Teaching Towards a Culture of Peace in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

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Teaching Towards a Culture of Peace in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

A Field Project Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By
Samantha Ferber
May 2018
Teaching Towards a Culture of Peace in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by

Samantha Ferber
May 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

[Signature]
Instructor/Chairperson

6/10/18
Date
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

I was introduced to the field of early childhood education from two very unique experiences. My first experience began as a Peace Corps Volunteer in a rural village in Morocco under the title of Youth Development Volunteer. Following this experience, I began teaching at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of San Francisco as a preschool teacher. The varying experiences were highlighted by an extreme difference in the pedagogical practices of the educator, the values inherent in the school systems, and the resources available.

With a rudimentary grasp of Darija (Moroccan Arabic) and a general lack of confidence in actually using it, I found myself most comfortable in Morocco’s early childhood educational setting where my language skills were more aligned with some of the youngest learners. From my experience, I found the teaching practices to consist of call-and-response and rote memorization, while lacking any creative outlets for the children. The classrooms had almost no resources—no markers or crayons to do art projects, no toys to play with, and no books to read. Children, ages 3 to 4, were being taught how to sit at a desk for hours at a time in preparation for future schooling. These educational practices promoted passivity and conformity with the intention of teaching young children that this is the role of the student, entirely neglecting the importance of social-emotional and physical development.

This form of education reflects the banking method of education, in which teachers view their principal responsibility to be bestowing their own knowledge upon the students (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) expands upon this banking method in the following statement: “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes
deposits that the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). This type of learning promotes complacency and conformity as the child receives information without any active engagement in the learning process.

However, I found my own experience to evolve beyond the traditional views of teaching that were heavily ingrained in the educational settings within which I worked. A reciprocity emerged between teacher and student. Rather than developing youth as my title suggested, I found there was a deep exchange of knowledge between me—the teacher—and my students. Through my relationship with the students, I found myself practicing the language with less hesitation, companionship that went beyond the classroom, and a deeper sense of community. Outside of school, one of my students, Souad, would knock on my door every afternoon to play in the neighborhood, do artwork, or accompany me to the Dar Chabab (Youth Center) where I also worked. This student-teacher relationship was mutually beneficial: I experienced tremendous personal growth, increased language acquisition, and experienced greater community acceptance and Souad had the opportunity to partake in educational experiences not provided in her formal education, including mentorship, art activities, literacy, and dance.

Following this initial experience with early childhood education, I began teaching preschool at the JCC. This educational setting was—in many ways—in stark contrast to my experience in Morocco. I went from working in a preschool that had essentially no resources to a preschool that was rich in material resources and catered to very affluent families. The JCC provides education to a very specific group of students from primarily white, middle and upper-class families. Based on my experience, I found that academics were highly prioritized by parents with little value placed on experiences outside of a community lacking in diversity—both
economically and socially. However, the mutual exchange of knowledge between student and teacher that I found so organically from my experience in Morocco was supported by the philosophy of the school at the JCC, which is based on the Reggio Emilia approach toward education. One of the guiding principles of this approach is that the student is a co-researcher of their own educational experience and that there is an exchange of knowledge between the student and the teacher (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53).

With my two very different experiences in early childhood education, I began to consider the importance of my role as an educator in the U.S. educational system. My experience in Morocco was not unique to Morocco; there are many preschools in the U.S. that are under resourced, lack quality educational experiences, and promote traditional teaching methodologies. Reports demonstrate that both state and federal investments in the United States have been found lacking in what is required to provide all children access to quality early childhood education as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2015).

Across the nation, 59 percent of 4-year olds – or six out of every 10 children – are not enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs through state preschool, Head Start, and special education preschool services… Even fewer are enrolled in the highest-quality programs. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 2) Furthermore, children living in poverty are more likely to attend poorly resourced schools with teachers untrained in classroom management and culturally responsive teaching (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Typically low funded educational environments lean on traditional banking method systems. It is evident that children experience social injustice beginning in the earliest years of their education. Thus, there is a need for high quality early childhood educational settings—such as the JCC—that expand across all demographics.
Given this context, I raise the following questions: How can we, as educators, branch these two distant communities? How can educators cultivate curriculum that reaches across these two different dynamics to help children come to an awareness of the inequalities around them? How can educators play a part in diminishing social injustices and inequities in the classroom? A huge responsibility depends on the teacher. The teacher requires the tools to make this possible and to work toward a more equal and just educational environment. First, teachers need to acknowledge personal bias and reflect on their own practices that cultivate inequalities in the classroom. Secondly, teachers must deconstruct the traditional view of the student-teacher relationship.

