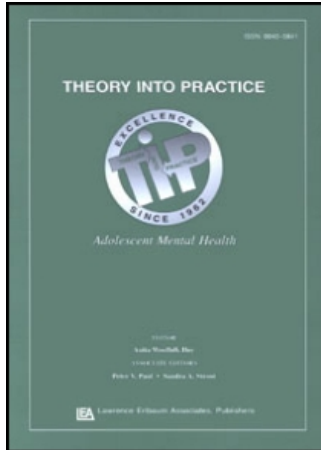


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Implementing Community Peace and Safety Networks in South Africa

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Tricia S. Jones

Implementing Community Peace and Safety Networks in South Africa

Peace education initiatives often import American models and techniques without careful consideration of their fit with existing sociohistorical contexts, indigenous cultures, and necessary links to community. This article describes a 2-year project that instituted school- and community-based mediation programs as Community Peace and Safety Networks in the Gauteng region of South Africa. Qualitative research processes were used to conduct needs assessments and develop cultural sensitivity that increased the success of the project. The potential role of formative and summative evaluation research to enhance respect for context, culture and community are discussed in relation to peace education efforts.

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THE PEACE EDUCATION WORKING GROUP at UNICEF defines peace education as the following:

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, inter-group, national or international level. (UNESCO, 2002)

Peace education and conflict resolution education share goals and objectives (Bodine & Crawford, 1998; Jones & Compton, 2003; Sommers, 2003). Peace education programs help people develop communication skills of active listening and assertive speech, problem-solving skills of brainstorming or consensus building, and orientation skills of cultural awareness and empathy. Peace education emphasizes understanding the dynamics of social conflict, warfare, conflict resolution, and peace.

As Salomon and Nevo (2002) suggested, no typical peace education curriculum exists, though

peace education programs usually include “anti-racism, conflict resolution, multiculturalism, cross-cultural training and the cultivation of a generally peaceful outlook” (Salomon, 2002, p. 7). A strong emphasis is learning methods of handling conflict, such as negotiation, mediation, or facilitation. Peer mediation is a component of many peace education programs and the most common form of conflict education in the United States (Jones, 2003; Jones & Kmitta, 2000).

The challenges of peace education include the breadth of the programming, the locus of the work, and the range of the goals. As Ben porath (2003, p. 525) summarized,

The field entitled “peace education” is in fact so broad that authors disagree on the description of the problem they wish to address and correspondingly on the proper solution, as well as on the site in which peace education is to take place.

The peace education audience typically focuses on primary and secondary school-aged children (Reardon, 2001), though some work is done in higher education, and may even extend to adult learning. Some peace educators have bold aspirations for peace education (transforming entire societies and creating cultures of peace), whereas others working in areas of recent or ongoing conflict have more modest goals (ending and preventing the current interpersonal or intergroup violence). Research on the effectiveness of peace education is almost exclusively focused on programs that develop individual skill and alter individual attitudes rather than demonstrating impacts at group, social, or institutional levels (Ardizzone, 2003; Harris, 2003; Salomon & Nevo, 2002).

Due to the underlying mission of peace education, organizations like the Association for Childhood Education (Bayer & Staley, 2002–2003) support efforts such as the Global Campaign for Peace Education (Reardon, 2002) and the Hague Appeal for Peace (Harris & Synott, 2002). To continue growing the support for peace education, it is imperative that peace educators work to address criticisms that can be leveled at these efforts.

Peace education may be ineffective or counterproductive if it fails to respect the socio-

historical–political contexts in which it is being introduced, denies the critical role of the surrounding communities, or is insensitive to the cultural realities of the people involved. This article presents a brief recounting of a peace education initiative, funded by the United States Information Agency, that created Community Peace and Safety Networks (CPSN) in South Africa following the end of apartheid. These reflections are meant to highlight the need to respect context, community, and culture, and they describe some of the ways we attempted to do this in the CPSN project. Of course, this project is not intended to serve as a model of ideal implementation, but rather as an exemplar from which to raise important issues for peace educators.

An Overview of the CPSN Project

A CPSN was created in the Gauteng province of South Africa during 1995–1997. It consisted of peer-mediation programs developed in four high schools in the Johannesburg region: an exclusively Black high school in the Black township of Thokoza; an exclusively Black high school in the Black township of Soweto; a recently integrated, predominantly Afrikaans high school; and a recently integrated girls’ Catholic school in a British suburb. These school-based mediation programs were linked to four small community mediation centers established in the communities surrounding the schools.

