



This paper is taken from

*Citizenship Education in Society
Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2007

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-1899764-90-7

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Karahasan, H., & Sat, A. (2007) Peace Education in North Cyprus: A Phenomenological Approach, in Ross, A. (ed) Citizenship Education in Society. London: CiCe, pp 555-560.

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This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The rector and the staff of the University of Montpellier III
- Andrew Craven, of the CiCe Administrative team, for editorial work on the book, and Lindsay Melling and Teresa Carbajo-Garcia, for the administration of the conference arrangements
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement

Peace Education in North Cyprus: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

This paper discusses multiculturalism and peace education in order to illuminate the significance of face-to-face, daily interactions. It argues that this could be a useful way to promote peace education in Cyprus. Although people could be able to cross the borders and can 'see the other half of their homeland' since 2003, Cyprus still lacks of a common educational policy as indicated by Michalinos Zembylas and Hakan Karahasan in 8th CiCe conference. The paper is qualitative and focuses on the curriculum in the northern Cyprus in general and how, on personal level, peace education could be promoted.

Individuals are both objects and subjects within networks of communicative interaction.
(Georg Simmel)

Introduction

It is well known that citizens are involved in the creation of 'life worlds' which form the background for individuals to exist both as subjects and objects in the process of interaction. The significance of face-to-face interactions on a daily basis is that the actors in the process of communication are simultaneously agents of change as well as continuity. This paper specifically examines the possibilities of promoting peace education within the Turkish Cypriot context. Given the dynamics of interaction in which 'individuals are both objects and subjects' peace education could be seen as a self-reflective discourse to create the possibility of genuine dialogue at the political and social levels.

The rationale of the research is that micro-level interactions more often than not form the basis for macro-level transformations. Any simple act of communicative interaction by its very nature involves diverse intentions to negotiate meaning. If citizens are active in the process of interaction, then, could they be the ones for promoting peace education in Northern Cyprus?

As Bekerman (2005) argues, although children go to the same school and take classes together in the bi-lingual school in Israel, when they go back to their homes, they hear similar stories or live their life in an environment that is based on the notion of *us* and *them* discourse, and this in a way clearly shows the significance of daily interaction between people and how individuals are 'both as subjects and objects in the process of interaction'. In other words, it can be argued that education itself is not the only thing that will help mutual trust and understanding but it is *through* individuals' interaction that meaning is given to issues like peace education.

This paper is part of *Citizenship Education in Society: Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A, published by CiCe (London) 2007.
ISBN 978-1899764-90-7; ISSN 1470-6695

Funded with support from the European Commission SOCRATES Project of the Department of Education and Culture. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained in this publication.

The theoretical framework of the paper is Husserl's notion of life world which is an experience of intersubjectivity. Our methodology primarily involves sample interviews and meeting reports with teachers at the primary and secondary schools and POST Research Institute's reports of *Education for Peace I* and *II* to see how micro-level interactions can be used in peace education in Northern Cyprus.

Broadly, the paper examines peace education as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which involves the interaction of life-worlds in the context of Northern Cyprus by using phenomenology to analyse peace education in general.

Methodology of the research

As described above, the methodology has been divided into two parts:

- a) We use phenomenology to 'understand' the phenomena because how people create their life worlds can be 'interpreted' through phenomenology. After all, each individual 'understands' and 'acts' according to what s/he perceives in his/her life world. Another theoretical framework of the paper is Husserl's notion of empathy which is an experience of intersubjectivity.
- b) The meeting reports with school teachers and the reports of POST-RI will be used, especially *Education for Peace 1* and *Education for Peace 2* to show the situation of education and peace education in Northern Cyprus.

What is phenomenology and how it can contribute to peace education?

According to *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2003),

Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.

As it can be seen from the definition, phenomenology can be used in peace education to understand how people perceive the notion of peace education and how 'we', the writers of this essay, 'perceive and understand' the phenomena. In other words, if individuals are the actors and they create their life worlds based on the notion of their experiences from the 'first point of view', then phenomenology can be a useful method to see the dynamics of peace education in the society that we live in.

