

Peace through Education¹

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*Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally
Let there be peace on Earth
And let it begin
With me.*

~Jill Jackson and Sy Miller

I was a young adult during the 1960s when civil rights and anti-war demonstrations were at their peak. At some point during those rocky times I had the insight that education was the only way to assuage these crises. It would have to take a totally new form in order to give rise to a totally new humanity, one capable of creating a more just and peaceful civilization. This inspiration occurred while I was working for the largest military contractor in the United States. Soon after I would leave engineering to become a teacher.

Today my driving questions for peace through education are:

What is the influence of dialogue on the process of peace?

What is the relationship between inner and outer peace? In what ways might the former a prerequisite for the latter?

How can teacher-learners and learner-teachers create an atmosphere of peacing?

What are the spiritual qualities that embrace peace as an ongoing soul experience?

Recently I have been exploring the idea of changing some of my favourite nouns into verbs. Nouns freeze time whereas verbs are in-process. There is no verb "to peace," so peace has a

¹ Based on the video interview <https://vimeo.com/219905763/884b51541b>

quality of thingness; it can be objectified. It is a state at rest — an historical point, a present experience or a future target. What if peace were a verb? One might experience peacing as a continuous journey bringing awareness to one's inner world while peacing with others.

I write as an educator to other educators so that we might inquire together about the nature of peace. What does it mean to-peace? Many would say that peace of mind is the absence of conflict. As a thinker with a philosophical bent, I have an allurements to the concept of peace of mind. In fact, at times in my life, I have experienced that peace. Yet those moments slip quickly into the past when thoughts, particularly binding, non-progressive thoughts arise, reminding me of that which is "not yet" at peace. My worry list intercedes, and I lose my stability.

Binding and non-progressive thoughts are ones that create emotional storms. They are based on conditioned responses and can take me into tunnels of doubt-fear. Even if I assuage the prominent worry, it will soon be replaced by another, as mind-thought is encased in its own conditioning.

What if one could immediately recognize a binding thought and the resistance it creates before doubt or fear arise? In feeling the emotion attached to that thought, one might say, "that is interesting" without having to find a remedy, only observe in order to see. By becoming consciously aware of my in and out breath, I have discovered that the practice of mindfulness provides a buffer to binding thoughts, sometimes transforming them for increased awareness. It does not always work. Short circuits occur when stress brings me back to highly tense moments, like living through 25 earthquakes greater than 5.0 within 24 months; or the residual stress from caretaking for my wife during a very unstable period of her Alzheimer's progression. At moments that trigger stress, sometimes emotion memory overcomes practice.

I still see peacing is an inner process where one experiences fluidity around the unanticipated adventures of life. Buddhists would call this unchanging wakefulness.

***Respond to the What-Is
by seeing, pausing
and seeing again; pausing
and seeing again.***

Peacing through education calls out to teacher-educators to be in relationship with their own inner peace dialogue. And it requires that the process of teacher preparation has to be congruent with the desired outcomes. We have to live the practice that we advocate in the teaching-learning process. Peace then is not the objective. In reality, peace is a process of fulfilling the Divine consciousness that each human receives. It is driven by right-action and its qualities include gratitude, compassion-empathy, humility, patience and love.

I am at a meeting at my workplace. It is the late 1960s and I work as an engineer. I see myself as a liberal in a sea of conservatives. I listen closely to the communication exchanges; welling up inside comes that old childhood feeling of being a "fish out of water." There is something wrong

here. I do not belong. Around me I feel an atmosphere of mistrust, competition and fear. I think about where these attitudes originate and how that could shift? Might education be the source of this conditioning? I reach the conclusion that there is no way forward for humanity unless the nature of teaching and learning is transformed.

That thought stays with me as I am more active as a parent at my children's Montessori school. Something feels absolutely "right" about his experience. I become friends with the teachers. They speak a language that captures my ideological heart.

In 1973 I casually mention to one of the teachers that I might want to be a Montessori guide someday. He replies, "Why not now?" Then, he hands me several pamphlets to read; one is Montessori's "Education and Peace." Six weeks later I am enrolled at Bergamo, Italy for the Montessori teacher preparation course to work with six to 12-year olds.

The seeds for the shift from engineering to education were sown early in my life. Peace was in my everyday vocabulary growing up. It was the word I used when greeting my childhood muse — family housekeeper, Ruth Gloria Hope. For Ruth, peace replaced hello and goodbye. I would always say "Peace Ruth" when either coming or going. She appeared in my life to show me essence, a spiritual way of being. She touched my soul.