Studies have demonstrated that biases from the teacher have played a role in perpetuating injustices based on race, class, and gender. Reports on suspension alone highlight a very specific reality. As the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) reports,

Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension; in comparison, white students represent 43% of preschool enrollment but 26% of preschool children receiving more than one out of school suspension. Boys represent 79% of preschool children suspended once and 82% of preschool children suspended multiple times, although boys represent 54% of preschool enrollment. (p. 1)

Children’s perceived disruptive behaviors are inextricably linked to race, class, and cultural misunderstandings and biases from teachers (Anderson, 2015).

Another report by Gilliam, a researcher at Yale University’s Child Study Center, demonstrates similar patterns of inequality in early childhood education. His report revealed,
The rates of preschool expulsions varied dramatically with age, gender, and race: 4-year-olds were expelled at a higher rate than 3-year-olds; boys were over four times as likely to be ousted from prekindergarten as girls; and black children were expelled about twice as often as Latino and white youngsters, and over five times as often as Asian-American children. (as cited in Anderson, 2015, para. 4)

Children have limited access to high-quality publicly funded early childhood education programs and when they gain access, are met with the threat of suspension due to teachers that are ill-equipped at handling disruptive behavior. Teachers cannot be expected to overcome biases without the expectation to review and reflect on their own responses in the classroom. Thus, teachers need the tools necessary to reflect on their specific interactions, especially when their responses result in such punitive measures.

Not only are children faced with overt biases in the classroom, but pedagogical practices are deeply rooted in structures of inequality. The traditional teacher-student relationship establishes a hierarchy of knowledge, in which teachers knowledge is privileged over their students. Traditional instructional methods of depositing knowledge from teacher to student promote passivity and discourage critical engagement with learning (Freire, 1970). When the teacher maintains this role as depositor, it reflects an image of the child as incompetent. The dynamic between the teacher and the child needs to change. It is systematically problematic towards the child in developing their own critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Peace education can participate in addressing the greater structures of inequality in early childhood education, which allows students and teachers to work collaboratively in the learning process, recognize students’ capabilities within themselves, amongst their peers, and
within their community, and engages students as agents of social change. Reardon (2000) describes peace education as:

The transmission of knowledge about requirements of, the obstacles to, and possibilities for achieving and maintaining peace; training in skills for interpreting the knowledge; and the development of reflective and participatory capacities for applying the knowledge to overcome problems and achieve possibilities. (p. 399)

Peace education shifts the pedagogical practices of the educator, the curriculum, the environment, and reconceptualizes the educational system as a whole. It requires early childhood educators to reimagine the role of the child as a researcher of their own learning environment, acknowledge their competencies and strengths, recognize each individual voice in the classroom, and promote values of peace through curriculum and daily practices.

One way to reimagine educational spaces as sites of transformation rather than oppression is through peace education. To understand peace education, it is important to note that it is not just a subject in school like English or math. Peace education is the approach to instruction just as much as the actual subject matter. Reardon (2000) a seminal scholar in the field, makes a distinction between “education for peace” and “education about peace.” Education about peace, in the context of early childhood education, may teach a lesson about celebrating our similarities and our differences. Education for peace is more concerned with the pedagogical practices used in an educational setting and the process of sharing information between the teacher and the student. It is critical that peace education involves “education about peace” and “education for peace” for the process to be effective and create sustaining change. Peace education should be integrated into the entirety of the curriculum and the greater culture of the classroom.
In order to fully incorporate the teachings of peace education, this curriculum guide must stem from critical engagement between teachers and the communities within which they work, as well as reflection between the needs of the students and the pedagogical practices of the educator. Peace education needs to be “...in constant redefinition and its meaning critically recast in relation to contexts that are authentic to the moment” (Verma, 2017, p. 9) in order to address the varying experiences young children have in early childhood education. In providing a handbook on the workings of peace education in early childhood education, it should be considered as a dynamic tool, in which teachers can reflect on their particular educational environment and transform it to meet the needs of the children and communities with which they work.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to develop a curriculum guide for early childhood educators of preschool for the teaching of peace education in diverse classroom settings in the United States. When provided with examples of peace in the classroom environment, the role of the teacher as a peace educator, and curriculum that fosters peace education, teachers will begin to understand the importance of implementing this type of instruction within every aspect of their educational practice. The project aims to create educational spaces that foster critical thinking and reflection amongst educators and their students. Teachers must reflect on their own perspectives and attitudes of young children and deconstruct the heavily ingrained idea of the teacher as the depositor of knowledge. By providing a tool for reflection, teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their own potential biases and consider how their teaching methodology provides opportunities for agency, critical thinking, decision-making, and community building.
When peace education is applied to early childhood educational settings, children’s greatest potential is recognized, they are provided with autonomy and decision making within their classroom, and they are viewed as active agents of social change. The project provides suggestions and ideas for specific activities that develop the children’s perception of the self, their relationships with their peers, their community, and the greater world. The activities have the greatest potential when implemented in a classroom environment that values a culture of equality and justice. Within such an environment, children will then have a greater capacity to think about larger issues in the world around them. Through the incorporation of peace education in the classroom, structural inequities and injustices that are perpetuated by the educational system will be addressed and educators will begin to create socially just and inclusive spaces.

