BUILDING CULTURES OF PEACE IN THE WORLD: ONE PEACE CENTER AT A TIME

Lisa Reber-Rider

Zayed University
PO Box 19282
Dubai
United Arab Emirates

Lisa Reber-Rider has lived and taught in South Korea, Turkey, the US and currently, the United Arab Emirates. She has an MA degree in peace and development studies, as well as an MA in teaching. Her interests include how to engage students and others in issues of peaceful coexistence, intercultural understanding and social justice. She has presented papers in the UAE, Pakistan, Turkey, Ireland and the US.

The world needs institutions and environments that elevate and explicitly address qualities of peaceableness so that these qualities become pervasive in societies. This paper introduces and explores the concept of cultures of peace. It reviews the history of the concept and establishes how cultures of peace can be identified and developed. Finally, the paper discusses the role of peace centers in this process. It is important to create places where researchers and laypersons can find the inspiration they need to work towards peace in their communities and throughout the world.

The world has become “out of balance,” according to sociologist and peace researcher Elise Boulding (2002). Many societies throughout the world today presume that war and violent confrontation are necessary in order to resolve conflict. This is simply not true. We need not allow the warring and violent nature of our societies to supersede their peaceableness. To do this, the world is in need of institutions and environments that elevate and explicitly address qualities of peaceableness. Such overtly designed spaces, which advocate and instill peaceful approaches to conflict and concern for humanity, need to be less exceptional and more pervasive in our lives. These spaces are essential in helping to build the cultures of peace which will lead to a world in balance.
CULTURES OF PEACE

If cultures of peace are the essence of societies living in balance, it is necessary to understand what cultures of peace are, how they can be identified, how societies and governments can develop cultures of peace, and what the benefits are to having a society and government that embody cultures of peace.

In the early 1980s, the United Nations declared that 1986 would be the International Year of Peace. In support of this agenda and to empower humanity and counter the myth that biological determinism is responsible for violence and warring actions, a group of scientists created and adopted the Seville Statement on violence. The scientists concluded that humanity could be “freed from the bondage of biological pessimism and empowered with confidence to undertake the transformative tasks needed” (Seville, 1986). Furthermore, using the Preamble of the UNESCO Constitution, their statement said, “just as ‘wars begin in the minds of men,’ peace also begins in our minds.” Thus it was that a new consciousness concerning our capacity for peace and responsibility in engaging in peace was begun.

It is from the Seville Statement and an educational initiative in Peru that the term “culture of peace” derived. The idea was expanded and developed throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then in 1995, UNESCO formally introduced the concept of “Culture of Peace.” The United Nations General Assembly went on to declare 2000 as the “International Year of the Culture of Peace,” and then declared that 2001-2010 would be the “International Decade of Peace and Non-Violence for Children of the World” (UNESCO-mainstreaming, 2002). Though the phrase was coined by the authors of the Seville Statement and UNESCO, the issue of cultural peace has been addressed widely in peace research and peace studies.

Embodied in the concept of cultures of peace is cultural peace, structural peace and direct peace. When these three facets of peace come together, we have a culture (i.e., community, state, or world) of peace. Johan Galtung (1985, 1996), the man whom many consider to be the father of peace.
studies, created this terminology. He explained that a culture of violence is composed of cultural violence, structural violence and direct violence. Direct violence is clear, identifiable violence—violence in which the incident and the victim are apparent. Its violence ranges from the global to the personal, thus including both military war and physical abuse of a spouse or child. Structural violence is the equivalent to indirect violence; it is shown usually not in specific incidences, but rather in the reduced quality of life for certain groups of people. It refers to the limits which social structures within societies place on human life and rights. Structural violence often goes unnoticed, but includes policies related to but not limited to capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Violence resulting from these policies can contribute to the growing division between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” A specific example might be US trade policies, such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), which tends to favor US markets by giving them generous subsidies, which in turn undermine the ability of poor countries to export to American markets, thus perpetuating their life conditions (Spieldoch, 2004). It could also include allowing an entire segment of society to go without healthcare, or not providing a living minimal wage for all workers. Cultural violence is the attitudes and ideas that allow unjust patterns and structures to exist in society. It is the “violent” morals and “violent” values related to race, religion, gender, ethnicity imbedded in a culture, and perpetuated through such mediums as music, television, literature and national holidays.