How does an individual constitute the world? This is one of the fundamental questions for Husserl in 'The Crisis of European Sciences – Part Two'. According to Husserl,

For the life-world – the "world for us all" – is identical with the identical that can be commonly talked about. Every new apperception leads essentially, through apperceptive transference, to a new typification of the surrounding world and in social intercourse to a naming which immediately flows into the common

language. Thus the world is always such that it can be empirically, generally (intersubjectively) explicated and, at the same time, linguistically explicated.

What Husserl mentions here is the significance of an individual's perception and the meaning that s/he interprets through social interaction. Language, for Husserl, is used as a medium that transfers the individual's experience that constitutes his/her life-world.

Another significant method that can be used when one talks about Husserl and peace education could be his notion of empathy. For Husserl, '...through the medium of empathy I can make use of the self-apperceptions others'. Regarding this, then, empathy can be used as a tool to 'understand' how others feel and think. Empathy can be used in peace education to 'make use of the self-apperceptions of others (i.e., Greek Cypriots). Again, referring Husserl,

What is directly and actually perceived (and it is even thought to be perceived with a particular sort of apodictic self-evidence) is the presence-sphere of the psychic experiences of one man, and only by that man himself, as his sinner perception; the experiences of others are given only through the mediated type of experience called "empathy" – unless this latter type of experience is reinterpreted as an inference, as it generally used to be.

The psychic experience that one interprets can be used in a positive way in peace education. For example, in issues like war and conflict, instead of just seeing the other as an 'eternal enemy', empathy can be used to see that the problem(s) can have multiple dimensions, and other people are also people like 'us'. In other words, empathy could be useful to see that 'they (i.e., Greek Cypriots) had [have] the same needs that we had [have]: food, shelter, living in safety on their land.' (Zembylas and Karahasan, 2006, p. 18).

Peace education: Towards a critique?

If people create their life worlds through what they perceive and respond to it accordingly, then, one can ask, what is the use of peace education and how can we promote it?

A little survey on peace education shows that there are different answers for this question (AKTI 2004; Bekerman 2002; Bekerman 2005; POST-RI 2004; POST-RI 2007; Theodossopoulos 2006; Zembylas & Karahasan 2006). Most research studies have focused on the curricula development or revising textbooks, however, the point that this paper touches on is the issue of how peace education can be promoted in Cyprus, although there is no settlement. We think that changing the history books alone will not be useful unless we consider that it is the 'Individuals [who] are both objects and subjects within networks of communicative interaction'. For example, Ziv (2005) argues that 'Good texts are important; but it is impossible to reach the aim [peace education] without considering teachers' (p.150).

Also, as Bekerman (2005) claims,

Given the above and while recognising the profound influence of parents (and social contexts at large) on children's perspectives, I have come to question why it is that educational institutions in general pay so little attention to parents, and that integrated educational initiatives act so similarly. Clearly, the need to pay attention to parental influences is not foreign to education, though for the most part it goes unheeded. But in the case of our schools and in spite of their efforts to take parents into account, this effort seems not to work sufficiently well so as to influence the educational scene (p. 238).

Bekerman's (2005) point is a significant one because the example of the bi-lingual school in Israel shows us that although Israeli and Palestinian children go to the same school and read the same books (one in Hebrew the other one in Arabic), still this does not change the fact that children have the 'same stereotypes' toward each other.

All seemed to be convinced that, in order for the effort to be worthwhile and successful, it needed to demonstrate its commitment to both ethnic pride and separateness in addition to coexistence. In a sense, the children were just mirroring teachers' and parents' views. It is when considering the above that I come to question whether there are children to educate, or is it the adults and their associative institutions who are the ones in need of education. Needless to say, the assumption that a commitment to separate identities and the conceptualization of identity as reified conditions of "self" are far from having been demonstrated as supportive of tolerance and recognition (Bekerman, 2005, pp. 239-240).

The findings of Bekerman (2005), then, clearly show us that if we only think of peace education as revising textbooks and the curricula without considering the individuals who live outside the schools (such as parents, friends etc.), then, we come to the conclusion that '...I question whether peace education, traditionally conceptualised as cognitive development and offered in an isolated context, can achieve such goals?' (Bekerman, 2005, p. 236).

