

# EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS PEACE EDUCATION

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This article examines the intersections among peace education and environmental education to understand how these commonalities frame education for sustainable development. The authors trace the intersection of the two disciplines and explore the role of the United Nations in promoting and empowering individuals with the values to advance the twin goals of peace and ecological sustainability. The paper profiles the United Nation's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, particularly as formal education, nonformal learning channels, and popular culture have embraced the holistic notion of ecological responsibility, peace, and social justice.

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the field of peace education's early focus on disarmament and the prevention of war, scholars within the field have also in the past two decades considered sustainable development, and environmental education toward it, to be a central goal.<sup>1</sup> While peace is not always discussed vis-à-vis environmental education, and environmental issues are not always included in peace education, there is an increasing awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the two approaches and the relevance of education in inculcating values to promote peace and environmental sustainability. This paper traces the emerging intersection of peace and environmental education, and focuses on the efforts of international organizations, primarily the United Nations (UN), for putting forth a call for education for sustainable development that espouses the goals and values of the two approaches.

Peace education involves methods and learning processes that include inquiry, critical thinking, and dialogue toward greater equity and social justice. As Betty Reardon noted, environmental education

seeks to provide learners with greater knowledge of and enhanced skills for promoting sustainable development, a key component of comprehensive peace.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of environmental education as part of peace education and ecological security as a goal of peace education over the last few decades reflects the confluence of several factors. These factors include greater international exposure for peace education through organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the direct impact of environmental changes on food accessibility and living conditions, and environmental degradation and competition over resources as a cause of unrest and conflict. This paper focuses on how international agencies and organizations, such as the UN, have coalesced on the espoused values of environmental education and peace education to launch the "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014)" and discusses their activities and goals. While international discourse and practice are often quite different, the larger discussions held and the priorities identified by the UN can result in increased funding opportunities and significant advances in programming in certain fields. This paper argues that the discussions around education for sustainable development hold great promise for the ideas and values thus far articulated by scholars and practitioners of peace education.

#### PEACE EDUCATION AND ITS CO-DISCIPLINES

Peace education has largely developed as a scholarly field over the past 40 years and emerged out of its "parent" field of peace studies. Peace education is broadly defined as the educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that develops awareness, skills, and values toward peace.<sup>3</sup> Peace education is comprised of multiple subfields in which scholars and practitioners work, but often are not considered part of peace education. These subfields, such as global security and human rights education, have often developed in their own right and hence are referred to here as "co-disciplines" of peace education. One such field is environmental education.

Seminal peace studies scholar Johan Galtung distinguished between positive and negative peace,<sup>4</sup> and these terms have been foundational concepts in the field of peace education. Negative peace refers to the absence of physical violence, that is, direct violence such as war. On the other hand, positive peace refers to the absence of

structural violence, that is, the systematic inequities and unjust structures embedded in society, such as gender or racial discrimination. Anita Wenden noted that contemporary conceptions of positive peace have extended to include a more holistic approach, including human rights education, development education, and environmental education.<sup>5</sup> While there are different approaches to educating about and achieving peace, there nonetheless exists the unifying concept that peace education seeks to achieve human rights for all by transforming students into agents of change for greater equity and social justice.

This overarching theme of working toward a better future has allowed peace education to manifest in a multidisciplinary way, yet retain its core characteristics. These subfields, or co-disciplines, take different conceptual and methodological approaches—from anti-nuclear efforts to interreligious dialogue—but fall under the umbrella of peace education because of their shared purposes.

A framework can thus be constructed whereby peace education, with its aim to achieve human rights for all, is understood alongside its co-disciplines. Each co-discipline has certain constituents who align themselves with the goals and values of peace education as a field, and others who prefer to develop on their own terms and without stated connection to the field of peace education. While these co-disciplines continue to emerge and evolve, for the purposes of this article, the most oft-discussed ones vis-à-vis peace education are included. Peace education may serve as the nucleus, but each co-discipline interlinks and interconnects with others directly. For example, teaching about nuclear disarmament not only works toward peace, but it also requires resolving conflicts and engaging in mediation efforts. Similarly, both co-disciplines affect and are affected by ecological and environmental factors.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 has its roots in literature on peace and ecological education. The idea of education for social responsibility is not a new idea, but an increasingly urgent one among educators and communities alike, as evidenced by the many educational organizations seeking to effect change through what is learned in the classroom. Given the unprecedented speed of global change, from political decisions that have accelerated environmental destruction to the increasing inequity among the world's rich and poor, educating for peace has come to be seen as an interdisciplinary effort rather than being isolated to one approach or disciplinary school of thought. Scholars have identified the “pre-ecological