An example of cultural violence in the US which American children grow up hearing is the myth that is told every year during the celebration of Thanksgiving. In this myth, children are told that the pilgrims peacefully dined and interacted with the Native American Indians, when in fact there was fear and distrust amongst them, and the eventual degradation and massacre—genocide according to some—of much of the native population. Another example could be the attitude related to the low wages paid to one’s migrant laborers or domestic help, the argument that states that, “It’s their choice to be here” and “They are better off here than in their home country.” Cultural, structural and direct violence are often layered one upon the other, one leading to and fueling the next. Conversely, too, the cycle may begin with direct violence. For example, the attack on World Trade Center in New York City in 2001 led the US government to create
policies that targeted those both within and outside of the US who were of Arabic origin. This in turn led to a lasting effect on the negative way many American citizens view individuals of this ethnic group.

Opposite cultural violence is cultural peace—“aspects of culture that serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace” (Galtung, 1996, p. 196). Cultural peace is, in this case, the reflection of the peaceful moral character and values that are at the root of a culture and its subsequent acts. It involves systems and policies that build and reinforce structural peace. It addresses the structural conditions, such as poverty and illiteracy, which drive people to acts of direct violence. Sociologist and peace researcher Elise Boulding (2000) defines culture of peace as “a culture that promotes peaceable diversity” (p. 1). In short, societies react to differences, whether within their own communities or with other communities, in ways that reflect either a peaceful nature or an aggressive, combative, warring nature. A peaceable culture deals with conflict nonviolently and creatively.

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There are clearly some which have been socialized to interact and engage in ways which promote integration and cooperation and avoid aggression and violence. The examples which Boulding provides are all small communities. Their methods for handling conflict have grown up out of the community. The societies she describes mostly include select tribal and religious societies. We are generally not given examples of large advanced societies, much less of countries as a whole, that exhibit cultures of peace. Do they not exist? There are counties in the recent past that have exhibited elements of peaceableness. In the news and in the textbooks, these acts are often forgotten.
and not given sufficient credit or awareness. These elements, though, must be highlighted in order that we have images of our potential for peace and not war. Though the bottom up approach of grassroots peacebuilding is essential, countries, too, can have a positive role. Peace educator Syed Sikander Mehdi of Karachi University says that there are examples from the recent past of countries which when faced with risks to their national security and who had the choice to respond aggressively or peaceably chose the latter (personal communication, December 5, 2005).

One example of this, he says, would be Japan. In 1964, China developed nuclear weapons and began trying to provoke Japan. Japan, too, had the nuclear arms technology but chose not to enter into an arms race with China. Rather, Japan believed that confidence-building with China would bring greater security. It knew that if China did not begin to develop its economy it would be a threat; thus, Japan chose to give foreign aid and provide China with more security. Another example, according to Mehdi, is Austria during the Cold War. Austria was on the border between the Communist East and the Democratic West. Austria could have chosen to go under NATO’s umbrella, but then it would have been threatened by the Soviets and in the midst of even greater tensions. As an alternative, Austria believed that bringing US and Soviet policymakers together would do more to bring peace and reconciliation than playing them off each other. As a result, it gained the respect of both sides.

Today, there are several states that tend to exemplify greater qualities of peaceableness. Sweden, according to Boulding (2000), is one example of a highly peaceable state system, one which she considers “utopia” in regards to its national policies (p. 47). Internationally, too, Sweden is known for its commitment to peacekeeping and cooperation (US Department of State, 2005). It has chosen to be neutrally armed and to only have nonprovocative defense; it apparently believes that war will be less likely by taking a nonoffensive stance and eliminating threatening activities (Barsh & Webel, 2002). Costa Rica and Japan both stand behind their desire for peaceableness through constitutional commitments. Costa Rica has gone beyond Sweden and has constitutionally abolished their army (article 12), and Japan has constitutionally renounced the “right of belligerence of state” (article 9).

