



# Peace Education in Schools through the Humanization of Conflict

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Mini Review

Volume 6 Issue 2

Received Date: August 25, 2023

Published Date: October 10, 2023

DOI: 10.23880/aeoj-16000219

## Abstract

Peace is not peaceful or even attainable in its totality. It contains within itself conflict, it is a conflictual process always in formation: conflict is ambivalent, as destructive of relationships as it is the seed of peace, so it must not be eliminated or unleashed but governed. The teacher has the task of educating students to live together despite conflict and, more precisely, through conflict. Peace education is about humanizing conflict so that its unfolding brings benefit to the parties involved beyond the object of contention, enriching the experience with a common value-oriented plus of meaning. Strategies and tools: dialogical, narrative, mimetic and ethnographic method.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Peace Education, Dialogue, Values, Worthy

## Thinking about Conflict as a Guarantee of a New Reality

There is no End to Conflict. And there will never be (...) Conflicts lead to transformations lead to conflicts leading to new transformations. There are life cycles, but no ending. The task is not to end conflict, but to handle dialectic life-cycles nonviolently-constructively [1].

Nobody escapes from the experience of conflict: conflict is the school in which the ego is formed: the more uniform, we want to shape the ego, the more conflicting it will be (ist der Konflikt die Schule, in der das Ich sich bildet: je einheitlicher, wir das Ich gestalten wollen, desto konfliktvoller wird es sein) [2]. The challenge consists in accepting that no conflict will ever be definitive and decisive, that the only reason is to stay inside the conflict with the aim of guaranteeing the fastest possible passage to a new stage of the conflict itself: social life consists in a conflictual temporary balance brought to a higher level each time. For each new unstable state of social coexistence, new conflicts, suffering and violence will emerge. In this discursive line, the idea of living together as

a non-definitive goal allows it to be freed from the positions that conceive of an insurmountable opposition between the parties involved. Opposition is interpreted as a relationship of mutual causation. For which it does not make sense to eliminate the conflict, but makes sense to carry it out in a nonviolent and creative way.

The logic that presides over the generative conflictual tension is found in Georg Simmel. For Simmel, there is no natural hierarchy between the parties in contrast, neither one is negative and the other positive. The contrasting parties are opposite but complementary, one exists because the other exists, one is the interface of the other and together they form a unity, a contradictory unity. The negative is not necessarily the enemy of the positive, one is at the same time both the servant and the master of the other: the negative is not a gap but the fulfillment of a role reserved for it alone [3] There is not a simple relationship between the contrasting parts. A negative component of the unity (Alter, the enemy, the different, the excluded, the evil...) performs a role reserved only for it, that of communicating with the positive component. Conflict is something permanent,

physiological, and constitutive of man and of every one of his objectifications; therefore it should not be prejudicially resolved or overcome. What Simmel highlights is not the preventative removal of the negative or an emphasis on the positive, but that man and all his productions in the world are ambivalent, have two opposite and complementary faces always imbued with the coexistence of good and evil, altruism and selfishness, constructiveness and destructiveness, sociability and asociality.

Upon the outbreak of conflict, the components that will form the unity come to light, before unity didn't exist, but was latent.

### Education As Education on Values

Whatever its status, education is always inspired by goal closely related to an ideal conception of man and society<sup>1</sup>. It evokes something that is assumed to be up of being transmitted the cultural values. Otherwise it is learning or soft skills training.

Values are the foundational ingredients of individual and collective life. By nature, they are abstract and indefinable: if they were at hand and definable once and for all, it would be like enumerating them, that is, fixing them in a closed list and making them unchangeable and identical in every epoch, latitude and social group. In the wake with Weber's criterion of ethical neutrality (Wertfreiheit), one cannot say what values are (value-judgment), but one can explain how they arise by virtue of the means used (value-relation). One cannot establish the ontological validity of values, but one can assess whether the empirical choice of means is adequate or inadequate in realizing a given value [4].