Figure 1. Framework of peace education and its co-disciplines.

consciousness,” which prioritized consumption over sustainability, and have noted the laudatory move toward a “post-ecological consciousness.”<sup>6</sup>

#### PEACE EDUCATION & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Both peace and environmental educators have a common goal of stopping violence, but in human communities there will always be conflicts, and humans must consume natural products. The challenge is to learn to resolve conflicts nonviolently, to share limited resources equitably, and to live within the limits of sustainability. This will become increasingly important as the twenty-first century unfolds with increasing human populations all seeking a better life. Peace will require environmental sustainability and environmental sustainability will require peace.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s, the idea of global security within peace education extended to that of ecological security as “environmental issues give rise to actual and potential international conflicts.”<sup>8</sup> Since then, an emerging and more accepted pedagogy has embraced the holistic nature

of ecological thinking and learning that underscores the idea of interconnectedness and cooperation. With the “vision of a transformed global society” where the younger generation perceives itself as an integral part of a shared planet, education for peace cannot be separated from education for ecological responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

Eva Norland supported this vision and contended that the economy and ecology are inseparable at all levels, from the local to the global, with one affecting the other and vice versa. Protecting the environment and preventing the deterioration of the Earth is critical to ensuring peace and social justice. Noting that “economic inequality is the planet’s main ‘environmental problem,’”<sup>10</sup> Norland pointed out that the denial of human rights and access to scarce resources is a severe development problem that continues in a destructive circular manner. Environmental issues force people out of their homes, leading to increased military presence for “security,” which in turn places more stress upon the environment. As a result, “many forms of development erode the environmental resources upon which they must be based. Environmental degradation, in turn, undermines economic development.”<sup>11</sup> Despite well-intended efforts to install peace and justice through development efforts, unintended negative consequences on the environment and, therefore, security and peace may emerge.

Without understanding the interconnectedness of the environment, development, and the economy, some approaches appear to exacerbate the problems they seek to address. Norland therefore presented a new way of thinking that challenges traditional views on education, such as that technology is the solution to everything, that book knowledge supersedes experiential learning, and that competition is a key motivator. Rather, when children begin to view themselves as “part of nature,”<sup>12</sup> then education for peace is also furthering ecological responsibility. To achieve this goal, children must be educated in a manner that empowers them to put their skills to proper use within their environment—furthering ecological responsibility by combining theory and practice.

Merryl Hammond and Rob Collins argue that the traditional teaching of the three Rs (wRiting, Reading, aRithmetic) must now include a fourth R, social Responsibility, as young people must be equipped with the critical skills “to cope with the incessant negative lessons coming at them from all directions.”<sup>13</sup> These effects not only stem from the absence of negative peace (i.e., war), but the absence of positive peace, such as the hidden consequences of social and

economic structural inequalities. As a result of the constant stream of violent images largely conveyed through the media that often immobilizes action, children must be empowered through education with the awareness, knowledge, and trust that they can become agents of change to build healthier and more peaceful communities. Sharing knowledge and encouraging action for social change lie not only in the areas of conflict resolution and discrimination, but also significantly in the area of environmental degradation. Through experiential learning, active participation, and role playing, peace education offers the opportunity to analyze, reflect, and then “reconcile, repair, and rebuild.”<sup>14</sup> Hammond and Collins go so far as to say that avoiding such education for social responsibility is in fact a political choice at odds with the pursuit of global peace.

New ecological thinking, therefore, instinctively understands the holistic nature of peace and ecological education. It develops, as Sergei Polozov explains, “the ability to comprehend and analyze integrally the processes going on in the natural environment, taking into account the current political situation and economic situations.”<sup>15</sup> To achieve peace and security, ecological education for peace and social responsibility must incorporate both formal and nonformal learning opportunities. Polozov supports the contention of other peace educators and highlights the value and benefit of participatory and experiential learning to enable children to understand at a deeper level the integral dimensions of global peace, social responsibility, and ecological security.