Many of these elements have been taken into account to develop indices,
data sets and reports which reflect—amongst other things—elements of peacefulness within a country. The United Nation’s Human Development Index (HDI) provides a set of data reflecting the degree of development within a country based on life expectancy, education and standard of living.\(^2\) The Global Peace Index (GPI) also provides a data set to reflect the peaceableness of a nation. The GPI does this by ranking countries using a five point scale based on 24 indicators broken into three broad areas: ongoing domestic and international conflict (such as wars being fought and relations with neighboring countries), safety and security in countries (including level of trust between citizens and respect for human rights), and militarization (including production and sales of weapons and amount spent on military).\(^3\) Amnesty International, an organization which aims to protect human rights, represents its findings solely (or mainly) with a report.\(^4\) There are many issues and concerns surrounding the current indices, data sets, and reports. These concerns range from reports being biased in terms of who they choose to report on to the epistemic violence that can result from applying a particular (often Western) standard on nations that have fundamentally different belief systems and cultures. Yet, while these concerns are valid, the indices and reports are at a minimum an indication of conditions.

And finally, it is good to note that any country that desires and works toward strengthening international organizations like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court reflects a willingness to look beyond borders and to give up a bit of sovereignty for the good of all.\(^5\) Such actions support a greater concern for global harmony.

**HOW SOCIETIES DEVELOP CULTURES OF PEACE**

Though there are clear examples of cultures behaving peaceably, there are, also, a disproportional number lacking peaceableness. According to UNESCO, cultures of peace are not the norm, but should be. In its report, UNESCO-mainstreaming (2002), it clearly links the advance of cultures of peace with education.

A culture of peace can be both an approach to peace education and an end result of peace education. According to American peace educator Betty Reardon, a culture of peace should permeate the entire educational
experience and become the “ethos of the school’s culture” (1999, p. 29). As an approach, cultures of peace is at the end of a long chain of evolution within the field of peace education, an evolution that has often reflected the current political concerns in the United States. Reardon (1999) noted that this progression of approaches began with war and nuclear prevention, moved into conflict resolution, followed by comprehensive peace education, and then ecological and cooperative education. Much of what Reardon views as the heart of the cultures of peace approach has its foundation in the ecology approach with its focus on our oneness with the earth and all living species. Within peace education, this ecological approach is viewed by some as approaching qualities of spirituality. Aspects of it which are most clearly drawn upon and emphasized within the cultures of peace approach are human consciousness and transformation. Without awareness and reverence for life, a global transformation of both the form and substance of human culture will not be realized.

A culture of peace approach to peace education necessitates a comprehensive and deeper look into identity, both individual and societal; it requires us to look within to see what it is that creates a culture from which violence arises. The goals should be to create a new consciousness and to transform societies into ones in which a desire for peaceableness is imbedded. However, in order to achieve this transformation, a transitional period is needed. This transitional stage is one which moves from an active creation of peacefulness to a maintenance of it. It is a stage that Reardon only slightly hints at in Peace Education: A Review and Projection (1999), but one that is clearly needed. The process can perhaps be understood when compared with language learning. Typically, a language is learned in one of two ways: by acquiring it naturally from an early age and by actively learning it at a later age. It is essentially the difference between unconscious verses conscious effort. Language that is acquired early and unconsciously becomes a part of the person. Consciously-learned language may also become a part of a person, but will do so only with considerably more effort.