CPSN extends the impact of school-based mediation programs by involving the school, a community conflict management organization, and community members (for example police, clergy, business owners, or representatives of other community groups; Jones & Bodtker, 1999b). Evaluation of peer-mediation program effectiveness in Philadelphia (Jones & Carlin, 1994) indicated that the positive effects of peer-mediation programs may be mitigated by a surrounding neighborhood or community that fails to understand or support the new skills and orientations taught in the schools. Without a base of education in the community, the peer-mediation efforts are limited in their effect. Involving school and community en-

hances the prospects for synergy and lasting effect (Jones & Bodtger, 1999a).

The project activities consisted of several phases. The phases are briefly described here and some are elaborated on in later discussions of attention to context, culture, and community. In Phase 1, a planning phase, a team of South African educators and conflict specialists (members representing each of the high schools and a South African nongovernmental organization) was brought to the United States to meet with educators and conflict specialists. Phase 2 emphasized needs assessment and community immersion with members of the U.S. team going to the South African schools and communities. In Phase 3, community-mediation trainings were delivered in South Africa. During Phase 4 the school-based mediation programs were implemented. Phase 5 involved program assessments and planning for sustainability after the funding period.

As a multicultural, multinational, longitudinal peace education effort, the CPSN project was guided by several sensibilities described by Ferdig (2001) as critical to any conflict transformation. The first is the *spirit of freedom*, in which everyone is empowered to make decisions about what to look at, how to understand events, and how to interact with others. The second sensibility is the *spirit of inclusion*—acknowledging and valuing difference. The third sensibility is the *spirit of inquiry*—looking for possibilities and options previously unconsidered.

Respecting Context

In any peace education program it is imperative that the social, historical, and political context be appreciated and allowed to influence the design and implementation of the effort. Failure to attend seriously to context results in ill-conceived *parachute* processes in which peace educators come in with short-term strategies that are rarely successful and may be destructive (Tidwell, 2004; Yarn, 2002). In the CPSN project, respecting context meant appreciating the historical magnitude of the shift from apartheid, embracing a spirit of reconciliation nationally in South Africa, and acknowl-

edging the role the South African educational system played in this national transformation.

The significance of the spirit of reconciliation in South Africa, especially in the mid 1990s, cannot be overstated (Sparks, 2004) and was a determining factor in the decision to use a peace education initiative that was congruent with a reconciliatory frame. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a backdrop emphasizing general principles of peace education (Enslin, 2002; Gibson, 2004). It underscored the possibility of having offenders and victims face their previous acts and progress toward peaceful coexistence.

Critics of mediation programs in the United States had argued that, because mediation discourages blame and the attribution of responsibility for an injustice, it cannot be used as a vehicle to right the wrongs of an oppressive system (Bettman & Moore, 1994; Townley, 1994). But it was precisely the eschewing of blame that allowed mediation to embody the essence of a reconciliatory system, one of the reasons that initial peace education efforts (including mediation) in South Africa had begun in some schools (Akanda, 1995; MacDonald, 1990; Stead, 1996).

As mentioned earlier, one challenge for peace educators is the decision about locus of activity—particularly whether the initiatives should be school based. A respect for context led us to decide that school-based programs were a critical component of the peace education work we were undertaking.

There were three reasons for the emphasis on school-based conflict programs as a means of effecting social change. First, the damage that had been done in the apartheid era struck most at the youth of the country (Fourie, 1990), and interventions needed to be youth oriented. Children, especially in the townships, had been subjected to continuous violence before and after apartheid (Gibson, 1989; Swartz & Levett, 1989). Straker, Mendelsohn, and Tudin (1996) studied the perceptions of violence among South African youth in the apartheid and postapartheid periods and found that Black-on-Black violence changed from politically motivated violence to domestic and random violence following the repeal of apart-

heid. Peace education could reverse these conditions. As Dovey (1994, p. 9) stated, “(the youth) are ... often insufficiently equipped to channel their idealism constructively. They need to have opportunities to understand, question, and challenge how society operates and how they can influence peaceful change in a positive way.”

Second, schools were a primary means of enculturation (Tidwell, 2004). After apartheid, educational institutions were seen as the primary agent of social reform. Since 1994, government policy in South Africa had strongly emphasized education for peace and democracy. According to the Department of Education White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995),

The education system must counter the legacy of violence by promoting the values underlying democratic processes and the charter of fundamental rights, the importance of due process of law and exercise of civic responsibility and by teaching the values and skills for conflict management and conflict resolution, the importance of mediation and the benefits of tolerance and cooperation. (Harver, 2003, p. 82)

Third, given the changes in educational policy in postapartheid South Africa, schools were becoming more quickly integrated than other institutions. Tihanyi and du Toit (in press) noted that youth, especially in multiracial schools, were at the forefront of the postapartheid transformation. They were probably the first in their family to attend institutions where different race groups shared educational facilities and experienced interracial contact with the opportunity for first-hand exploration of reconciliation.

