Peace Education – a Book or a Webpage?

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What could be education for peace?

This text on education for peace is mostly written for those who want to learn more about peace education, for those who have partly encountered its contents and methods, as well as those who have been participants thus far. I hope that those with more experience in this respect will find its contents worth discussing, and see it as altering and furthering education for peace.

The phrase *education for peace* may sound fairly imaginary – idealistic and abstract at the same time, but self-explanatory as well. Just as at a first glance we all feel we know what peace means, the term *education for peace* may sound self-explanatory, it tells us a lot about its general meaning, but not its contents. Well, then, let's analyse it further and give some more concrete guidelines through an analysis of its context, contents and methods of work.

One of the possible ways of understanding the term education for peace is that it encourages and empowers citizens to take an active role in diminishing violence, whilst encouraging social justice at all social levels, from personal to institutional.

Peace is not merely the absence of war and escalation of violence. As those who want changes, we perceive peace not only as a condition, but as an ongoing journey – a road towards building a society with less violence and more social justice.

Education for peace is a part of the work on the broader context of social change.

In sociology writings, social change is viewed as a 'change of institutions, behaviour and social relations within a community', or as 'activities of public advocacy with the goal of positive changes in society'. (Source: wikipedia)

If nonviolence and peace are the social change we wish to see then education for peace helps us to encourage awareness of the need for these changes and offers knowledge and skills whose use can help such a change to occur. Changes towards a society with less violence and more social responsibility (even justice) include awareness of the problem, skills for nonviolent reaction to injustice, and even sanctioning discrimination and violation of human rights.

In our regions social change can involve a wide range of changes: a wish for legal states' functioning, sanctioning war crimes and crime in general, encouraging social responsibility of economic companies and many, many others. Social change also means meeting the individuals' and groups' needs for a higher quality of life and/or life with less discrimination; it is also encouraging gender equality, affirmation of all types of diversity, encouraging rights of all minorities – from ethnic to sexual.

Social change would also be a change in the manner of decision making, encouraging public debates on important reforms and changes, involvement of those whom these changes affect in decision making, encouraging, establishing and implementing public policies, and changing discriminatory and inadequate laws.

Let's go back to social change in the context of education. In our work we believe that change begins with individuals so that programmes of education are often conceived in such a way as to begin with understanding oneself and becoming aware of our own approaches and behaviours. Through becoming aware of our relations with other people and analysing them, we open a space for analysing social relations.

Of course, in order for a change to be visible it is important to encourage changes at many levels, from intrapersonal (knowing and understanding oneself) to interpersonal (understanding one's own relations with others) to institutional. Harmonised activities of work with individuals, but also cooperation and changes within institutions, policies and bad traditions, are important in terms of visible social steps forward towards a society with less violence and more social responsibility.

The range of influence of education for peace moves from possibilities of change at a personal level, influencing one's immediate surroundings, to influencing institutions and society. Influence varies greatly depending on the concrete social situation in question, tension and conflicts in society, possibilities for public action and debate, develop mechanisms of institutional cooperation, but also in terms of activities accompanying the education.

The outreach of the change depends on what the focus of our work is, whether we dedicate more attention to individuals, encouraging them to act in their environment or to act towards institutions. Of course, we cannot separate these processes from one another and a change at a personal level is to a certain extent followed by influencing one's own environment.

However, can we be content with a slow, barely visible change in situations in which it seems to be a high time we've done something concrete?

Education itself begins and ends at an individual level unless it is followed by activities. This fact alone is valuable, but in terms of changes it is not important just how much we as individuals know, but what we do with that knowledge. Whether if it is the education of citizens, educators, politicians, it will not influence changes unless it is followed by other forms of action: organising, advocacy, campaigns, public policies development.

On the other hand, programmes of education for peace also have a limited reach or a very slow influence on the changes of the system we know because they are often experienced as subversive, since they question patterns that are considered to go without saying and are generally accepted, deeply rooted and slow to change, such as:

- patriarchal, traditional constitution of society – by advocating gender equality of men and women;
- competitive patterns of behaviour – by advocating team work and cooperation;
- perceiving military force as a guarantee of security of a certain state or territory – by advocating demilitarisation and right to conscientious objection to carrying weapons;

- vertical hierarchy organisation of institutions and society – by advocating horizontal hierarchy of responsibilities;
- ways of decision making such as voting, compromise, political trade in which the interests of the powerful majority prevail – by advocating consensual decision making and respecting the voice of minorities;
- citizens' representation by elected politicians in all spheres – by advocating direct participation and the greatest possible influence of citizens and the public on creating public policies, as well as making decisions of importance for all members of a community and/or state.