A culture of peace should permeate the entire educational experience and become the “ethos of the school’s culture.”
Learning peacefulness within society can be similarly understood. A peaceful culture teaches human qualities such as empathy, compassion and respect. If the child is in an environment (culture) that already reinforces this quality, it is likely that she will acquire and make this quality her own, too. This obviously would be the easiest, most desirable approach. On the other hand, it can also happen in less peaceable cultures, but with more conscious effort. The teaching—through awareness-raising, example and experience—must be deliberate and extensive. This is the transition that needs to take place, the evolution that is needed, one where a culture of peace becomes imbedded in a society’s way of accepting and interacting with the world. As Reardon (1999) explains, peacemaking capacities can be taught and are a beginning, but until the capacity for peacemaking becomes part of a culture—a reflection of the basic beliefs about one’s own culture and those viewed as other—there will be no transformation of the global society.

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Aspects of peace and violence are inherent in all cultures. Knowing this can be somewhat liberating and can help dispel the notion that we need rid society completely of all violence to be a peace culture. In Boulding’s book *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* (2000, p. 4), she writes about societies being a “blend of violence and peaceableness.” The right blend, though, is important as a society with too much violence—as we are in the midst of in much of the world today—becomes a society that is unhealthy and, as mentioned earlier, a society which is “out of balance.”
If the world today is generally "out of balance," what needs to be done? Though all cultures have peace behaviors, it is the rare one that does not need to change in some way in order to become more peaceful (Boulding, 2000). It can be inferred from this that cultures must look within and acknowledge those attitudes and values that lead to violence—both direct and structural—within their own culture and/or against other cultures. Reardon (1999, p. 30) points out, though, that, "culture remains an untouchable, sacrosanct area of the human condition." I believe that because aspects of culture can be sacrosanct to those within the particular culture as well as to those not within, it is essential that a place for community and dialogue on these taboo subjects be created. A desire for discourse and engagement in no way negates the importance of cultural diversity and plurality for it is through this discourse that better understanding, appreciation and respect can grow. If this discourse does not occur, I believe that a transformation of cultures—and transformation of countries, which is essential for global peace—will not come about.

The peace behaviors which Boulding (2000) speaks of range from the bonding that takes place in family life cycles to the daily work rituals of exchanging goods and services to acts of play. Though the contemplation of these behaviors at the small community level is extremely important, it would seem that the behaviors at the level of nations and governments, which might slightly differ, should also be addressed. It is essential to address the reasons why societies and countries should embody cultures of peace even though it is perhaps self-evident. In regards to the role of a country, internally and globally, the value of embodying a culture of peace cannot be overstated.

One important sign of a culture of peace is that it has a discourse for peace. By discourse we mean not simply the words and symbols that are used within a particular social setting or field of study, but also the history, culture and context in which the words are used. All of these elements come together to create discourse. A tool of discourse is the metaphor. A metaphor is an expression that is used to communicate one idea by relating it to another idea. An example of this would be metaphors of war such as "fight for life" or "battle of wits." In both of these metaphors, the concept of war in terms of fighting and battle are combined with another concept.
In the first metaphor, a war concept is used to have us envision the physical struggle that is required for life (or a life) to continue. In the second, the metaphor gives us an image of a physical battle to illustrate what takes place when two or more minds engage over a disagreement. The linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson, in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), discuss metaphors similar to those above and say that these metaphors are highly natural and pervasive, but that we often do not recognize when we use them or how they came to be a part of our discourse.7 Warring metaphors, like other metaphors, have become a natural part of society and culture. It is a totalizing discourse that defines how individuals and thus how society thinks. Concepts, though, do not need to be expressed in terms of war or violence. This discourse has been chosen. It both reflects a culture and dictates that culture.8 Consider the shift that occurs when a metaphor such a “fight for peace” is remade into one which rejects a warring mentality. Metaphors which might result could include: “foster peace,” “embrace peace,” or “value peace.”

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...about, negative cultural discourses must be brought to light so that cultures might change the way they think about themselves, about others and about their relationships with each other.

