



"If you don't
teach kids peace,
somebody else
will teach
them war."

Teaching Peace

As Oregon educators show, changing the culture of war begins in the classroom

By Meg Krugel
Photos by Terry Poe

It is hard to argue against the idea that, since 2001, our country has become a militarized nation. Our wars in this country extend beyond our presence in the Middle East; many would say we're engaged in a slew of wars on the homefront as well: a financial war, an environmental war, and a class war. We are fighting over equal rights, civil rights, economic rights, and, yes, educational rights.

In this state alone, Oregon schools face near-inconceivable threats to funding, to the most recent tune of a \$2.2 billion deficit for the next two years. As we debate whether to cut days, cut programs, or cut people in public education, we are unintentionally infusing a culture of conflict into the school setting, and students are bearing witness to it. Our country's students are coming of age, as some

generations have before them, in an era where being in a state of war is the “norm.”

“If you want to bring peace, you have to create structures that don’t have violence built into them,” says Stan Taylor, a faculty member at Lane Community College (LCC). He’s referring to a model of thinking borne by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung in the 1970s, called the “positive peace” paradigm. The alternative, a “negative peace” paradigm, is modeled more around the concept of war/not war.

The absence of war is “negative peace,” Taylor explains. If we are to foster peace through education, we must start by building the structures that move us away from the negative peace paradigm.

Through a number of different courses he teaches that focus on issues of justice, and through the LCC Peace Center he helped launch in 2007, Taylor is building nonviolent structures to further peace education at the community college level. He explains that the college is looking at peace through a variety of lenses—social, environmental, and spiritual, among others. A successful peace approach will infuse a social justice perspective in varied educational opportunities, including classes and conferences, for students and community members.

The LCC Peace Center has been a long-term goal of Taylor’s, ever since he began instructing at the college 12 years ago. When the college changed leadership in 2004, Taylor and current LCC President Mary Spilde began talking about ways LCC could better incorporate peace education on campus and in curriculum development. By 2007, launching the Peace Center had drawn support from every employee group on campus—administration, faculty and classified staff—as well as students. The central goal of the Peace Center was to create educational programs that would foster peace work “in a world beset by war, racism, poverty and environmental destruction,” according to the center’s mission statement.

The center sponsored its first conference, “Peace & Democracy” a year ago, welcoming keynote speakers Medea Benjamin, founding director of the human rights group Global Exchange, and long-time activist Bob Wing, who founded the first ethnic studies department in the country at UC Berkely. Currently, the center is planning its second-annual conference, titled “Peace and Collective Action: Connecting Hope to Change” for May 29-30. Last year’s conference brought together more than 300 peace activists from Lane County and surrounding communities. The conference helps capstone another goal of the Peace Center—to provide space and resources for activist communities in Eugene and Lane County to engage with one another in meaningful ways.

“If you look around us, the world is in such dire straits in so many different ways, and students want to know what is going on. They want to know what they can do and build skills to do it,” Taylor says. He’s developed courses to help address this need, including a 3-part “Peace and Conflict” class and an Environmental Politics class. Every term, they are continuously overfilled. “It’s not

every student who comes to community college, but it is a significant number of people want to know how to locate themselves in the world we are in,” he says.

As the Peace Center grows in scope, a central goal is to implement a multidisciplinary Associate of Arts Transfer Degree (AAOT) in Peace Studies. The degree, if approved by the state, would provide a social justice education to fulfill core requirements needed to continue at the 4-year university level, including math, social science and literature credits. “You can envision math, or science, or certainly social science being taught in ways that bring elements of peace studies into the curriculum,” Taylor says. “A course might teach the physics of global warming or the environmental impacts of building a bomb. Those kinds of issues can be taught using themes that are built into the peace studies framework.”

Currently, the Peace Center steering committee is exploring classes that can easily be “converted” to fit the AAOT requirements for a Peace Studies degree. From interpretive dance classes to mid-century literature courses, “they wouldn’t necessarily be classes that would originally be thought of as peace studies. We’re at the stage of identifying people who could be part of an original framework, and from there growing and fusing,” Taylor says.

Taylor credits the campus—including staff and administrators—for providing the support to funnel peace studies into education. But, more than that, he credits the student community for engaging in the work. For Taylor, it’s particularly heartening to have community college students, a majority of whom come from working class backgrounds, take part in shaping a Peace Studies curriculum. “When we begin to talk about issues of social justice, the working class is a great spot to be able to reach. These aren’t elite topics, these are real, down to earth issues that impact them,” he says.

A 2007 article in the *Register Guard* showed that Lane Community College and other community colleges in Oregon serve a “neglected majority”—nearly 350,000 students around Oregon who, without post-high school education, wouldn’t qualify for 90 percent of the fastest-growing, better-paying jobs available today. “These students know their education is going to take them somewhere, and they can’t sit around and wait to find out where that might be,” Taylor says.

Peace Studies is not a new phenomenon in education. American student interest in what is now called “peace and conflict studies” appeared in the form of campus clubs in the years following the American Civil war. After World War II, more rigorous approaches to peace and conflict studies began to emerge in university courses around the world; the first U.S. academic program in Peace Studies developed in 1948, at Manchester College in Indiana. Over a decade later, student concern over the Vietnam War spurred more universities to offer courses about peace, and each successive war—from the Cold War to the Iraq War—has engaged (and enraged) more students to consider the study.