Programmes of education for peace most often have the goal of:

- raising awareness on the types of violence, injustice, discrimination
- raising the level of awareness and building participants' capacities for nonviolent action – work on understanding violence and skills of nonviolence;
- encouraging and empowering participants for change of relations and nonviolent action in their environment;
- questioning and changing hierarchy models of organisation of society (organisation of institutions, families, states);
- questioning our own identities;
- becoming aware of our own prejudices and stereotypes;
- becoming aware of our own behaviour in violent and stressful situations;
- becoming aware of violations of, and raising the level of knowledge about the protection of human rights.

Context of the work – from a war to the post-war period up to the present day

The approach and contents of education for peace significantly depend on the context of the work – the time in which it is taking place, the space in which it is done and the people it is carried out with. Globally speaking, it is very different to work on the same contents and skills in Denmark, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Skopje, Rijeka, Tuzla or Novi Sad. Looking at the regions of the former Yugoslavia, there is still a big difference between working

in environments directly affected by the war or in larger urban environments in which there were no direct conflicts.

The difference stems from different perceptions of peace. In the environments directly affected by war, peace is still defined through basic security ('peace is when I can go to the football pitch with my mates'), whilst in environments that were not directly involved in the war, peace is more related to the matters of degree of democracy, openness of society, social justice, and discrimination against those with less power, the other, the different.

Different perceptions of the notions of: violence, prejudice, discrimination, acknowledging diversity, building trust also derive out of this difference, so that work with different groups, in different environments and at different time is different, to which proper attention needs to be paid.

Immediately after the war activities in Croatia and the region, the goals of education were to establish communication and build trust between different people. Even to this day this goal has not entirely been attained, but conditions are gradually being met and the focus has changed and shifted towards building communities, creating conditions for work on joint (over-the-border) projects, opening job positions, participating in governance and joint decision making.

Where are we educated for peace?

Education for peace is easiest to carry out in the form of workshops and trainings. These names themselves immediately indicate that there is a dynamic approach behind them, creativity and practice. Since it is important for the process to be interactive, programmes of education for peace can seldom bear presentations, lectures, seminars – forms in which it is difficult to establish a dialogue. Using passive models of transferring knowledge does not empower participants to make a move themselves, and does not encourage them to actively approach problems.

We shouldn't overestimate the reach and influence the education processes themselves. They have a certain impact on individuals, but how much they will impact on their surroundings and society depends on many other things – on

the amount of support participants get after the trainings, and other activities following the education.

Contents, and even more so methods of work on education for peace are applicable in a wide range of activities and processes because nonviolent communication and a focus on cooperation and team work lie in their foundations.

Knowledge and skills of education for peace are used in organising and leading group meetings, strategic, operational and action planning, leading and organising a wide range of projects. Some of the contents are not unlike therapy work and many other types of group work.

Contents and methods of education for peace enter, or have already entered institutional programmes at all levels (from pre-school to higher education ones); this is an almost unquestionable fact. What remains open is the matter of their monitoring, evaluation, adaptation, improving.

Programmes of education for peace in Croatia, and also in other regions of the former Yugoslavia, have stemmed directly from the war. People who resisted escalations of violence, along with mutual support and support from international volunteers, have conceived the initial programmes and activities (e.g. MIRamiDA trainings, Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb). For this reason, education for peace in Croatia for example has a strong activist approach and it is slow to become included into institutional and academic programmes. Education for peace has not gained much momentum as a notion in Croatia, and its contents and methods are used in education for democratic citizenship and education for human rights.

In the countries of the former Yugoslavia there are three programmes of more extensive peace education – Peace studies, very different among themselves, mostly lasting for one year.

In Macedonia, the Peace Studies Programme is at an exclusively academic and theoretical level as a post graduate programme entitled Defence and Peace Studies; in Belgrade an informal programme of Peace Studies – a combination of activist and academic approaches; and Peace Studies in Zagreb, also an

informal programme, in which activist approaches prevail over the academic ones in terms of the selection of subjects and modes of work.