Another example of discourse that surrounds us every day is in the print media advertisements. Recently in the UAE, where I currently reside, a local newspaper had an advertisement for an office chair. The advertisement showed a small office with a desk and chair. The chair was lying on the floor with a large bullet hole through the back of the chair and a rifle lying in the foreground. Beneath the photo was a “suicide note”
from the chair. The note indicates that the chair took its own life because another furniture company’s chair was superior. As “stated” by the chair, it had no pride left, its “life” had lost its value. My Emirati students and I were shocked and saddened by such an advertisement. My students said that certainly this was not from a local newspaper as suicide is forbidden in Islam. Unfortunately, it was from a local paper. The decisions which advertisers, corporations and governments make—simply in the discourse they chose to express their views—has an impact and a lasting effect. They can represent, and thus reinforce, the more negative aspects of culture, or they can focus on the positive. It is a choice. Cultures of peace embrace peaceable discourses.

Another great benefit to embodying a culture of peace is that such societies and countries have a greater ability to imagine peace. The concept of imagination and creativity in peace studies and the field of conflict resolution is widespread. John Paul Lederach (2005) says that imagination is one of the most important capacities for transcending violence; Johan Galtung (1996) states that nonviolence and creativity go hand in hand and lead to creative conflict transformation; and, Elise Boulding (2002) points to Fred Polak the founder of Future Studies who believed that having an imagined future can empower action. This means, I believe, that images of the future are not permanent structures with prescribed truths. Rather, visions of the future are like temporary scaffolding. As such, they are inherently flexible, easily altered and changed; they need not be fixed. Imagining the future gives people something to reach for; it gives them an alternative to current conditions and possibilities for how to change or improve them. These ideas and visions need to be flexible images that are open to negotiation and adaptation, and whose purpose is to stimulate. Peaceful images of the future need to be articulated so they become common instead of remaining exceptional. Futures studies are essential for a transformation of the world (Barsh & Webel, 2002; Boulding, 2002; Hicks, 2004; Inayatullah & Milojievic, n.d.; Reardon, 1999).

For a community, nation or government, a peace discourse reflects attitudes of peacefulness; it reflects a frame of mind and basic underlying assumptions about how peaceable peoples behave and interact. A warring discourse does the opposite. If those who lead our communities, organizations and governments do not have a peace discourse, are not used to
thinking inside the conceptual framework created by a peace discourse, then they will not have the built-in foundations for conceptualizing and creatively imagining peaceful resolutions. If one is brought up surrounded by certain discourses and ideologies, moving beyond them is extremely difficult. For example, as an American citizen, I was born and raised within American society. For the past fifteen years, though, I have been living outside of the United States, and was somewhat recently in a peace studies program. One might presume that I have had sufficient non-American experience and influence to allow me to think outside of the box created by the prevalent American discourse with which I was exposed to growing up. On the contrary, when I consider certain issues, such as national security, I am extremely hard pressed to imagine my country being able to protect itself without military might. I want to imagine that it would be possible, but it is difficult. I am a product of my upbringing; and, though I want to alter my thinking—and feel I can in time—I am still restricted by it.

The US reaction to the events of September 11 illustrates what can happen when a state lacks a culture of peace and the capacity to imagine. When the tragic event occurred, the US had the sympathies of the world, and the world was ready to act together. The US government had a choice. It could respond to the violence with further violence and revenge or it could transcend the violence. However, as Lederach (2005) would say, the US lacked moral imagination; it would not risk the peaceful alternative. As such, it is clear that a state with powerful warring discourses is less able to sufficiently imagine the peaceful means necessary for dealing with conflict.

The more we understand and appreciate the nature of both peace and conflict at the individual level as well as at the societal and national level, the better our chances of rooting our societies and cultures in peacefulness.
PEACE CENTERS AND CULTURES OF PEACE

Peace centers can bring forth and reinforce these understandings of peace, establishing foundations for future generations in local communities, in larger regions and throughout the world. As mentioned earlier, the world needs places that explicitly address qualities of peacefulness and which help us learn how to be peaceful. A peace center is that place. Peace centers will not solve the world’s ills, but they are a step in the right direction. They bring together peace researchers, advocates, teachers, students, governments, business leaders, as well as common individuals. Attitudes and beliefs advocating peaceableness must be encouraged and propagated at all possible levels. Such overtly designed places and spaces which stimulate this must become more pervasive. Galtung (1985) believed that the essential component of peace research was dialogue, and that this dialogue is “only meaningful if it can happen across … ideological, national and civilizational borders” (p. 143).