Still, with all of these reasons for engaging in school-based peace education, the question of quality in South African schools was an important aspect of context in terms of goals and implementation specifics. The schools involved were radically unequal in terms of resources, because the apartheid government had instituted highly unequal educational opportunities and facilities divided on the basis of race. The Thokoza and Soweto schools did not have windows, books, or

heating, whereas the Afrikaans and British schools were as well resourced as typical suburban U.S. high schools. Fiske and Ladd (2004), in their excellent account of the changes in South African education since apartheid, recounted that in a mere decade the new regime has created an educational policy that comes close to treating races equally. The persistence of socioeconomic disparities among schools, however, means there are still substantial inequalities in educational experience and opportunity.

The schools themselves were undergoing considerable structural changes. The end of apartheid ushered in a number of significant educational reforms, such as the centralization of a previously (racially) divided education administration, the introduction of new curricula, and the racial integration of schools (Tihanyi & du Toit, in press). One of the biggest changes was the policy reallocating teachers to schools they would previously not have entered. For example, it was common for a teacher of a well-resourced school in his or her community to be assigned to an impoverished township or border area school. As a result, many teachers quit and many new teachers were hired without adequate training. Two studies conducted during this time (Rogan, 1999; Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999) found that, in most schools, lack of teacher education resulted in overreliance on lecture formats, inability to teach in students' native languages, poorly structured lessons and curricula, little group or participatory work among students, and even little emphasis on reading and writing. Some suggest that, although progress has been made, these basic problems continue to this day (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Onwu & Mogari, 2004; Waghid, 2004).

The context of the CPSN peace education project indicated there were realities that must be addressed in the design and implementation of the program. Clearly, a youth-based focus was needed, and schools in South Africa were the best mechanism for education. But it was not wise to rely solely on the school, or to place too much responsibility for success on undertrained teachers and school administrators undergoing stressful change and possibly planning to leave the teaching profession.

Due to these realities, we made several changes in the CPSN design. In the original project plan-

ning, we had assumed that teachers would be trained as site leadership teams for each school and run the peer-mediation programs (as in many U.S. peer-mediation programs), that the school-based programs would be implemented first and the community programs created second, and that the concentration would be on a community-by-community design rather than a network crossing all communities. All of these plans were modified based on the factors previously discussed. Although teachers were trained in mediation with students, the focus shifted to a much greater student-empowerment model, and the training shifted to accommodate that. The initial phases of training asked students to discuss the purposes of mediation and peace education in their schools and communities. The students identified the goals and structures for the programs that were included into program design. The community-based programs were developed first, and their implementation highlighted the need for strong community support. Perhaps most important, the decision was made to build infrastructures between schools and communities in the project as much as possible. For example, trainings were structured to combine students from various schools to increase their experience of meeting and working with new and different peers.

Respecting Community

Arguing that community support can be important to educational innovation is not new. Knoff's (1995) model of improving school-community relations emphasizes that there must be human resource systems in the school that are linked to the wider community, that truly partner with the community in a collaborative fashion, and where teacher involvement in these collaborations is key. One of the reasons these links to community are key, according to Knoff, is that they help innovators develop an understanding of deep cultures and help participants generate shared norms and cultures. Yet even with the advocacy for community linkage, the reality is often disappointing. Most educational interventions do not build successful partnerships with the surrounding community.

Other peace education experiences have also confirmed that community involvement can determine the success of peace education. Looking at peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland, Cairns (1996) and Smith (2002) confirmed that school-based initiatives require community links and support to succeed. Although school-based programs may be able to develop individual skills, without involvement of students in the community and involvement of community members in the program, the skills wane and the impacts to inter-group and social peace building do not happen (Williams, 2004).

The decision to develop Community Peace and Safety Networks signaled an initial respect for community gained from the grassroots peace education work that some of the project principals had conducted in the United States (Jones & Bodtger, 1999a). Yet, in addition to including the community, we took several actions to respect the community as a partner in the peace education efforts.

First, we wanted to build in time to meet and learn from the four South African communities as well as the schools. This was done in several ways. As a condition for receiving funding we had completed initial orientation with South African community members, but in the Phase 1 planning we realized that this was not nearly sufficient. As a result we added Phase 2, devoted to building relationships with community partners, in which members of the U.S. team went to South Africa and spent 2 weeks meeting with community members and school members. Specifically, Phase 2 provided us with an opportunity to make presentations at the schools, meet with community leaders, and gather information about their needs, desires, and resources through focus group interviews and informal discussions. The emphasis on qualitative and quantitative needs assessment as essential for planning and design was perhaps the most important factor in the overall CPSN project accomplishments.

