# The Relevance of Peace Education in Today's Context

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the relevance of peace education in the present day by studying the works of three prominent peace educators. The field of peace education is so broad that it encompasses works of scholars from seemingly different background who however aim at tackling violence in their societies using peace education as a tool for the promotion of social justice. For instance, W.E.B. DuBois' work focuses on the elimination of racism and racial inequality targeted at African Americans; Friere's work is geared towards the elimination of oppression in a society with a wide gap between the haves and the have-nots; and Appiah focuses his work on the need for the respect of the other in society towards the attainment of a society where diversity is celebrated. This article recognizes that one of the root causes of most conflicts today is identity and the peace educator's discussed here have centralized their work on the elimination of conflicts affecting their societies caused by structural or cultural violence targeting the collective identity of a people.

**Keywords:** Peace education, structural violence, cultural violence, collective identity.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the world faces a period in its history where war and weapons of destruction are so sophisticated that they cause the greatest destruction to lives and property than ever before; the environment suffers great destruction due to human greed and insensitivity; children die of malnutrition and preventable diseases at such an alarming rate. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen (giving little or no hope at all to the less privileged of ever getting out of the economic situation they were born into)and the division lines between people are getting more pronounced in the form of sectarian and tribal conflicts.

This paper will discuss relevance of peace education in today's contextusing the theories posed by peace educators. The paper will be divided into three main sections: the first section will look at the meaning of peace education, the second session will examine some peace educators, their concept of peace and their theories with regard to peace education, and the third part (the conclusion) will relate the theories discussed in terms of the present day context.

## MEANING OF PEACE EDUCATION

Peace education has had different definitions depending on the context and content that it seeks to address. UNICEF defines peace education as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level" (Fountain, 1999).

Peace education is also defined more broadly as both a philosophy and process empowering people with skills, attitudes and knowledge to create a safe and sustainable world (Harris and Morrison, 2003). This second definition is all encompassing as it does not limit peace education to either formal or non-formal education. Based on this definition, peace education can be regarded as a system of culture for the promotion of peace (which includes human interaction with the environment).

## PEACE EDUCATORS AND THEIR CONCEPTS OF PEACE

### W.E.B. Du Bois

*"Responsibility without power is a mockery and a farce" (Du Bois, 1903)*

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W. E. Burghardt Du Bois (African American philosopher) was born a few years after the abolition of slavery in the United States. Though in paper and legally slavery was abolished, there was still discriminations in the country along racial and economic lines. Du Bois was born to a relatively fortunate family as most of his family members had some degree of education (which meant most of them could at least read and write) at a time when most people of African American decent were not educated. In high school he learned interestingly that discrimination was not just a matter of race but a matter of race and social standing, he said in his autobiography that *"there came some rather puzzling distinctions which I can see now were social and racial; but the racial angle was more clearly defined against the Irish than against me. It was a matter of income and ancestry more than color."* ( Du Bois, 1940).

During the industrial expansion of America, he says had it not been for his racial background, he *"should have probably been an unquestioning worshiper at the shrine of the social order and economic development".* However, seeing how people from his racial group (African American) were excluded from the industrial world not because they were not qualified enough to fit in it but simply because they were not given a chance to receive the qualification required to fit in due to their skin colour, Du Bois questioned this new worship.

His concept of peace and freedom implied an equal right for people of all races and economic classes. He argued that only through education could this equality be achieved. This freedom could only be given to African Americans through what he referred to as the "spread of independent thought". Considering the fact that African Americans just got out of the chains of the slave masters, their problem was deeper than a lack of formal education, it was also a problem of the "ignorance of the world and its ways". In order to get rid of this problem, there was a need he said to have people within the (African American) community with broad knowledge and formal education training for the other members of the community; a period of "educational evolution" (Du Bois, 1903). However, this system could be counterproductive and even dangerous if ignorance is widespread. The only way to make this system successful therefore is through ensuring the careful education of the teachers is passed down. He adds that this level of education can only be reached by a select few but what is important is not the number of these educated few but the number of students they pass down the knowledge to. Despite identifying that the educators can only be a select few, the same high standard of education should be accessible to every African American child through ensuring that public schools are free if the racial problem was truly to be addressed (Du Bois, 1903).

Du Bois also strongly advocated education through liberal arts, he referred to all art as "propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of purists." He uses the word "propaganda" to describe art because according to him, art strives to achieve a goal and the only goal he cares about which could be achieved through arts is the emancipation of the black people (Anderson, 2007). His point is clearly stated when he said *"I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care for any art that is not used for propaganda."* (Appiah and Habekost, 2007)

A critique of this theory is that if taken to the extreme it could lead to further isolation of the members of the oppressed group. Where oppressed people isolate themselves further from the oppressing group, they create a greater problem of enmity and in extreme cases could resolve in doing a similar thing to what the oppressors did to them: they will begin to portray members of the oppressing group in stereotypical or even fictional terms.

## Paolo Friere

> *"True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity."*

The Brazilian philosopher born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil worked with adult illiterates in northern Brazil. In 1964 coup d'état he was imprisoned for what the regime referred to as "subversive elements in his teaching". He was later exiled in Chile where his methods were used. The UN school of Political Science also held seminars on his work. He returned to Brazil in 1979 and in 1988 he was appointed Sao Paolo's Secretary of Education.