Where might a peace center whose aim is to build and propagate cultures of peace be located? Anywhere and everywhere, ideally. However, if we were to take one initial step in establishing the next center, I might advocate Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Having lived here for the past five years, I can easily see the advantages of this Middle East location, as life here does happen across the “ideological, national and civilizational borders” which Galtung talked about. Peace centers with various missions have been created in other parts of the world; few exist in the Middle East and none in the Arab Gulf region, at least none whose sole mission is fostering peace. Dubai is well-positioned between Europe, the Far East and Africa. Its centrality is reflected in the city’s multicultural makeup. Dubai represents over 150 nationalities and more than fifty languages. This immediately creates a mix of communities that can benefit from the education and services provided by a peace center, and provides a diverse environment that is comfortable and inviting for a wide range of nationalities. There are in fact several other cities in the region, such as those in Qatar or Bahrain, which would also serve well for a peace center as they have many similar attributes.
FINAL REMARKS

Peace centers can have transforming influences on building cultures of peace. They can do this mainly by working at the individual level. Researchers who go to these centers will be empowered to further the cause of peace. This empowerment will come through knowledge they gain from their research and discussion with other experts, and from the stimulation of interacting with individuals with diverse backgrounds and faiths, and with diverse ideas about how peace can be obtained and propagated. Research can address current peace agendas, methodologies, and critiques within the field, and explore new areas and approaches. Individuals who come in contact with peace centers will be more likely to walk away not only with a global outlook on what it means for governments and nations to act in ways that reinforce cultures of peace, but also with ideas about how each person on an individual level can impact the community and environment in which she or he lives. For the non-professional adults and young people, a shift in attitude, empathy for the other, and a sense of personal responsibility may come about. Interactions at peace centers which focus on building cultures of peace help to break down stereotypes, misunderstandings and misrepresentations between differing faiths and cultures. Individuals can learn of the peace philosophies and peace narratives inherent not only in their own faith and culture, but also others’. Interactions will lead to building alliances between peoples. It will lead to the Gandhian desire to “be the change [they] wish to see in the world.” I believe that finding and inspiring this sense of agency within the common individual to be one of the necessary challenges. Individuals need to believe that they can have an impact on the world. The role of a peace center can be to inspire this sense of agency, and hence lead to greater cultures of peace throughout the world.
Notes

1. Over time, the term “culture of peace” evolved to “cultures of peace” to reflect the awareness there is not simply one way of being peaceful. There is not one ideal culture reflecting the peace we desire, but rather each society finds its own ways of embracing peace. A complementary idea is the belief in multiple peace(s). Just as there are many ways to be violent or have conflict, there are many forms of peace that can be embraced. We need not all have the same concepts of peace or manifest it in the same way, but rather we should respect and appreciate its many diverse ways of being conceived. This emphasis on peace(s) is an idea put forward by various peace advocates, including Wolfgang Dietrich (2005), Dietrich & Sutzl (1997) and Vincent Martinez Guzman (2001).

2. For more information on the Human Development Index go to: http://hdr.undp.org/

3. For more information on the Global Peace Index go to: http://www.visionofhumanity.com/rankings/

4. For more information on Amnesty International go to: http://www.amnesty.org/

5. This point was agreed upon in a personal communication with C.P. Webel, peace educator and researcher, February 21, 2006.

6. All of these approaches are still present in education today. Institutions generally choose and modify their approach depending on the perceived needs.

7. In addition, David Lee's Competing Discourses (1992) talks more about the relationship between language and world view.

8. See Writing the War on Terrorism (2005) by Richard Jackson for a discussion of the relationship between the war on terrorism and political discourse.

References


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