The number of college and universities offering peace and conflict studies courses is difficult to estimate; courses may be taught out of

Left: Eighth grade student Nikia Evans and class instructor Peter Hower discuss planting a Zen garden to promote peace at Crossler Middle School.



Crossler Middle School Peer Helpers engage in peace projects.

Top: in front of their painted wall that promotes “Hands Are Not for Hurting.”

Bottom: in the early planning stages of reaching out to military service members.



different departments and have different names. However, the International Peace Research Association website mentions over 400 programs related to teaching and research of peace and conflict studies. Though dated, a 1995 survey in the *International Journal of Peace Studies* found that 136 U.S. colleges offered peace studies programs. At that time, 32 percent of courses were offered in large public universities, 21 percent at private secular colleges, and only 1 percent at the community college level.

“The fact that it is growing and spreading from graduate work down to associate degrees is a real indication of the increasing interest in peace studies as a way of approaching the world,” Taylor says.

It goes back to the idea that we are becoming increasingly more militarized: “That militarization has become so prevalent that people are looking and yearning for some kind of alternative approach,” he says.

THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT

In Oregon, educators at the middle and high school level are also starting to define the role of peace in the education of younger students. Oregon Education Association has partnered with Peace Jam Northwest, a year-long international educational program that inspires youth to “work for a peaceful, just and environmentally sustainable world.” Through training by Peace Jam facilitators from Oregon State University and other education partners, participating OEA members have the opportunity to take part in developing peace curriculums in their own classrooms.

Peter Hower, a counselor at Crossler Middle School in Salem, found a natural connection between the Peace Jam philosophy and the “Peer Helpers” class he co-facilitates with colleague Kelly Tiscornia. Beyond the responsibility of introducing new students to the school, students in the Peer Helpers class “identify issues they see in the world, and develop projects to engage in those issues,” Hower says.

It’s a form of service learning that encourages the students to become “active agents for creating the type of world they want to live in. They’ve become very conscious about their world. (Through the development of projects) we’re just providing them the opportunities to develop social skills to move from passivity to action,” he says.

Hower notes that middle-schoolers are at a unique stage in their intellectual development, where they are just starting to formulate opinions about the world around them, but haven’t yet mastered the skills to enact change. Channeling their energies into plausible opportunities, or getting them to think more deeply about the impact of their work, is part of Hower and Tiscornia’s challenge as class facilitators.

Last year, after two Peer Helper students attended a Darfur workshop at the Oregon Peacemaker’s Conference, the class was inspired to create a school assembly that explored the genocide conflict. The assembly ballooned into a multi-day event; which included an opportunity for all 8th grade English classes (nearly 250 students) to attend “Camp Darfur,” where they learned about genocide in Darfur and connected it to their study of the Holocaust.

Through volunteer time, the Peer Helpers class raised \$1,700 (the original goal was \$500) for a Mercy Corps' humanitarian relief program in Darfur.

In October, Crossler's 2007-2008 Peer Helper Class was recognized with the Oregon Peacemaker Award, which honors middle and high school youth in the Northwest for work on non-violence, conflict resolution, leadership, diversity and human rights.

This semester, Hower and Tiscornia are again helping their students develop projects that further student awareness of global issues. The class of 20 students is currently in the early planning stages of these projects—from planting a Zen garden where “students can go to feel peaceful,” to setting up a military pen pals program. The students have ownership over the projects from conception to implementation.

A MILLION VISIONS OF PEACE

In Eugene, Shasta Middle School teacher Lura Pierce has taken a different approach to exploring peace in education. Last year, Pierce's Language Arts/Social Studies class partnered with the Eugene nonprofit “The Nobel Peace Laureate Project,” to honor the 22 Americans who've won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The project offers three sets of curriculum, for elementary, middle and high-schoolers, written by former Oregon teachers and members of the Laureate project board. Pierce offered to pilot the middle-school curriculum and assigned her students to each select one laureate. At the end of the year, the students joined community members at a 2-acre piece of land inside an existing Eugene city park, where the Nobel Peace Laureate Project plans to build a Peace Park by the summer of 2009.

“The students became those laureates, sharing in first person their own vision of peace,” Pierce says. The adaptation of the Nobel Peace Prize curriculum fit in well with a unit Pierce had previously developed to research “heroes” of the world. Her students were eager to learn about the laureates, many of whom they'd never heard of. It was a lesson in history, peace-making, and diversity, she says.

This year, Pierce's class is collecting “one million visions of peace” written on individual postcards by students, community members, and elders. Her middle school students are getting nearby elementary school students involved in the process of creating postcards (which they plan to send to Oprah). Recently, her students taught a postcard-making class at Clear Lake Elementary School to first graders. “They learned how to be teachers, learned how to be patient, and learned how to explain words like peace and vision in a way that resonated with them,” Pierce says.

Early on in the curriculum, Pierce remembers sharing her vision of peace with her students. “I envisioned that kids would teach adults what they had learned about peace, and what adults may have forgotten about peace.”

The fusion of peace and education provides a response to this need. In many ways, the projects in Pierce's classroom—and in other peace education programs across Oregon—are helping bring the vision to fruition. ■



Top: Stan Taylor, far right, joins the LCC Peace Center's steering committee, which includes administrators, classified staff, faculty and students from across the campus. Photo: Terry Poe

Bottom: One out of one million: a vision of peace postcard from students at Shasta Middle School. Photo: Lura Pierce