In my youth I knew about peace as the absence of war. I had no concept that peace might be an inner process. That came much later when, in my late twenties, Spirit introduced me to philosophy and states of consciousness. I have been dancing with the idea of peace as a way of life —an inner journey— for 50 years. With life experiences, especially in relationships and through teaching and learning with both children and adults, I discovered that peace it multifaceted and challenging to maintain.

Awareness of my inner processes amplified and was forever internalised as I tended to my wife, Marsha Snow Morgan, during her cognitive decline. The last four years before she went into full time care were filled with loss and protection. Those experiences enabled me to be acutely aware of observing and noticing "that which is important." It also left me with an understanding of the deep beauty we shared — teaching me about love and peace in the most profound way.

I have also been influenced by the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti whose insight into personal transformation comes through an understanding that "truth is a pathless land," and that each person has to observe his or her own conditioning in order to see.

Another influence was U.N. Assistant Secretary-General, Robert Muller whom I met at New York in 1984. During our dialogue, he introduced me to the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. I first met Berry at the Seeking the True Meaning of Peace conference in Costa Rica and later visited him at his home in New York. I have had ongoing contact with Swimme for nearly 20 years.

Having survived two world wars, Muller wrote the book *Most of all They Taught Me Happiness*. I invited Muller to be one of the keynote presenters at a Montessori 1985 AMI international study conference I co-organized on Education and Peace. His lecture was titled *Peace, Spirituality and*

Global Education. When he became Chancellor for the U.N. University of Peace, he invited me for dialogues at the University's home in Costa Rica. Muller says that, "It is our paramount duty to educate children in the art of living and happiness, in believing in humanity's success and the establishment of a peaceful, just, brotherly and happy world."¹

Naturally, the work of Maria Montessori was a very strong influence. She travelled throughout Europe during the 1930s lecturing at international conferences addressing her observations that only through a new education could a new human arise to create a peaceful and just society. She came to that realisation after 25 years observing the personality changes in children who attended her schools.

I met Marsha Snow Morgan in 1975 at a Montessori conference. Twenty-one years later we were married and worked together to create the TIES Master of Education programs in Integrative Learning and Montessori Integrative Learning. As partners in love and work, she taught me much about peacemaking. Observing her with both children and adults was a window and a mirror into a new way of being.

Natural mapping, developed by Morgan, is a tool that explores systemic and sustainable relationships in the playground of ideas as well as in organisations and learning communities. It is based on ecological principles rather than hierarchies. I use that process now to share the integration of my research arising from working with adults and children since 1974. Eight aspects emerge that may foster the development of both inner and outer peace in an educational setting:

Unconditioning

Normalising

Prepared Environment, Integrative Learning and Systems Thinking

Love and Right-Action

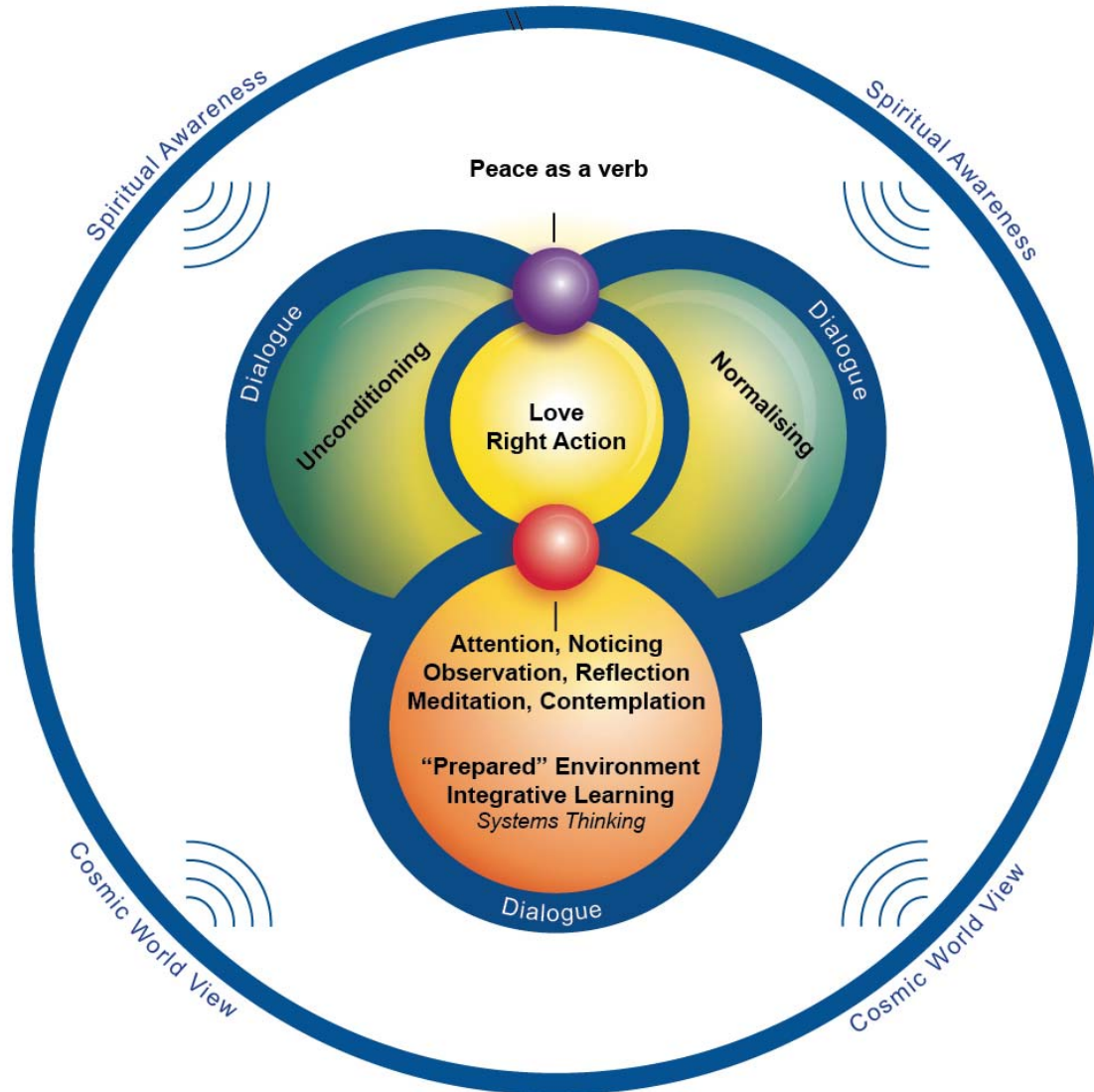
Attention, Noticing, Observation, Reflection, Meditation and Contemplation.

Dialogue

Peace as a verb

Spiritual Awareness and Cosmic Worldview

This illustration demonstrates that all eight aspects are contextual.... derived from weaving parts into a whole.



Natural Map of Peace through Education

We begin the exploration of these eight aspects with **unconditioning**.

Krishnamurti spent his life exploring the domain of psychological freedom. There is an ancestral and cultural imprint that prejudices, or conditions the mind, resulting in unexamined assumptions about life. He asserts that to rid oneself of these assumptions is freedom's gateway and the essential task of education. He names the process unconditioning. Krishnamurti explains:

The question is whether (the teacher) and the student in their relationship in a school can uncondition themselves?²

[Is it] possible to educate human beings, from childhood and beyond, to cultivate, to nurture the whole outward and inward totality of [each person]. That is, for me, right-education. Is it possible in our life to educate ourselves completely, totally, inwardly as well as outwardly?

Unconditioning begins when we pay attention to our thinking patterns in order to observe coherence with right-love and right-action. These patterns of thought have psychological, cultural or philosophical roots. Exploratory questioning is the inner and outer dialogue that may transform conditioning.

These are questions “worth thinking about” and take a different direction based on the developmental stage of the learner.

Endicott College-TIES M.Ed. graduate, Aarthi Nandakumar explains, “The ideologies and philosophies discussed as a part of this program led me to question a lot of my previously held assumptions and look at things from a fresh perspective.”³

Stories are an essential container in the unconditioning process. They provide a sense of wonder and appreciation for the significance of life. They offer questions and metaphors to comprehend mystery, and they identify the overarching contexts that shape who we are.

Normalising is the restoration of the circumstances prevalent before conditioning compromises the mind or the body. It is a term used in psychotherapy and bodywork. Maria Montessori employed it to address the qualities she observed in children attending her schools. Normalising is a process of inner development characterized by emergent traits such as deep focus or concentration, purposeful collaboration, biophilia, love of work, empathy, humility, compassion and gratitude.

