Chapter 11
Youth Participation and Leadership: Moving Together Towards Peace Education and Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The UN declared 2005-2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that conveys the concept of balancing economic development with environment and social considerations. In addition to schools preparing and enhancing students for the work force, their learning has to instill a notion of living sustainably and participating towards the goals of global human survival. Thus a new movement where youth are engaged as a major stakeholder group in all policy development processes has been instigated internationally. This movement necessitates an education that enhances values such as leadership, justice, respect, nonviolent communication, and collaboration. This chapter showcases two school programs, Play for Peace Clemente and University Lab School Hawai‘i, that are responding to the challenge of developing both youth participation and leadership in school setting for sustainable peaceful development.

INTRODUCTION

Recorded history indicates violence has always existed in humanity (Mueller, 2004; Shackelford & Hansen, 2014). However, acts of violence have also spawned reactions allowing humanity to adapt under new evolving structures. People challenge the existing conditions by pushing for change through social, cultural, and material alternatives (Pinker, 2011). This chapter presents two case studies that deliberately construct peace-oriented environments and conditions through youth participation and leadership. The
first case study focuses on Play for Peace Clemente, an after school program in a Chicago high school, engaging students in peace leadership; while the second one focuses on stimulating youth participation and leadership through a high school elective at the University Laboratory School, Hawai‘i. These two case studies will provide examples of constructive reaction in creating non-violent transformation inside a school environment toward sustainable development.

It took the destruction of two World Wars for the global community to react and create the peace-promoting United Nations (UN). Through the UN, world leaders targeted universal equality as a non-violent strategy towards peace. The first UN international agreement, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognized the important of education in this strategy by stating that “everyone has the right to education” (UDHR, 1948, Article 26 (1)).

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” and further defines education to “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (Article 26 (2)).

This definition of education is more reflected in the slow evolution and adoption of the components of “education for sustainable development” (ESD) compared to the mainstream career-orientated schooling objective. Many scholars argue that youth are marginalized stakeholders as they are given little opportunity to develop their innate learning abilities within institutional educational systems (Dewey, 2012; Eisler, 2000; Freire, 2000; Holt, 1983; Montessori, 1949; Payne, 1918; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Steiner & Bamford, 1996). Through the lens of ESD, education itself becomes a global enabler for sustainable development and a stimulator for pedagogical innovation (UNESCO, 2014a). The culture of peace, non-violence, and equality through human empowerment and mobilization, became important ESD targets and action plan (UNESCO, 2014c).

The influence of peace on the U.S. education system is not a new concept and has a fluid and changing form based on historical time and sociocultural influences (Wien, 2009). American youth used non-violent strategies during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War’s anti-war protests to address structural violence within society, such as race and class struggle, discrimination, and poverty (Harris & Morrison, 2003; Stomfay-Stitz, 2008). In addition, the threat of nuclear war in the 1980s strengthened the need for peace education as educators responded by including studies focused on citizenship, humane relationships, and environmental concerns in the global community (Reardon, Nordland, & Zuber, 1994). The principle goal of peace education became to create a “culture of peace.” The concept of a “culture of peace” recognized that the new vision of peace requires a culture based on “universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women” (UNESCO, 2002, p. 2). The culture of peace is a complex concept that touches on tradition, culture, language, religion, and politics (UNESCO, 1995; Wintersteiner, 2010). The road to a culture of peace is to encourage full participation, empowerment and shared goals between communities. In 1998, UNESCO passed the Resolution of the Culture of Peace that emphasized the importance of peace education to sustain democracy, equality, tolerance, respect, knowledge and peace (Harris, 2010; Ilcan & Phillips, 2006; Salomon & Cairns, 2010; United Nation, 1998). Peace education and EDS essentially are synonymous (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009). Young people together with democratic participation, equality, and peace education become the soul of culture of peace towards sustainable development (Adams, 2013; UNESCO, 2014b). Youth, as a stakeholder, hold a key role through participatory leadership towards a culture of peace (UNFPA, 2014; Woolcombe, 2007). The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 in 2015 as the first resolution in history that focuses solely on the importance of youth in
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