Following Simmel [5], value is not something anonymous pre-packaged by society in the public sphere for good measure to be transmitted in the concrete of everyday life. Nor does it lie from the beginning in the object (be it a flag, a cross or a totem pole; or the idea of tolerance towards others, cooperation, democracy, respect for the environment etc.). Rather, the object, originally meaningless in itself, acquires value because of an external intervention: it is man who loads a surplus not originally contained upon the object by making it exist. It is the individual who through his own mental and psychological activity gives value to conventional

objects and meanings that society makes available to its members for them can access the world. In order to gain experience, the individual cannot but "nurture" on those conventional objects valid for everyone, but once they are conveyed in the contexts of interaction, here he does not passively receive them but "cooks" them according to his peculiar sensitivities and motivations played in the relations to each other (Wechselwirkung as reciprocal relation plays a central role). He projects there something of himself that is neither foreseen nor predictable such as emotions, dreams, desires, fears, judgments, needs. In short, he introduces into those patterns of experience personal facets of meaning, «infinite variety of value beyond their objective substance» [7], some creatively deviances that enrich the collectivity letting it to evolve. I mean to say that something becomes a value provided that the individual can recognize in the patterns of experience conveyed by the social imaginary a part of himself, a quid already experienced (precisely: desires, fears, hopes, etc.); provided that those patterns are "naturally" framed into something prior and personal that he deems "important" and "valid". In other words, the sphere of value acquires its own style of existence – «a completely autonomous order» (ibidem) - on individual ground and becomes objective in his effects in relational processes.

This something to which the individual ascribes special care, something of an exquisitely subjective nature and which then pours into the collective sphere, I proposed to call worthy. Worthy as a set of practices, rituals and beliefs that the individual "holds", that he "cares about", "cherishes", "believes in" (even in a religious sense). It is a natural and indefinite urge to "bind oneself to" (people, objects, notions, events), it comes in the form of a relational act in which what we feel and think is one with what we say and do (authenticity), in which we do not disentangle what is sought - the end - from the way of feeling and practicing it - the means, the social rules. These attributes of worthy give the individual a sense of belonging to the object itself to such an extent that if he or she lost it, he or she would feel impaired by something not only generically learned but embodied (as recent neuroscience studies attest [8,9]). Being allocated in the smallest situational contexts of life, worthy is not immediately recognizable, unlike value, we encounter it in the everyday practices blending with the obvious and leaks out in tastes and preferences, although not deducible directly from the initial scales of preference and tastes. It is what constitutes everyone's hidden curriculum (of life, not just of school).

The transformation of the subjective worthy into an objective value does not occur as a function of mere need satisfaction, but by virtue of the attractiveness of the object itself (because it sends back to me what I have inflected about myself upon the object) and on the basis of processes

<sup>1</sup> That the content about peace education is made up of values does not fail to be reiterated, even in specialized texts: it «would be a structure that enhances peace values, both those values that enhance negative peace (absence of direct violence) as well as those values that affirm [positive] peace (social justice, participation and cultural diversity)» [6]. However, as we highlight in the continuation of the paragraph, there is no sociologically set analysis of how values arise, evolve and last in concrete situations such as the one in the classroom.

as confrontation, selection, condensation, length. Of course, attractiveness can increase, decrease or disappear, therefore not all relational acts become worthy or all to the same degree<sup>2</sup>.

Through the dialogue on the worthies, everyone becomes able to get in tune with the other, share their values and build new ones together.

What I try to make clear is that there is an inextricable genetic linkage of value from worthy, so that Ego and Alter, in order to understand each other and dialogue, must go back to the roots of their respective worthies and from these to the values acted upon: the interchange of worthies is the ground of dialogue (among students, couple partners, different cultures, different religious beliefs, etc.). Through the dialogue about the worthies, everyone becomes able to get in tune with the other, share his and her values and build new ones together.