Freire who witnessed oppression directed both at him and fellow citizens of his country in the hands of the government officials regarded peace as the freedom from oppression and thus in his work "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" which was written based not only on his educational training but also on his experiences with oppression and working with people from oppressed groups, he talks about the

attainment of freedom through education. According to him, education left in the hands of the government was used as a tool of further oppression by seeking to maintain the status quo and he referred to this system of education as the "banking system of education". In this system, the teacher is the subject of the learning and the student the object: the teacher who holds the position of the all knower of knowledge passes down information to the student who is the recipient of this knowledge. Under this system, the oppressor (in this case the government who instructs the teacher on what is to be taught) has control of the minds of the students and gets them to conform to the system. This strong tool actually ensures that the oppressor's power is not challenged by the oppressed and therefore he continues to maintain his power and control over the oppressed.(Friere, 1970)

In Friere's "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed", the freedom he talked about could be achieved through *conscientizaçao* which entails a critical reawakening of the oppressed mind. Rather than an oppressed person regarding himself as a victim, he should seek to challenge the status quo; and according to Friere, the challenge of the status quo is something which is scary but needs to be developed. The need for the liberalization of the oppressed is not for him alone, but for the oppressor also who cannot find in his power the strength to liberateeither himself or the oppressed.

## LIBERATION EDUCATION

Rather than have the students and teachers on opposite sides as is the case in the "banking concept" of education, education must begin by addressing the teacher-student relationship. Under this system of education, both the teacher and student benefit from the learning experience; the teacher learns from the student and vice versa. This theory of education emphasises dialogue based on love, humility and faith. This is a horizontal relationship where mutual respect is established in the learning environment. Another point of emphasis here is in the engagement in critical thinking. To the critical thinker, the important thing is the continuous transformation of the world instead of the mere acceptance of the present as it is (Freire, 1970).Experimenting with the "problem-posing" method of education recorded ahigh success in Brazil in terms of the learners' achievement not just in acquiring "tools to unveil structures of domination" but also in the short period of time it took them to acquire literary skills (Schugurensky, 1998).

Some critiques of Freire's work include that the language of his works were too difficult and elitist which contradicts his theory that writing should be simple but not simplistic. Other critiques of his work also include that the teacher-student dialogue method of education was non-directive. He responded to this critique by saying that he did not believe in a non-directive education; he did not believe freedom should be chaos or passivity. He stresses that teachers should not impose their views on the students but also should not be neutral observers. This being the case, it can be argued that even Freire believed in some degree of control in the learning environment.

### Kwame Anthony Appiah

> *"Each of us has one life to live; and although there are many moral constraints on how we live our lives—prominent among them being constraints that derive from our obligations to other persons—"*

Kwame Appiah was born in 1954 in London (to a Ghanaian father and an English mother) but moved to Ghana in his infancy. His early work was concerned with the philosophy of language but later turned to politics and cultural issues. In his work "I*n Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race"* he argued that the concept of biological race is problematic. Appiah in his philosophy recognises that every human holds many different roles and the measure of life depends on the person who holds those roles (limited only to the extent where it affects the lives of others) even if it meant that the person had a life not as good as he could have had it(Appiah, 2005). He also recognises that cosmopolitanism has made it such that (with technologies such as the internet) human beings can affect lives everywhere and learn about lives anywhere too. The challenge here according to him is in taking these minds that now interact and equip them with ideas and resource to live together as a global village (Appiah, 2006).

The concept of peace according to him is in recognition of two main ideas: (1) that we have an obligation to those with whom we share the world, and (2) that we take seriously "the value of not just human life but of human lives": this includes human practices and beliefs. (Appiah, 2006).

## A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

This concept entails that every human being has responsibilities to every other human being regardless of the locality, religion or sect they identify with. This does not mean that the human being

disregards whatever identity he has, it only means that in accepting whatever identity the human being chooses he also respects the identity of the other human beings. Ultimately, every human being is a citizen of the world.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above examinations of these three philosophers, a recurring idea is that the different identities human beings hold tends to create conflicts between people of different groups.These identities and labels have been instilled in the minds of the human being to an extent where the mind identifies very strongly with members who hold similar identity while disrespecting members who identify themselves differently and this is an obstacle to the attainment of peace in the world today. Appiah in his cosmopolitan theory argues that the human being does not have the need to disregard or deny any of his/her identities, in fact only he/she has a right to identify himself/herself with whatever identity, however he/she is obliged to respect the identity of the other human beings.

Finally, it could be argued that peace education which is an education for a struggle for the emancipation of a people, a challenge of the status quo and an education for the respect of others more than ever before, is relevant in today's context especially after examining the nature of the conflicts the world is currently experiencing. There are challenges however to the full implementation of peace education because it challenges the status quo and only very few people are comfortable with change out of fear of a disruption of what they are used to.

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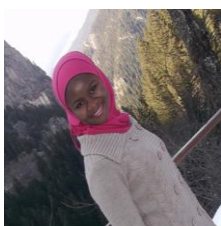
**Fatima Momodu** combines a background in Law with an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies. Her research primarily focuses on the use of peace education in the promotion of peace and an end to the different forms of conflicts. She currently lectures in the Political Science and International Relations Department of the Nigerian Turkish Nile University, Abuja.