The framework of peace education and its co-disciplines—including environmental and ecological education—introduces the emerging call for and acceptance of a peace pedagogy that sees learning as a collective and experiential process aimed at empowering and creating agents of change.<sup>16</sup> The selection of literature reviewed by peace educators offers evidence to Lothar Brock’s claim that “the environment has now become firmly established as an item on the agenda of peace research.”<sup>17</sup> Environmental degradation threatens global security in an indirect, but nonetheless real and critical, manner. Elaborated by authors such as Brock, the established link between the peace problematique and the environment can therefore engage and promote cooperation and peace building at an international level. Moreover, the inclusion of environmental security and sustainable development as benchmarks for international development in the Millennium Development Goals evidence their inclusion as important components of a comprehensive rights-based approach to human development.<sup>18</sup>

## THE UN DECADE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education is not only an end in itself. It is a key instrument for bringing about the changes in knowledge, values, behaviors, and lifestyles required to achieve sustainability and stability within and among countries and ensure democracy, human security, and peace. Education at all levels and in all its forms constitutes a vital tool for addressing virtually all global problems relevant for sustainable development, in particular poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, peace and stability, knowledge formation and sharing, rural development, and changes in production and consumption patterns.

### *UNESCO Vision Statement on Education for Sustainable Development*

The UN has legitimized and accepted peace education as a holistic pedagogy that includes as a co-discipline environmental and ecological education. While the debate about the exact role of the UN continues, most scholars agree, according to Courtney Smith, that it plays a critical role in promoting and engaging dialogue between nation-states.<sup>19</sup> The space provided for international dialogue by the UN, if utilized well, can promote tolerance, international peace and security, and “the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”<sup>20</sup>

As Smith noted, the UN participates in dialogue in three main ways: passively, actively, and autonomously. First, the UN creates a forum through which member states can pursue their own efforts for mutual understanding, which passively facilitates dialogue without intervention. It also puts forth “pressing global problems on the international agenda”<sup>21</sup> and provides a place where its members can participate in an open and inclusive dialogue about such issues. Second, the UN and its bodies play an active role through leveraging its legitimacy with its members to offer opinions and suggestions on a particular issue. Through treaties and declarations, the UN becomes a catalyst toward the process of peace building. It also engages with and encourages dialogue among different key stakeholders, from the state to civil society. Third, the UN in theory has an autonomous role in which it can serve as a settler of disputes irrespective of its members’ interests. As Smith noted, its different bodies also play a role in the

technical assistance and economic and social development of states in a manner that is independent of other agencies and states.

Given the various roles that the UN plays and has played, its ability to engage others in an international conversation allows it to set the agenda on issues of global concern. Actual shifts in practice and national policy may be slower to ensue, but the role of international consensus around certain issues, such as development or sustainable development, cannot be ignored. The UN often hosts world conferences, as it did in 1995 and 1996 highlighting five major issues: social development, prevention of crime and treatment of offenders, women and equality, development and peace, and human settlements. In addition to such conferences, the UN has created the concept of international years, focusing attention on one particular area of concern. By elevating these issues into a “year,” the UN can articulate and steer the conversation through multiple efforts. For example, there has been the Year of Tolerance (1995), the Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996), and the International Year of Sport and Physical Education (2005). The UN also created “Decades” around issues that necessitate long-term discussions, analysis, and solutions, such as the Decade of Disabled Persons (1983–1992).

Peace garnered central attention as the UN declared 2001–2010 as the International Decade for the Culture of Peace. Recognizing the end of the Cold War and a new world order that saw a proliferation of civil strife, militarism, religious war, and global terrorism, the UN sought to establish the notion that Galtung and others had for so long argued—that “peace is more than the absence of war.”<sup>22</sup> The expression “Culture of Peace” began to take form in the late 1980s, and was a concept UNESCO adopted that “presumes peace [as] a way of being, doing and living in a society that can be taught, developed, and best of all, improved upon.”<sup>23</sup> UNESCO determined that a focus on educating and empowering individuals about a set of values and behaviors conducive to nonviolence and solidarity could foster environments that reflected peace values. While research on the actual impact of such international endeavors is necessary, the creation of deliberate spaces for discussion of issues of peace, gender equality, and environmental concerns in international fora offers the possibility for reevaluation of norms and practices that do not align with these stated values.