Peace Studies in Zagreb operates as a programme for all interested citizens. From 1997, 40 participants have enrolled every year. Peace studies represent a mutual opportunity for study, exchange of experiences and the re-examining of peace topics among participants and the programme leaders. They are a place to come together and articulate current actions, campaigns, public policies and theories of peacebuilding, dealing with the past, human rights, ethnic, gender and sex identities, environmental protection, citizens' organising, globalisation, social responsibility of corporations and many others.

Who do we work with?

The selection of people we work with (target groups) is important, considering what our goal is, what we wish to attain with the education in question, and which changes we wish to influence.

We often address the groups by ourselves, as initiators of more extensive projects or education programmes, and sometimes groups who are already organised (teams, organisations, initiatives) ask us to design a programme and adapt it to specific needs and goals.

Groups should be homogenous – consisting of people of similar profiles, professions, positions – if we work on a focused goal (starting certain activities, changes within a certain community, organisation, territory). If our goal is broad, e.g. increasing the level of knowledge and raising citizens' awareness, and the more heterogeneous the group is, constituted by different individuals, the richer the process of exchange of experiences, the more successful the learning and changes.

We frequently encourage gender equality as an important goal of peace education, so it is important for the groups to be well gender balanced. If establishing communication between certain groups is important (ethnic, groups within a community, other groups in a conflict), it is also important for an equal number of people from both sides to be present. In this way we get a reasonably good balance and prerequisites for work on conflict transformation.

Through the composition of the group, but also through the team of facilitators, we send messages important for peacebuilding.

In order to work on social change, it is important to support and empower those who wish to solve problems, but also to change those who have the power to solve those problems.

Conditions appropriate for education for peace – methodology and methods of work

From the theory of education there comes a phrase which states that it should be 'about peace', 'for peace' and 'in peace'. In the activist world we often say that 'we live what we do'. Regardless of which principle we are closer to, each of them tells us, in its own way, how important are the methods we use are they in accordance with the values we promote and the contents we speak of.

This principle enables us to do a whole education, we often don't see it directly, but we feel it; among other things it helps us to exchange more easily and adopt certain contents within a context.

It is unacceptable and inefficient to teach about violence by using rhetoric and methods of violence, about participation by not making it possible for everyone to be involved in the work, about respecting diversity by not acknowledging people who sit with us, about the importance of conflict transformation by ignoring the conflicts before us.

Several things that help us work 'for peace' 'in peace':

- When we work we sit in a circle, not because we are a sect (which we are often told), but in order to be able to see each other. The circle enables an open communication and equality in discussions.
- Making agreements about the work, a list of rules at the beginning of the work. The list contains things participants expect to happen, things that will help them to feel better in the process, as well as things they don't want to happen in the process of work, from the trivial – mobile phones switch off, asking to speak – to the ones important for building trust – for confidential contents to remain within the group. Agreements on the work enable us to create a safe space for learning and sharing experiences.

Since everyone is involved in its creation, it helps to create a safe space between participants, specific to each particular group, as well as taking responsibility for the process. The agreement of the work should be enable, among other things, an open but focused communication, respecting the equality within the group, encouraging those who have more difficulties becoming involved, but also protecting those who can't or don't want to speak at a given moment.[1]

- Encouraging an open and direct communication, talking about concrete examples supported by arguments, encouraging dialogue instead of debate. Dialogue and open communication enable us to view the topic we discuss from many viewpoints, to give a chance to different perspectives and opinions to be heard, to open a space for changing the participants' standpoints. Using debate, participants find it much easier to get entrenched in their position leaving no room for changing their opinions or finding solutions. It is also not advisable to use the institution of 'wrong quotes' because if we believe every opinion to be legitimate then there are no incorrect answers, merely differing opinions. By all means, this should not be carried out to the point of absurdity of dialogue and the relativisation of values, so one has to bear in mind the goal of the workshop and values we advocate, but it is important for different opinions to be respected, even the ones we don't agree with.

- Combining methods of work. Interactive and experiential approaches enable us to combine various methods of work, not only in order to make the process more dynamic, but also for it to provide us with a range of various modes of expression in order for every participant to have the opportunity to find the one he/she feels an adequate, and to find the way in which to express their views, ideas, suggestions in the best way.