### Dialog: Layered Meaning and Functions

Dialogue comes from the Greek, composed of *diá* «across» and *lègein* «to discuss, converse between two or more persons», has two layered meanings that are not necessarily opposed. The first is found in Diapason: it unites (puts into consonance) two different pitches of sounds in such an almost perfect way that the two sounds forming the interval itself indistinguishable (an effect of euphonic harmony results). The Greeks called such a sound relationship diapason (*διά πασῶν* («*diá pasōn*»)) with the meaning of «crosses all [the notes, the strings]». Same meaning in Diagonal, from the Latin *diagonalis*, a remake of the Greek *διαγώνιος*, composed of *diá* (*diá*) «across» but joined with *γωνία* (*gonia*) «angle». In geometry, diagonal refers to the segment joining two non-consecutive vertices of a polygon or polyhedron. In these terms, the prefix *diá* means to join different, opposite points.

Diaspora, from the Greek *diasporá*, means «dispersion» of a people and their institutions in the world (not necessarily nor exclusively caused or imposed by an external force), particularly the dispersion of the Jewish people. Here *diá* has the meaning of separating-removing something from something else.

In essence, the compound *diá-lègein* indicates separation-and-reciprocity, unites what is separate and remains so, creates similarities between what remains dissimilar. It is never complete fusion, it unites in diversity (typically two

lovers remain distinct even though in the love relationship). Dialogue brings the interlocutors slowly and, we would say, demurely closer to what they consider important to communicate to the other. It is not just communication or exchange; rather, it brings differences to life in the same way as convergences; it has as its end a limitless contamination among different parties that increase understanding without merging.

Plato in Phaedrus [10] indicates what the «true» dialogue is. This Dialogue is devoted to love, but the central theme is, precisely, that of «true» communication (cf. «Garden of Adonis: 276d,e; 277a» and the known «Prayer to the divinity Pan»: 274b -278c). «True» dialogue is not a matter of oratorical technique or simple communication/sharing of something among several actors. The first condition wants the speaker to accomplish within himself a strict congruence between what he feels and thinks («the within») with what he says and does («the outward things»): when he makes his conduct correspond to what he says and the words to what he feels and thinks. That's, the sine qua non is that he implements an infra-communication (narration of self to self) beforehand.

### Once he becomes inclined to Dialogue with Himself, How does ego get in tune with the other? He must do like the Good Farmer (The Philosopher): 277a.

The good farmer to make the «seed» (the dialogue) flourishes, what does he do? He prepares the soil (Alter's consciousness) by plowing the soil-consciousness of Alter in the propitious time and cultivating it with foundation («sow his words found on knowledge»: he takes care of it: he listens on the life-story narrative, eliminates redundancies and irrelevancies of it, challenges the conscience with pertinent questions, finally enriching it etc.) so that the seed/dialogue ripens well («the seed is vouchsafed immortality»), that is, takes root in Alter's inner self as a mental habit to live congruently. Formed this habit of authenticity, Alter becomes «a soul of the right type» concordant with Ego, authentic as already Ego, now predisposed to attune with each other and with others.

Dialogue, in the layered sense in *Diá-lègein*, demands that Ego mature a prior infra-communication between self and self, and only on this mental habit can it set up an inter-communication with Alter who has already become inclined to dialogue with itself. The «true» dialogue takes place between already dialogic individuals who in the exchange preserve the unalterable core of their own identity; it is not fusion, unites-and-separates, draws nearer-and-maintains a

<sup>2</sup> The worthy, ethically founded, is in itself unstable and ambivalent, so much so that it can transform itself into a configuration of the opposite sign – even Hitler and Stalin “believed” in their respective ideas and political actions. In short, there are negative worthies against which the action of control and selection of the collectivity may not be successful.

distance: it creates a disjunctive unity.

Dialogue initially takes place between actors in asymmetrical position, each with different material and moral expectations from the other, in conflict with the other. Conflict is a physiological and permanent ingredient of every social relationship. This meaning of conflict, thanks to the avant-garde works of Simmel and Galtung, has reversed the idea that peace is the antithesis of conflict, arguing instead that conflict is the germ of peace, has a constructive function as a glue as much as a destructive one as a solvent of ties [11], consequently it must not be eliminated or burst, but rather must be governed. From here we draw the novelty: human beings can dialogue and cooperate if they maintain a certain rate of conflict among themselves and learn to manage it.