Given this understanding, the UN and its agency UNESCO declared 2005–2014 as the Decade for Education for Sustainable



Development (DESD). The idea behind this decade is to “encourage changes in behavior that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.”<sup>24</sup> In this framework, peace and the environment are inextricably linked and the protection of future generations’ access to resources is a central concern.

Specifically, the UN has established two goals for the DESD. These include providing “an opportunity to promote the vision of sustainable development through all forms of education” and raising “the profile of the critical role of education in sustainable development.”<sup>25</sup> Lasting peace requires sustained development efforts that do not compromise environmental security or ecological integrity. Each needs the other for true and sustainable human development.

The DESD approach toward education for sustainable development reflects the holistic concept that defines peace education. It characterizes its learning methodology as interdisciplinary and embedded in the whole curriculum, not taught as separate and disparate subjects. Rather, in line with the pedagogy of peace education, UNESCO outlined the need to offer a multimethodological model to engage students in a participatory and experiential decision-making process—from the literary to the artistic. This approach also focuses on developing the values and critical thinking skills to empower children to understand how the global issues of peace, development, and environmental sustainability interact and are relevant to their everyday surroundings. By establishing a decade on education for such purposes and emphasizing a multidisciplinary and multiperspective approach, the UN has given the movement toward peace and environmental education more legitimacy among educational and national-level policymakers within recent years.

The DESD requires the cooperation of stakeholders from different sectors and disciplines, from state officials to civil society. Aligning with the framework of peace education, education for sustainable development must take into account its related goals of advancing human rights, health promotion, gender equality, cultural diversity, rural development, and poverty reduction. Addressing the issue of natural resources has been determined by the UN to be a cornerstone of the broader agenda of sustainable development. Educating others about the values and behaviors conducive to protecting natural resources is essential for human survival, development, and peace. As UNESCO contends:

There can be no long-term economic or social development on a depleted planet. Education to develop widespread understanding of the interdependence and fragility of planetary life support systems and the natural resource base upon [which] human well-being lies [is] at the core of education for sustainable development.<sup>26</sup>

By placing the issue on the international agenda, the UN is facilitating a dialogue around these interconnected disciplines with the goal of educating and empowering individuals to achieve sustainable peace.

The *Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit* offers a manual on precisely this area of intersection: peace and sustainability. Numerous other such Web sites, curricula guides, and manuals exist that focus on learning for environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustained peace. The proliferation of these resources offers an indication that the intersection between peace and environmental education is not only a valid and useful one, but also one that is urgently needed at this time in our society.

#### CONCLUSION

The holistic approach to contemporary positive peace has expanded the notion of structural and direct violence to include violence inflicted on the natural environment, as Wenden outlined.<sup>27</sup> While peace education and environmental education each exist independently with their respective subthemes and concerns, the intersection between the two is also emerging as *education for sustainable development* as a valid and critically important field. As the literature has shown, this intersectional space places emphasis on how peace—both positive and negative—cannot be achieved without environmental security and ecological responsibility. It also underscores the need for an integrated approach to education that will encourage the development of a set of values and behaviors to empower each individual to take personal responsibility for his or her interaction with nature, use of natural resources, and connection with the environment. This responsibility directly and naturally affects one's sense of respect for neighbor and stranger alike, promotes larger goals of conflict transformation, and ultimately supports the movement toward greater respect for human rights.