Some of the methods we use in our work:

- individual work
- work in small groups

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1   The rule of 'pass' is often used by those who do not want to or cannot speak at a given moment.

- moderated discussion in a large group
- brainstorming
- drawing, modelling, acting
- role-playing

• Evaluation of workshops. It has a twofold function. One is: to give participants the chance to give their views in the end of the workshop/ training, to add something if they hadn't had the chance to do so during the workshop, to say how they felt, what they had learned, to criticise the process, work of the group and/or facilitators. On the other hand, evaluation is precious for the moderators of the process in order for them to get feedback from participants and include the information and criticism in further processes or preparations of workshops that will follow up.

It is not crucial whether we abide by these guidelines in detail or not, working in a group makes it important for us to respect and accept people we work with, to be open and adaptable to the needs of the group as facilitators and to accomplish progress in a given context.

Contents that 'educate' us for peace

In attaining the goals of education for peace we are helped by subjects and contents that enable questioning of assigned patterns of behaviour and organising, that enable us to re-examining our own identities, our own prejudices and social stereotypes, which ultimately gives us knowledge and skills for nonviolent action.

Most frequently these are: nonviolent communication, understanding and nonviolent conflict transformation, building trust within the group, work on team work skills, considering and adopting different ways of decision making, work on prejudices and stereotypes, questioning identities, questioning gender stereotypes – positions of men and women in society, understanding violence and nonviolent action, becoming aware of our own power, analysing relations of power in society, encouraging power of cooperation, raising awareness on the protection of human rights, getting to know mechanisms for protecting these rights.

Along with the afore mentioned, depending on the specific needs and interests of the group we work with and processes we encourage, we can work on a wider range of subjects, bearing in mind the context in which we work and the methodology we use.

Thus we can include work with media, work on specific public policies, strategic, operational and action planning and other subjects, bearing in mind the importance of interaction, participation and complete learning. Using a methodology of education for peace for subjects that are 'not typical' offers challenges and calls for the creativity of moderators.

Peace education and institutional level

From the academic community often come criticisms of the inability of articulating education for peace and using it in institutional programmes. At the same time, initiatives meet resistance from within institutional frameworks and valuable programmes mostly remain informal, so they are difficult to certify and it is hard to realise continuity and quality in their implementation. It takes stronger and more open communication between activists and academic communities to push things forward.

Theoretical contributions and writings about the experiences and development of education for peace in Croatia are insufficient, activist materials collected in the past 15 or so years are still not archived. It is possible that this is a level without which it is difficult for us to enter an 'equal' dialogue as activists.

On the other hand, even though progress has been made, the importance of experiences of activism in education is still being recognised, but slowly.

There are talks about the importance of a lifelong learning, the development of schools as communities (from the inside), the importance of opening towards a community, project and problem curriculum, gender awareness, and education on human rights. Discussion on these randomly chosen, and also many other 'novelties in education', remains enclosed within academic symposia and conferences. Only in a very small number of cases do they become a subject of an argument-backed public discussion, and the people it concerns seldom get

actively involved (as well as professors at all levels, activists, trainers, ministry employees, employees of institutes, offices).

Recommendations of the Platform for Peacebuilding

The Platform for Peacebuilding was initiated in Croatia in 2005. Signatories of the document of the Platform include around 50 civil society organisations, a dozen cities and municipalities as well as individuals.

The Platform represents the actions of peace activists in Croatia during the last five to ten years, as well as being an opportunity for a series of agents from other social spheres to become involved, such as the academic community, public institutions, business sector, trade unions, political parties, the media, and policymakers.[2]

Among other measures, the Platform introduces the following short term and long term measures and recommendations for peacebuilding and education policies:

- It is of particular importance for the efficiency and sustainability of peace education for its principles and contents to be integrated into various existing education areas.
- To ensure that the school systems and decision making process in education take into consideration various local needs of users, education staff and institutions, e.g. differences of mother tongues; trust, communication and cooperation impaired by war; the needs of disabled persons and the need for continuous training of teachers and capacitating school institutions for the promotion of culture of nonviolence and cooperation.
- To increase financial funds for peace education and to include peace education in all national education strategies. Funds should be allocated exclusively for education in peacebuilding from the budgets of local communities (counties and cities) but also at the national level.