These traits reveal themselves in a “prepared” learning environment that embraces freedom of choice in an atmosphere where learners and educators mutually embrace right action and love. I observed these traits throughout my years of working with children. However, I did not realize that adults could also be in a normalising process. At the end of her graduate journey in our master’s program, Alison Jones says:

*I have discovered that my personal beliefs and professional beliefs are aligned and this gives me great peace. I have discovered that my role as an educator is to observe the needs of my students and respond appropriately.*⁴

A **prepared environment** is a setting that maximises the growth of independence, as participants have freedom to explore activities for inner and outer development. It not only emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, but is also imbued with the qualities of love and reflective awareness. For these qualities to evolve, educator-teachers have a compelling need to engage their own inner peace dialogue.

Integrative learning and systems thinking are reciprocal processes. In Fritjof Capra’s Web of Life he explains,

By the 1930s most of the key criteria of systems thinking had been formulated by biologists, psychologists and ecologists. In all these fields the exploration of living systems – organisms, parts of organisms, and communities of organisms – has led scientists to the same new way of thinking in terms of connectedness, relationships, and context.⁵

From a scientific view, integrative learning is a derivative of system thinking. However, integrative learning is much more; it is a context for the integration of heart, body, mind and soul. In that way it is a spiritual practice. It is also a container for normalizing and unconditioning. It recognizes strategies and approaches like: creative expression, non-adversarial relationships, acknowledging intuition-heart wisdom and the formation of dynamic learning communities as well as exploration based on personal interest. Recent TIES graduate, Hiba Hijazi explains:

Systems thinking helped me in my work and in my daily life. In spite of being discouraged sometimes when I find my ideas differing greatly from those who are around in my community, I now feel excited to observe the outcomes of this new emerging mode of thinking.⁶

The journey of inner knowing embraces the deep overarching context that all is one: one Universe – one cosmos – one Earth community; and to perpetuate that oneness, humans need to live within the ecological carrying capacity of the Earth.

Love is a priori for peace because it is a container for unconditional acceptance as well as a continuum of respect and reverence for life and the unfolding potential of humanity. Without love, learning is often reduced to a method or a subject, and the field of experience is limited. Universal love parallels universal responsibility. It emanates from a core understanding and visceral experience of evolution as well as humanity's place in the natural order. Embedded in love is the quality of gratitude.

Right action is our ethical contract with life. When we act "rightly," we act without selfish attachment. We act mindfully. Our "right" actions spring from love, compassion and understanding.

The focal or stability point in this natural map of peace through education recognizes that one needs space and quiet time for: **Attention, Noticing, Observation, Reflection, Meditation and Contemplation**. All these attributes might be replaced with one word, mindfulness, as they represent the "pause" that can assuage conditioned responses and allow love and right-action to emerge. They set the context for living a life that seeks truth and practices compassion.

Dialogue, holds the space for integrating flow. It is a method of exchange within a learning community that carries active intention. Dialogue is a process that begins with a willingness to be tentative about what you know, and its focus is on "what is" rather than on ideas and opinions. It allows communication to unfold with affection and mutual support as well as respect. Hence, dialogue is the process of communication in a non-adversarial learning

environment. Its purpose is to pursue shared meaning. Aarthi Nandakumar's M.Ed. reflections also include the following thoughts:

The evidence that dialogue is a beautiful way to communicate comes from how I feel about the space of communication. It touched my soul because in a dialogue, people are non-judgemental, open and receptive to feedback, and hence I had no fear to express my thoughts and emotions. This was in contrast to the previous education experiences. And that's why I always mention that this M.Ed. has been the true education of my life!⁷

Peace the verb is an unfolding process. It is not a static state or condition. As mentioned earlier, peace is an inner process where one experiences fluidity around the vicissitudes of life. Participating in our learning community reflects the aspects of education that are addressed in this natural map of peace through education. New TIES graduate, Molly Smith, explains,

This program creates a learning environment that takes the community's reflections on content, helping the individual to find deeper understanding. It is not set up to change an individual's mind, yet it is designed to encourage a thoughtful and tolerant environment. The program also helps TIES students understand the implications that this type of learning can and will have on future generations. It has created an awareness that has allowed me to become a stronger teacher to young children as well a competent earth community member.⁸

The sources of influence that bring intention to this natural map are **spiritual awareness and a cosmic worldview**. Robert Muller introduced me to the following words from his mentor, former UN Secretary General, U Thant:

Spirituality is a state of connectedness to life. It is an experience of being, belonging and caring. It is sensitivity and compassion, joy and hope. It is the harmony between the innermost life and the outer life, or the life of the world and the life of the universe. It is the supreme comprehension of life in time and space, the tuning of the inner person with the great mysteries and secrets that are around us. It is the belief in the goodness of life and the possibility for each human person to contribute goodness to it. It is the belief in life as part of the eternal stream of time, that each of us came from somewhere and is destined to somewhere, that without such belief there could be no prayer, no meditation, no peace, and no happiness.⁹

And, in a 1939 letter from Maria Montessori to Mahatma Gandhi, Montessori says:

Spiritual attraction is the force that can save humanity. The art of spiritually approaching the child is a secret that can establish human brotherhood; it is a divine heart that will lead to the peace of humankind.¹⁰

The ***cosmic world view*** acknowledges the ongoing journey of the Universe and the contextual relationships that are a derivative of that journey. In cosmic education learners may fall into bliss with existence. They are

***...in awe of creative emergence,
...notice natural and systemic relationships,
...and are aware of being aware.***

And they are invited to discover their cosmic task or great work to honour their human responsibility.

As shared earlier, I left engineering 45 years ago to pursue a career in education. I realised that the immense problems facing humanity could only be remedied through a new form of education – one that provided overarching contexts so that learners would come to know that everything is interconnected in a meticulous web of relationships – and that this knowledge would change the way we behave toward each other and toward the Earth. I was only partially right. Knowledge itself is not enough. There needs to be congruent, seamless processes that allow learners to live in those contexts and develop right-action. Those seamless processes are revealed in the natural map of peace through education.

My film, To Educate Eco-Sapiens¹¹ was released in June 2016. The over-arching question that drove that inquiry was:

What contexts and processes in education might liberate teachers and learners so that they become catalysts for a “new human” – one whose integral relationship with Gaia is bound by right-action and love?

Peace through education responds to that question.

*Peace is the beginning of love.
Peace is the completion of truth.
Peace is a return to the source.*

~Sri Chinmoy

17.06.03 Responses to Peace Through Education

Katharine Errico

"Listening to Philip's words about his experiences puts my long journey into a context and makes it feel right. I am willing to embrace where I am while knowing at the same time I am growing into the ideas discussed in the video and by all of you."

Tanis Elliott

"As I listen to the importance of "Living the Practice," "Peacing," unconditioning or reconditioning and normalizing, releasing assumptions and integrating heart/body/mind and soul, I am encouraged...I am inspired...I am able to renew my faith in all of the benefits of prepared environments and mindfulness, in dialogue and spiritual awareness, in the dream of guiding learners towards "a life that seeks truth and practices compassion."

Pheroos

"Dr. Gang's wonderful video is a powerful reminder of the process of being mindful in daily practices. And how it is hard work some days and others days it's so very simple. Looking at peace as a verb, being in the process of peacing has helped me be more aware of my actions, behaviour and language."

Martha Urioste

"If Peace is a Verb, and I believe it is.. then, your message can be reviewed and related to others; action / peace / verb."

Nancy Wentworth

"Active peace or peace as a verb and what Phil presented in the video reminds me of the second yoga sutra yogha chittavrti nirodah, yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind, or, wholeness is the process of being and becoming aware."

Carmalina Viviano

"I like thinking of peace as a verb. As a noun it was always this far away goal that may or may not have ever been attainable. How would you know if you ever found inner peace? As a verb it is something you can do on a day to day basis. Even if it is only once a day to start. That, to me, is more realistic and is something anyone of at any age can do."

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- ¹ Muller, Robert. 1982. *New Genesis*, p. 89.
 - ² Krishnamurti, Jiddu. 2015. *Unconditioning and education*. p. 15.
 - ³ Nandakumar, Aarthi. 2017 Graduate Review Submission
 - ⁴ Jones, Alison, Graduate Review Submission, 2017.
 - ⁵ Capra, Fritjof. 1996. *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. p 36.
 - ⁶ Hijazi, Hiba 2017. On-Line Reflections, TIES eCampus.
 - ⁷ Nandakumar, Aarthi. 2017 Graduate Review Submission
 - ⁸ Smith Molly. 2017. Graduate Review Submission
 - ⁹ Muller, Robert *New Genesis* (1982, p. 41) Doubleday, NY
 - ¹⁰ Montessori, Maria. 1939 *Gandhi and the Child*
 - ¹¹ Gang, Philip Snow. 2016. *To Educate Eco-Sapiens* (DVD)