Second, we started the mediation training in the communities so we could have some support for the mediation when we introduced it in the schools. The community support was not difficult to gain in the Black townships where tribal cultures have long resonated with the use of informal

third party processes like mediation for resolving disputes (Gibson, 2004). In fact, the number of adults ultimately trained as mediators for the community mediation centers in Thokoza and Soweto were double the initial projections. But the Afrikaans and British communities were not as sanguine about developing community-mediation centers. They were satisfied with having adults trained in mediation to act as support for the schools, but were reluctant to go the next step.

Throughout Phases 3 and 4 we made as much time as possible (outside of training) to visit communities, spend time with school and community members, and continue the dialogue of how the project was meeting their needs. And, of course, between phases the members of the South African project team were working in their communities spreading the word and building support. They did an excellent job of identifying community leaders and stakeholders whose support would be key for maintaining the project focus after funding. Policymakers at the municipal level, from the private sectors, the Department of Education, and the Department of Safety and Security were brought into the discussions relatively early in the project. This involvement helped to move toward institutionalization of the conflict education initiatives. The community support was advanced enough at the end of the project to host a 1-day conference where hundreds of community members and members of the educational infrastructure of the Gauteng province came together to celebrate the accomplishments of the Community Peace and Safety Networks (Jones, 2004).

Respecting Culture

If peace educators respect context and community it is likely that they will also be at least partially respectful of culture, given the integral relationship between these components. However, there are many levels of culture, and some of the more subtle may be underemphasized by peace educators. In their account of peace education efforts in the West African country of Sierra Leone,

Bretherton, Weston, and Zbar remind us of issues of transferability and cultural insensitivity:

The question of how valid it is to transfer the peace education curriculum from one context or culture to another is also a key issue. ... Our aim was to develop a program that suited local conditions but that also modeled what has been learned from international experience. The method adopted—drawing upon and then systematizing the work of local agencies and educators for peace—was cooperative rather than an imposition by experts. ... The need to connect with the local culture. This sounds like a truism, but is not often observed in practice. (2003, pp. 15–16)

One way we tried to respect more subtle elements of culture included analyses of the conflict-management norms of the various student cultures through a series of focus-group interviews. Before developing and implementing the peer-mediation training, it was important to understand the students' conflict contexts. This initial examination would provide critical information about whether the conflict contexts in which peer mediation was used in the United States were sufficiently similar to conflict contexts in South Africa to justify cross-cultural transferability of the training models. In addition, it would provide information about the cross-cultural differences in conflict contexts among the diverse South African student groups. Focus group interviews were analyzed for themes related to the following three areas: (a) What types of conflicts do students experience? (b) How is conflict managed by students? and (c) What opportunities for change can be identified in the way conflict is handled?

By and large, the types of conflicts reported by the South African students resembled those reported by students in U.S. schools (e.g., rumors, he said/she said, boyfriend/girlfriend disputes, disobeying rules, and arguments with teachers). Racial conflict was also reported, primarily by students in the predominately White schools, but was not posed as intractable nor did students reference vivid stereotypes. Rather, racial conflict was identified in relation to language use or preferences in

music and fashion. These findings have recently been supported by other qualitative research on racial integration processes in South African high schools (Tihanyi & du Toit, in press).

Language was seen as an important cultural cue tied to conflict (e.g., which language gets privileged in interaction) and was also a source of misunderstanding between students. It is important to note that only the British students spoke English as a first language; for all other students English was a second language (or third or fourth, as is the case of most of the Black students). Yet, for the students in the CPSN project, English is the language common between them, thus their only means of interacting. Also, racial conflict related to language use was not unique to White and Black groups; the White British and Afrikaans students also used language as an intergroup marker.

Though most reported conflicts were similar among the different school groups, some differences were reported. Students in the Black schools discussed more conflicts related to family and with teachers and expressed the desire to learn how to manage these conflicts. For instance, one student wanted to know how to help his parents settle a dispute, showing great concern to bring harmony to the family. Of course, conflicts related to family and teachers were not relevant only in the Black schools. What is noteworthy, however, is that Black students chose to discuss these types of conflicts to a far greater extent than did the students from the primarily White schools. This may represent a cultural difference so that the Black student cultures place a greater emphasis on community (e.g., a collectivist culture), whereas the White student cultures are more individualistically oriented (Dovey, 1994).