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2   *Plate-forme*, **according to French original, denotes a programme with practical recommendations that provides a basis for cooperation.**

- To ensure preparation of school and university professors, care givers and expert staff for peace education, which entails including of peace education into compulsory programmes of professional training for teachers and pedagogues.
- To increase the possibilities for verification of informal programmes on peace education at the level of the state and counties
- To increase the visibility of peace education in school system – e.g. by establishing annual awards of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for promotion of nonviolence and human rights, to be awarded to primary school, high school and higher education institutions.
- To increase inclusion of parents into the work of schools and develop awareness raising programmes on the role of parents in upbringing and education process. It is necessary to establish a partnership between schools, parents and students in creating and implementing the curriculum.
- To systematically encourage the creation of positive images about members of national minorities and the values of living in multicultural environments.

How to harmonise recommendations and possibilities?

As has been mentioned earlier, parts of the system of values on the methodology of peace education in Croatia attempted to become included in the processes of institutional education – in the curriculum – and through the work on National Education Standard and various individual programmes of education of teachers, in higher education programmes – through the implementation of Bologna Declaration.

Along with values and contents, both processes foresee a small number of participants in education groups, in order to enable individualisation of the teaching process. At the very first step we encountered the complexity of implementing the set of goals because changing education brings with it a reorganisation of the entire system. It entails, to say the least: a greater number of classrooms, a greater number of teachers, teachers trained for the work in smaller groups, a familiarity with the new methodology of work, and

particularly an awareness of the new range of subjects whether they relate to peace education, education for human rights, education for democracy and/or learning social skills.

At the level of values and goals, the whole thing sounds wonderful, and one of the trends is also

"teaching that is not only based on words, but such a teaching that gives and creates spaces in which exist certain positive experiences. The students should be enabled to have experiences and develop skills during their upbringing and education that are required later in adult life: experience of responsibility, justice, solidarity, decision making, consistence and cooperation; skills of judging, thinking, observing and acting independently; discovering their own talents, and accepting others and difference".[3]

However, what happens with expounding goals into tasks, contents and methods?

It is important to strive for the subjects and contents of peace education to be included into the institutional education as a whole, and not partially, in pieces that fit into the system. In this way, building in pieces without consistency, and often without sensibility, will mean that positive steps forward will not happen, and things that are written into programmes will not happen in reality.

I'll give the example of upbringing goals: developing responsible behaviour towards oneself and others.

Example:

The upbringing goal: developing responsible behaviour towards oneself and others.

Its upbringing tasks: distributing class obligations and duties.

Knowing the process of building responsibility, it is clear that it is not attained by students being assigned tasks and duties, but by creating conditions for the students to be encouraged to undertake certain tasks by themselves, and that they are not responsible for their shortcomings, only the teacher, but the group suffers from their shortcoming. In that sense, the task is contradictory

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3   Croatian National Education Standard; www.mzos.hr

to the goal, we can nominally say that we implement it, but there is no real progress. As long as teachers assign the tasks themselves, students will not learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Developing responsibility towards oneself and others also includes, as a method of work, workshops on peaceful conflict transformation and in that sense there is progress in terms of introducing peace education. Including only some parts, unfortunately, is not enough, and realistic steps forward will not happen unless the conditions are created for taking the approach of the complete learning (in this case, peace learning) which is consistent, grounded in values, elaborated with sensibility for peace/nonviolent action, and in which tasks come from goals, and methods of work follow the contents.

Instead of a conclusion

Even though there has been a lot of effort in terms of systematization of this text, some important new fields are opened in every part of it in almost every moment. If we return to one of the first sentences – the reason for it can be that peace (and thus education for peace as well) is a really extensive concept that moves through various levels – from philosophical and theoretical to a very very practical one; from our most individual needs, fears, thoughts to public and political mechanism. It is difficult to think about peace in a linear form which we need for a printed book, education for peace is more a hypertext, a web page, globally networked with many links in various directions.

Yet I hope that this text makes a small contribution to 'sorting out' the terminology, values and contents of peace education. If not, then it is at least a clear signal that we need to dedicate ourselves to that task, through public, expert and experiential – oral and written discussions.