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Peace Education in the Philippines: Measuring Impact*

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Abstract

In this essay I discuss the education and experiences that were important for my formation as a Peace Educator and Advocate. The essay also briefly looks at the issue of peace research, teaching and activism, and how we at the Miriam College –Center for Peace Education believe that research and teaching are important but not enough. I recount research I helped to conduct that shows that peace education had a positive impact on those who participated in it, and then go on to describe our successful lobbying efforts with the Philippine government and at the United Nations. I conclude with examples of peace activities by those we educated that encourage us to persevere in our peace education efforts.

Introduction: The Formation of a Peace Educator and Advocate

I remember it too well. The place was Camp Corazon R. Gonzales (CRG) in Novaliches, Quezon City. The year was 1988. I attended a peace education workshop organized by the Catholic Education Association of the Philippines (CEAP) facilitated by Dr. Virginia Cawagas and Dr. Toh Swee-Hin. I was a high school teacher in Maryknoll College (now Miriam College) at that time. I was sent to this peace education seminar by the College President at that time, Loreta Castro, who I later realized was grooming me to be her peace education partner (see essay by Loreta Castro in this issue of the JSE).

Prior to my participation in this peace education workshop, other groups had tried to recruit me into their slice of the political spectrum. Though I had worked with these groups as a student and as a young professional, I knew I was looking for something else — something that was more consonant with my faith, values and personal philosophy.

I was born in Quezon City but my father's work relocated the family to Guimba, Nueva Ecija when I was 5. I spent 8 years of my life there. I went to a school run by the Franciscan sisters. Here, I acquired the basic skills and values that have stayed with me today — communication, imagination, creativity and leadership skills. I was Class Vice-President from Kinder to Grade 6. My class had always decided on a male President. I was not a gender equality advocate yet at that time but in my young mind I always wondered why my class would always insist on a male leader. It was also in this small town in the province where my social and interpersonal skills—my ease at mingling with everyone regardless of socio-economic status, intellectual abilities or place of origin—were developed. The school, being strongly connected to the parish, also gave me the opportunity to develop and enhance my public speaking skills. I remember those years when I was daily commentator and song leader at liturgical services. The daily singing in public and reading of verses from the bible during Mass helped build my confidence, as well as my knowledge of ethical teachings of the Catholic Church. In addition, my father consistently affirmed and motivated me whenever I brought home medals for exemplary academic performance, calling me “the best in the west,” even though we lived in the east. From my mother, I learned the value of generosity. She cooked big meals every day and gave out a bowlful of *ulam* to all our neighbors. In Grade School, I saw the movie “Minsa’y Isang Gamu-gamo” in Manila. I remember crying profusely in the theater and after. It made such an impact on me that I decided to stage a play about

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human rights in class. My view of the world since then became bigger. I realized that there was a world outside my family, school, and immediate community.

These are some experiences from Grade School that taught me some capacities and values that are still very useful to me now as a missionary, as peace advocate, and teacher.

We moved back to Manila when I was starting high school because my father was elected to Congress. I did not expect that the confidence built in Grade School was going to be put to a test. On the first day of class, I was made a laughing stock in my new school because of my *promdi* (a colloquial term meaning “from the province,” provincial) ways). I was laughed at for wearing the wrong cut of uniform, for saying *opo* and *po*, for addressing teachers as “madame” instead of “miss.” I was laughed at for being unsophisticated and unfashionable. I remember how some of the students extorted my allowance and how they laughed as they yelled *nognog* (dark skinned) each time I crossed the school quadrangle. That was my first experience of pain. I realized later that there was a name for that kind of pain that you inflict on others. It was psychological violence manifesting itself in attitudes and behaviors that hurt and shoot down other peoples’ self-esteem; that denigrates others because they are different. It is manifested in words and actions that do not consider how they impact others. I am now a crusader against bullying because of its impact on both the offender and the target. Offenders, most of the time, do not realize the impact of their behavior on others. Both have to be saved. I became friends with many of the offenders later on and high school life became fun than misery.