Just as the types of conflicts that were reported by South African students were quite similar, so too were their modes for identifying and manifesting conflict. Most conflict was identified as disagreements or arguments, viewed as negative, and frequently framed as group or clique related. The British students spoke more of following rules and being respectful of the age and *position* hierarchy when they identified conflict, suggesting a strong

normative orientation to their understanding of conflict. Conflict was manifested by exchanging verbal putdowns, chastising, spreading rumors, and nonverbally shunning or excommunicating students in disfavor.

The greatest diversity between the different student groups was in how they managed conflicts. The British students relied overwhelmingly on authority to manage their conflicts. Although they had an official structure designed to empower them to deal with conflict on their own, it was based on hierarchy according to grade and was reportedly largely unsuccessful in resolving conflict. Students also reported the use of direct confrontation, yet ensuing talk typically involved attempts to persuade one another rather than engage in genuine discussion. Thus the conflict was often left unresolved unless brought to the attention of a teacher or administrator.

On the other hand, the Afrikaans students dealt with conflict almost exclusively through peer groups and rarely consulted adults in the school to assist them. Interpersonal conflict, or conflict between members of a peer group, became a group issue, often with the leader of the group and other group members taking the responsibility of negotiating for the members in conflict. The Afrikaans students also placed a high value on face saving in this context. For instance, one boy reported that, when two boys in the peer group had an issue, the one deemed at fault was not made to explicitly admit fault; rather, it was implicitly understood through informal talk among other members of the group, and the boys went about their business as usual. If the issue had not been adequately addressed (i.e., if the injured party did not feel redeemed), they waited until another explicit issue (related or not) arose, or they created another issue, and then went through the same process. The girls at the Afrikaans school also reported that conflicts were frequently managed through silence. For example, if a girl learned that her friend had spread a rumor about her, she would actively avoid and ignore the friend rather than confront her or have others confront her.

Interestingly, the Afrikaans boys commented that, although they managed conflict among their

(White) peer groups indirectly, they believed that racial conflict in the school needed to be addressed explicitly because “there is not yet established a common understanding of *what* means *what!*” The boys went on to explain that, because the school had only been integrated for a year, the racial groups did not know each other well yet, and the process of true integration was occurring slowly.

Informed by the insights from the focus group interviews, we changed the initial plans for peer-mediation training in three ways. First we realized that combined trainings would provide some opportunities for students to work outside their own school communities. However, there were language difficulties that prohibited students from all four schools being trained together. We combined the Thokoza and Soweto schools for one training and combined the Afrikaans and British schools for a second training. It is important to note that the Afrikaans and British schools, which have been recently integrated, chose a racially and gender-diverse group of students to participate in mediation training. In Phase 4 the project provided two 4-day peer-mediation trainings for 83 secondary school students.

The second change was to make the training more multilingual. South African and U.S. trainers worked together as training teams to allow the South African trainers to present all information in English, Zulu, and Afrikaans. Written training materials and questionnaires were translated into Zulu and Afrikaans so all students could learn from materials in their first language. Although this required more coordination between trainers, the result was significant, especially among the Thokozan and Sowetan youth who found the use of their native languages a signal of respect and empowerment.

The third change was to incorporate the conflict norms for various student cultures into the training in terms of role plays, exercises, examples, and discussions. In addition, the mediation training began with a series of discussions in which students articulated how they saw mediation benefiting their schools and communities. Instead of assuming that mediation would serve the same purposes for all schools, we allowed the stu-

dents to explore the possibilities and tailor the mediation process and program to reflect their cultural orientations.

Conclusion

The success of peace education in the CPSN project was significantly impacted by the context, community, and cultures involved in the project. This article provides a brief account of why those factors are important and how we tried to respect them. Peace educators should attend to these factors, especially if they are involved in school-based interventions.

Peace educators are well-served to maintain macro- and microfocuses when planning and engaging in their work. We need to resist the tendency to assume the cultural transferability of programs, curricula, and techniques. In addition, we need to resist the temptation to concentrate exclusively on the individual or the interpersonal when monitoring the impacts of peace education interventions. Changing a student's attitudes and improving a student's skills are very important, but retaining that narrow focus misses a great deal that may explain those changes as well as suggest additional impacts at group and social levels.

The considerations of context, community, and culture all require sophistication in and dedication to the use of program evaluation research. In the CPSN project we relied heavily on observation, participant observation, focus group interviews, and informal discussions at all phases of the project. Grounding in basic formative program evaluation processes helps ensure effective and respectful peace education.

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