Whether it is climate change leading to a decline in agricultural harvests, which directly affects migrant labor, or environmental

destruction in the pursuit of oil, which can lead to greater political and social instability in oil-producing regions of the world, the intersection between the environment and world peace has become part of everyday conversations across the globe. Moreover, “popular culture” has come to accept the natural intersection of the two disciplines with an increase in ecologically friendly consumer products, focus on local and sustainable food sources, sustainable housing, and environmentally friendly options for activities from weddings to tourism.<sup>28</sup> Emerging companies in the global North that offer philanthropic travel destinations and ways to reduce consumer carbon footprints provide strong evidence as to the increasing popularity and acceptance of attuning to one’s personal relationship with the environment and sustainable living. In the global South as well, long-standing efforts that resource-limited communities have engaged in, such as water conservation and reuse where possible, have been aided by new technologies such as rainwater harvesting, grey (or used) water treatment, and the harnessing of solar energy. Information about such initiatives and strategies on how to incorporate sustainable solutions is part and parcel of education for sustainable development, and the DESD has already begun to provide educational resource packs and other tools for schools and policymakers globally.<sup>29</sup>

Nonformal educational efforts by non-governmental organizations to promote learning about how to create a generation of change agents with a deep understanding of peace and the environment have also emerged. They exist in numerous forms to encourage participatory learning, such as interactive Web sites run by non-governmental organizations and environmentally focused organizations. Two examples of organizations that leverage participatory learning in the pursuit of sustainability and environment protection are the Jane Goodall Institute and the World Wildlife Foundation, which both aim to build communities where young people actively engage in mutual dialogue with their peers from around the world.

Educational television and media programming have also been a force of nonformal learning on the intersection of peace and environmental education. For example, in its inaugural season Sesame Workshop’s production in Indonesia, *Jalan Sesama*, focuses on environmental protection, cultural diversity, and healthy habits.<sup>30</sup> Leveraging a medium to instill a set of values among young children about their personal role and responsibility toward nature, and hence toward

their community and other communities around the world, is an excellent example of using nonformal educational settings to focus on the intersection of peace and the environment.

These efforts have also circled back to formal educational settings with greater importance and priority placed on the relationship among education, the environment, and peace. Many schools have introduced school gardens as a way to connect children with their natural environment, promoting healthy cooking and a sense of civic responsibility beyond their immediate environs.<sup>31</sup> These programs, found scattered throughout Western industrialized and developing countries, emphasize and empower children to understand that their actions and beliefs can directly impact not only their own personal health and environment but also that of others living across the globe.

“Green schools” have also become a more common and desirable moniker. In the United States, designation as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building by the U.S. Green Building Council is an honor that many schools at all levels are striving to obtain.<sup>32</sup> In developing countries, UN agencies are increasingly funding “facilities-based solutions” to school construction through initiatives to develop solar energy, rainwater harvesting, biogas, and ecosanitation, among others. This trend of using sustainable energy to operate school buildings may in turn, through curricula and instruction, develop among learners a greater understanding of their school space and its role in advancing a sense of responsibility for the natural environment.

It is no longer sufficient to think that events are isolated and that one’s actions do not affect others. Rather, “everything that happens is everybody’s concern and everybody’s responsibility.”<sup>33</sup> The notion that ecology is about cooperation and relationships enables ordinary citizens to take personal responsibility to achieve peace, for lack of access to the “essentials for life” from a healthy environment results in conflict and injustice.<sup>34</sup> As a result, education for social responsibility and peace must empower each member of society to see that the self, the environment, and the planet are inseparable.

#### NOTES

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3. Reardon, *Comprehensive Peace Education*.

4. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969): 167–191.

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8. Reardon, "Learning Our Way," 28.

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12. Ibid., 17.

13. Hammond and Collins, *One World*, xi.

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15. Sergei Polozov, "Social Responsibility and Ecological Culture Through Ecological Education," in *Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education*, ed. Betty Reardon and Eva Norland (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 104.

16. Marianne Gronemeyer, "The Ecology Movement – A New Field for Peace Education," in *Three Decades of Peace Education Around the World: An Anthology*, ed. Robin Burns and Robert Aspeslagh (Hamden, CT: Garland Publishing, 1996).

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18. The Millennium Development Goals are a set of benchmarks for intergovernmental organizations, governments, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations to assess their progress toward human development. The goals include the following: Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education; Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women; Goal 4: Reduce child mortality; Goal 5: Improve maternal health; Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability; Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

19. Courtney Smith, "The United Nations as a Vehicle for Dialogue," *Peace & Change*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2003): 555-569.

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