A great deal of my time in college was spent in teach-ins, symposia, seminars and on the street as this was the time when Ninoy Aquino was assassinated. I became deeply involved in activities that called for a change in political leadership. My political and social awareness and involvement were cultivated deeply in Maryknoll, now Miriam, College, and by the political context of that time. Hence, the workshop at Camp CRG in 1988 appealed to me and spoke to my values and personal philosophy. Eureka! I thought as I sat through this workshop. This is what I am looking for. This is what I want to do. This is where I want to be. The threats to peace—war, militarization, prejudice and discrimination, human rights violations, gender inequality, poverty and injustice, environmental degradation—are the socio-political issues I want to challenge in ways that are nonviolent. A passionate peace educator and advocate was formally born in that conference, although the ground was fertile and ready.

Dr. Loreta Castro, who is peace personified, made sure I would be a faithful disciple. She recommended that I go to the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana to do my MA in Peace Studies. My experience at the University of Notre Dame nailed it. My knowledge, understanding and appreciation of peace, nonviolence, human rights, gender equality, human security, political economy, and conflict resolution deepened. I did not only learn from notable teachers like Robert Johansen, George Lopez, David Cortright and Robert Holmes, among many others, but also from my classmates who were different from me in terms of nationality, race, religion and ethnicity. The academic discussions as well as the cross-cultural exchange brought out that longing for nonviolent change, inspired me to envision the world I wish to live in, and inflamed my yearning to contribute to the attainment of this vision.

Peace in Theory and Practice

I returned to the Philippines in 1992. I started teaching Peace in the classroom and in training workshops, reaching out to various sectors: teachers, students, and out-of-school-youth, among others. I also started attending networking meetings as well as seminars on peace and conflict to enrich and share my views. In a human security conference in Bangkok, a response of an academician to a query startled me. He was asked a question on what he was doing in relation to the challenges to peace and security. He replied that as an academic, he had no business solving the problems of the world and that his business was solely to theorize. I was astounded. I never made that distinction between theory and practice. I have learned that when you are a peace educator, you do not only teach peace, you live it and work to make that vision happen.

This is why at the Miriam College-Center for Peace Education (CPE), we are big on advocacy work. This is the peace education we know. We discuss the root causes of conflict and ways by which they can be overcome peacefully and constructively. But we don't limit ourselves to musing. We campaign, we lobby, we engage in action to help build that culture of peace we teach and yearn for.

However, we do encounter challenges in our education and advocacy work. We earn the ire of those who profit from war or those who perpetrate and support armed violence. We are challenged by mindsets supportive of violent pathways to confront conflict or social issues. We hold that war solves nothing and that violence begets violence. But in a society where systems of hierarchy and domination persist, beginning with the family, offering this perspective, though backed with solid evidences, is a challenge. For example, when I gave a talk in one school on challenging bullying, male parents insisted that boys should learn how to fight back physically and that I should consider including that on the list of options to address the problem of bullying.

We are also challenged by attitudes of indifference, helplessness, hopelessness and do-nothingness. We have heard people say that war is inevitable; Muslims are terrorists; weapons are needed to keep the peace; men are naturally aggressive or that we are some kind of freak for thinking that a better world is possible. But we believe that humans are inherently good and a culture of violence can be deconstructed. The aggression that we see in humans is a product of socialization. What humans construct can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Peace education and advocacy can help reconstruct beliefs, attitudes, systems, institutions, policies, and structures to those that will move us closer to the goal of establishing a peace culture.

The Impact of Peace Education

In the course of educating for peace, we have also encountered queries on the impact of what we do. This has been in our mind at the CPE and thus, we have made some efforts to know what changes, if any, have taken place in the beliefs and attitudes of participants in our peace focused courses. In 2003, we, together with Peace Education Network members, the Ateneo de Manila Grade School and the Far Eastern University, surveyed students enrolled in peace-focused courses to learn about the effect of their peace education course on them. The survey was part of a project made with the Third World Studies Center housed at the University of the Philippines - Diliman, and the United Nations Development Programme. Four hundred fifty-eight (458) students from grade school, college and graduate school completed our questionnaire. We found positive change in the attitudes of the surveyed students. For example, 92.2% reported change in attitude towards

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war, while 98% reported change in attitude towards diversity. Among the frequently mentioned changes were the realization that war is not the solution to conflicts, and that diversity should be respected, not scorned.