The point of Bekerman (2005) is clear: in order to promote peace education, we should encourage peace and reconciliation on a micro level, because daily interactions can change the whole structure, of course not completely but on an individual level. Otherwise, peace education may not work but helps the maintenance of the status quo (Bekerman 2005). In order to promote peace education, it will not be useful if we only revise the textbooks that are being taught but also we need each and every individual to understand and promote peace education. In North Cyprus, revision of textbooks actually shows how a revision could be based on a grass roots level (POST-RI 2007). As indicated in POST-RI's (2007) *Education for Peace II*, 'the dynamics of change' in the Turkish Cypriot society actually caused the revision of the history textbooks in secondary schools because Teacher's Trade Unions (KTÖS, KTOEÖS), from the very beginning are very much positive towards peace/settlement in Cyprus. Also, as indicated in the *Education for Peace I* (POST-RI 2004), although textbooks contained many nationalistic themes and elements, the relative autonomy of teachers meant that students do not 'learn' things in a very nationalistic way. For example, some teachers' refusal to

post the posters that have blood or violent scenes can be given as an example of that, although these posters were sent by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Even this can be seen as how an 'individual could be both object and subject within the network of communicative interaction' as Georg Simmel claims. It also shows another fact: although textbooks contained nationalistic elements and themes that promoted mutual distrust between the two major communities (T/Cs & G/Cs), the relative autonomy of teachers minimised, and sometimes diminished these problems (POST-RI 2004). The findings of POST-RI (2004; 2007) are very important in the way that it documents how even one individual can promote peace education although the educational system and textbooks contained nationalistic elements and themes.

Nonetheless, as POST-RI (2007) shows in *Education for Peace II*, just revising the textbooks does not mean that you can reach the aim that the educators/politicians expected.

A common remark made by teachers concerned the lack of time allocated to the teaching of Cyprus History (only 40 minutes a week). Therefore, although the revised textbooks contain many useful teaching tools and exercises, due to time constraints they are not being used to their full capacity... Moreover, the teachers did not receive training in light of the revised textbooks and no teaching manual was provided to schools. Although the revised textbooks are more student centred in their approach the teachers lack the skills and knowledge to work provide such teaching (POST-RI, 2007).

Thus, we can say that changing textbooks does not mean that you can change the whole structure. Instead, there are other elements, such as training teachers, parents, educators, students etc. that are important in promoting peace education in society.

Also, Bekerman (2005) points out that:

It is from this perspective that I claim that there are no children to educate towards peace, and that institutionalised schooling might not be the way to achieve this goal. The child is not the father of man but is authored by her, at least at first, and thus adults are the ones needing to be educated for peace (and this outside the spell of modernist perspectives). Integrated schools shaped in modern narratives are prone to become forgetful of these facts and, in line with the nation state hegemony, put an emphasis on reforming children while disregarding the wider social context. When doing so, they fall pray to the nation state hegemonic power and collaborate in securing a state of continuing conflict. If the integrated schools want to contribute to peace education, they should seriously consider the one thing which schools have historically denied, that is the necessary and intimate connections between education (in school) and society (outside) as well as the relationship between contexts of learning and contexts of "real" life (p. 241).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper analysed peace education from a phenomenological point of view and argued that in order to promote peace education it is significant to understand

the dynamics of daily face-to-face interactions of people. Phenomenology is used to show how individuals create their life worlds; through senses, hence interpreting and understanding phenomena according to Husserl.

The paper, then, talked about how we can promote peace education in North Cyprus. One of the conclusions that we ended up with can be summarised as it is through the daily interactions – for example, educating the father of the child but not the child as Bekerman (2005) argues. Another thing is the fact that empathy can be used as a useful way to ‘understand’ what the other thinks to a certain event.

To conclude, we would like to end our paper by re-stating Bekerman’s argument and say how peace education can achieve its goals such as peace, reconciliation, tolerance and recognition of others just by emphasising or revising the curricula but not the people who make the whole system.

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