Dialogue unveils and covers. There is a gray area in each of us, which we do not want or cannot unveil; there is a more or less conscious conflictual tension on which everyone builds his or her own identity. No one can know the other in depth, not even the most intimate relationships lead to a complete dialogue. I perennially play out my relationships in an ambivalent way, either with the “mask” and by taking off the “veil”, but I only dissect my inner self, the Who am I? Authentic, to those who can grasp those profound traits of me - the hidden and inalienable core of my identity - the kernel of my worthy - that even in dialogue I have not brought out to light and of which often even I am not fully aware.

Dialogue and classroom context. Every context (be it a school classroom, a family, a prison, an immigration office or a pub) produces its own appropriate and peculiar rules for living in it, understanding and interacting with it. It means that each context, while initially indecipherable, is not chaotic nor does it occur randomly, but is structured-according-to-rules. Such explicit and implicit “situational rules” (e.g. how to take turns in speaking, on what issues the leader acts and how the class responds, what the system of discipline and the expedients to escape it, etc.) define what in the class context is ingested and circulates by classifying it into correct/incorrect, repeatable/unrepeatable, good/not good. It follows that the teacher’s skill set will have to include appropriate skills to identify and manage the “rules” that govern the classroom (and the school as an apparatus)<sup>3</sup>.

### Teacher’s Educational Task

Peace education in the classroom is characterized by the creation of common values centered on the humanization of conflict: 1 – the teacher brings out the peculiar sensitivities and motivations of each student that have arisen in the micro-

contexts of everyday life by making attractive what he or she enters into relationship with (teaching contents didactic, relationships with the class and the teacher himself, the school and the outside world). 2 – The teacher leads the student to reflect and justify the reasons for what he is tied to, with which he identifies (he asks himself: “why is that relationship important to me?”): phase of intra-communication. The bundle of “important” ties constitutes the worthy, which forms the hidden curriculum and the inalienable core of the self. 3 - identification with what one does, says, thinks and loves arouses a sense of responsibility towards oneself and towards others for the effects of one’s feeling and acting; d – justifying one’s own worthy implies comparing and negotiating it with the worthy of others (including those of different cultures): phase of inter-communication; e – in the relational arena of the classroom, comparisons and disputes among different worthies eliminate variants and traits that are more subjective or connoted as disvalue so that a commonality is created among the different worthies of the students which over time condenses in “a classroom trust climate”; f – the teacher identifies and manages the implicit and explicit “rules” that prevail in the classroom (and the school as an apparatus); g - in the negotiation of worthies the sense of authority (who sets the criteria to assign meaning and value and to what) and the construction of common values are played out: the most shared worthies receive an additional plus of credibility until they stabilize as objective and true.

### Activities

Traditional activities (frontal lectures, working groups, readings).

Mimetic activities. Teacher combines traditional activities with the indirect transmission of models of conduct (by calling in experts and privileged witnesses in the classroom or reading exempla of life taken from literature or history). Among these models of action, each student will be able to recognize the ones most congenial to his or her worthies and adopt them, by mimicry, as a guideline for experience. Teacher will have to dose explicit knowledge carefully in relation to the hidden curriculum accumulated by the student in his or her own set of worthies.

Dialogic-narrative activities each student is preemptively led to learn to dialogue with himself (intra-communication), that is, to match what he does and says with what he thinks and feels by becoming authentic. On this platform he engages a dialogue with others who have also become authentic. The object is the interexchange between one’s own and other’s worthy (inter-communication): each person absorbs something of the other’s worthy and at the same time sheds something of his or her own one-sided point of view, a tuning

<sup>3</sup> Bohanman PI, [12] was the first to detect the homology between the activity of the teacher and that of the ethnographer.

is created between different but compatible one's (unity in diversity).

Ethnographic activities teacher captures and teaches to capture the explicit and implicit "rules" of the classroom brought out light by participant observation and dialogic-narrative activities. Conflict management. Teacher matures in student relationships a more humane type of value conflict such that it generate the higher possible level of peace enriching the sense of a value-oriented existence [13].

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