When I did my dissertation in 2000, I measured the impact of peace education on prejudice reduction. Schools are not spared from unkind, and sometimes violent acts that emanate from the intolerance of differences. Many students who differ in certain characteristics suffer from hateful remarks and exclusion. Hence, my study sought to find out if gain scores of the group who went through peace education were significantly higher than the gain scores of the control group on attitudes of prejudice. I used a quantitative methodology, supplemented by qualitative data. One hundred seventy-one (171) students participated in the experiment. Instruments used were a self-developed Likert-type scale and an open-ended questionnaire. Results of the study showed that the gain scores of the students who went through peace education were statistically higher than the gain score of the students in the control group. In other words, the peace education experience helped reduce various forms of prejudice including abilitism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, looksism and sexism.

Inspired by this study, and enjoying the construction of valid and reliable tests, we, at the CPE, proceeded to developing similar questionnaires to measure attitudinal change of people in different sectors to whom we have given peace education seminars. We tested, for example, if a workshop on women, peace and security was going to change attitudes of UN peacekeepers that were going to be deployed to Golan Heights and Liberia; we also tested local government officials from several municipalities in the country on women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. We found among the peacekeepers and local government officials a greater acceptance of the proposition that women have the right to meaningfully participate in matters of peace and security and that they are capable of doing so.

We also conducted a study to find out if Moro, indigenous and Christian women's beliefs and attitudes toward arms control and other peace issues will change after a peace training. We also sought to find out if such training would improve the community women's faith in their agency to provide peace and security in their conflict-affected communities. To measure changes, an internally validated 22-item Likert-type scale was administered prior to and after the peace training. One hundred fifty-seven (157) women from conflict-affected areas in the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga and Cotabato in Mindanao participated in the study. Post-test scores using ANOVA (analysis of variance) indicated significant differences, particularly on issues such as arms control and participation in peace, human rights, security work and governance. Specifically, the peace training helped change participants' views that guns were necessary in providing personal and community security. It also convinced women that they can be effective participants in building peace and promoting security in their communities.

A more recent study we did involved student leaders from 40 schools nationwide, from different faiths and cultural traditions, who attended a youth peace camp. Results revealed that the peace camp helped reduce beliefs that war is an effective way of resolving conflicts; that physical violence has to be met with the physical violence; that revenge is an acceptable response when harmed; and that conflicts are best settled through the use of force.

Before the peace camp, participants had low acceptance of the suggestions that equitable redistribution of wealth can contribute to peace and that the unevenness in the distribution of wealth in the country is a major cause of peacelessness. After the peace camp, the propositions were highly accepted by the participants.

Likewise, the peace camp increased beliefs and attitudes about the need to correct historical injustices against the Moro; that the youth can be effective agents of peace; and that peace and normalcy can be achieved if private armies were disbanded and firearms were reduced and controlled.

Advocacy at Home and at the United Nations

Measuring beliefs and attitudes, is of course, just one of the ways by which we determine the impact of what we do as peace educators. Our work at the CPE has also helped shape policies meant to promote a culture of peace, including the adoption of E.O. 570, Institutionalizing Peace Education in Basic Education and Teacher Education. We lobbied the Department of Education and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process to get such government order adopted.

The CPE was one of the lead NGOs in formulating a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in the Philippines. This NAP is meant to increase women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Women's voices are normally not heard in these processes and mechanisms even though they make up half of the world's population and can offer unique perspectives. Can you imagine what we lose by not hearing the perspectives of half of the world's people on matters that relate to peace and security? The NAP helped instill that message in many peoples' consciousness in both government and civil society.

Internationally, we have strongly helped in the adoption of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in the United Nations (UN) — a treaty that requires States Parties to assess prior to arms transfers if these arms will be used to commit human rights violations, genocide, crimes against humanity and gender-based violence, among other negative impacts . I was privileged to be among the advocates who worked very hard for the passage of an ATT that had strong language on gender. We at the IANSA Women's Network and the Control Arms Coalition used every method available to us to encourage States to include and support a provision in the treaty that would require States to assess before selling arms if there might be a serious risk that such arms would be used to commit or facilitate gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children. Lobbying for the ATT was a very rewarding experience for me.

My lobby work in the UN started with my attendance at the Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2008. Here, I learned about the gravity of small arms violence in countries other than mine. Here, I learned how civil society in the world is working to stop the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons. I have been very privileged to meet passionate, talented, knowledgeable, and committed disarmament advocates in the world who are moving heaven and earth to save lives lost daily from armed violence. It is in lobbying in the UN that I got to polish my advocacy skills, specifically lobbying. Currently, we are actively

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campaigning for a nuclear ban treaty. Nuclear weapons are the most destructive and indiscriminate weapons ever created. A single nuclear weapon detonated over a populated area could kill hundreds of thousands or millions of people. In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution to begin negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, and CPE is actively lobbying States to see through the adoption of this treaty in July 2017.

Peace processes, when successful, have the potential of ending armed conflicts. CPE and Pax Christi-Pilipinas are ardent supporters of the peace process. We, through WE Act 1325, worked closely, for example, with the former GPH and MILF peace panels to get a peace agreement that will give greater autonomy to the Moros who have been victims of historical injustice. We also lobbied for an engendered Bangsamoro Basic Law—one that would mainstream women’s meaningful participation in various spheres of governance, and succeeded in getting rich gender language in the draft. The BBL did not pass in the last Congress but the gender language we won—the language that women count for peace—has already been etched in the minds of policymakers.

Conclusion: Why We Persevere in Our Work

Among the results of our peace education and advocacy work is the number of our graduates who go into peace, development, human rights and security work. It is also evidenced in the number of young people who organize or join peace clubs, organizations and peace campaigns. It is seen in the number of students who join us in our visits to Congress to lobby for peace-related bills that will help, for example, control the proliferation of arms, challenge discrimination, or give more autonomy to a group of people who for decades have suffered from historical injustice. It is seen in students who ardently join public actions that call on government to uphold life and human dignity, or that protest human rights violations such as extra-judicial killings.

We see the impact of our work on students who walk hand-in-hand with their Muslim friends during a school fair. We see it in students who voluntarily mediate in conflicts among peers, or in the student who buys rice porridge, ice cream, or a cupcake knowing that such purchase will support a project that will help conflict-affected people in Mindanao.

We also see the impact of our work in schools building their own Centers for Peace Education or declaring their institutions as Zones of Peace. We see the impact in schools integrating peace in the curriculum or in their school vision and mission. We see the impact in educational institutions creating peace-related programs, such as anti-bullying and peer mediation programs, after going through some form of peace education training. We see them in grassroots peace education participants organizing themselves so that they could help resolve or mediate in conflicts that happen in their communities.

We see the impact of our work on community women who throw their hat into the election ring or play leadership roles in various organizations after having been trained on political participation and peacebuilding. We see it in women finally participating in decision-making mechanisms such as Councils of Elders controlled by men, after our initiatives at challenging the status quo.

We see the impact of our work on the youth from various faith and ethnic traditions who would send us private messages on Facebook after a peace education training telling us how they have been inspired by our message and example.

These examples and many more are some of the reasons why we continue our work. We persevere in our efforts because we know that it is in teaching peace that we can get to peace. It is in touching the mind that we develop compassionate hearts, and encourage action.

We dream of a world free from armed violence, a world where justice and equality prevail, a world where human rights are respected and promoted, and a world where ecosystems function and serve the needs of this generation and the others to come.

But to realize that dream, we have to increase the number of workers in the “peace vineyard.” It was a peace educator, a peace education workshop and a peace studies course that brought me here. It was peace education that turned me into a passionate, relentless, and committed peace advocate.

Hence, this is the pathway I will continue to take if I want to see more workers in the field.

*This essay is an adaptation of Jasmin Nario-Galace. (2017), Peace Education: Measuring Impact. In *Three Decades of Peace Education in the Philippines: Stories of Hope and Challenges*, T. Swee-Hin, V. Cawagas, J. N. Galace (eds.), A. K. M. Dinglasan, (asst. ed.), Quezon City, Philippines: Center for Peace Education, Miriam College & World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, Philippines Chapter, pp.235-243.

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