**Theoretical Framework**

I have referred to Freire’s critical pedagogy to guide the development of this project. The Montessori method and the Reggio Emilia approach shape the methodology as they offer environmental, cognitive and social structures that inform the critical pedagogy framework. These pedagogies highlight the importance of a reciprocity of knowledge and reflection of values. While educational settings have the potential to be transformative, schools in the United States, are more often than not, oppressive sites that stifle critical thinking and agency while promoting passivity, complacency, and obedience. Verma states, “As beacons of transformation and possibility, schools are in many ways burdened with conformity” (2017, p. 9). Borrowing from the ideology and practice of critical pedagogy can frame the reflection of our actions, ideologies, and educational philosophies within the limits of early childhood education in the
U.S. school system. This can evolve the educational setting to become a transformative site for peace.

**Critical Pedagogy**

My project will focus specifically on the educational theory of critical pedagogy, which is heavily influenced by Paulo Freire. Critical pedagogy is related to a variety of “oppositional pedagogies promoting educational experiences that are transformative, empowering, and transgressive” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 22). Elements of critical pedagogy are interwoven into the principles of peace education, which contributes to a more holistic approach to education through reimagining the school structure—the policies, practices, and beliefs.

Critical pedagogy requires both students and teachers alike to become part of both dialogue and knowledge production within its educational system.

A central aim of critical pedagogy, then, is: to engage teachers and students in a critical, dialectical examination of how power relations (particularly connected to the construction of knowledge) operate in schools and society and create or sustain hegemonic structures; and to equip teachers and students with the language of critique and the rhetoric of empowerment to become transformative agents who recognize, challenge, and transform injustice and inequitable social structures. (p. 22)

Through the implementation of my project, teachers will examine their power, hierarchical structures, and privileged knowledge, which works to sustain inequalities within the school system. Teachers will be provided with a tool to engage in a critical reflection of their environment, conflict-resolution, and engagement with the community within which they work. This process leads to a transformation of the traditional educational system, one that
deconstructs hegemonic values and assumptions that benefit the oppressor and maintain social inequalities (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016).

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally grounded in the development of my project because children are considered active agents of social change with the competencies to engage in their own knowledge production and voice their beliefs and rights in the classroom. This view of children works to disrupt the commonly held belief that children are incompetent and lacking knowledge. These values and image of the child influenced the development of my curriculum.

**Problem-posing education.** The project will draw from two specific aspects of critical pedagogy: problem-posing education and praxis. Problem-posing education contradicts the banking method of education, which is commonly practiced in the U.S. educational system. Problem-posing education engages students and teachers to work together in the learning process and promotes critical thinking. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) define problem-posing education as “the education for freedom and emphasizes that teachers must see themselves in a partnership with their students. As part of this relationship, the teachers must see themselves as teacher-student, ready to accept that their students possess knowledge and solutions they can share with the teacher” (p. 34). By creating an educational space that is grounded in peace education and driven by problem-posing education, even the youngest learners of the educational system will research, experiment, and produce knowledge. For this reason, the curriculum included in my project will be used as provocations, or experiences that provoke interest, for children’s learning. Ultimately, the child’s interest in the experience should guide the educator.

**Praxis.** The goal of problem-posing education is praxis, simply understood as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 126). The curriculum
will establish a process for reflection and action that will develop critical thinking and agency; teachers will consider how their beliefs about the world are formed and how they will advocate for those beliefs. My project intends to deconstruct the traditionally held assumptions early childhood educators have of young children and how these beliefs perpetuate injustices and discrimination. Using praxis, educators are provided the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about children and exercise agency by deciding on how they will partake in the student-teacher relationship.

For early childhood educators teaching peace education, it is important to encourage children to engage as active participants of their classroom and their preschool community in order to develop the skills to be active citizens of their world. They should be engaged in decision-making, feel a sense of ownership in their community, and be recognized as competent and useful partners of their educational experience. This, then, means that children must also be part of the process that is praxis. Reflection and action should not exist in seclusion from the children. Instead it should also be a tool to promote the relationship between teacher and student. This is essential for peace education because it “considers the ways in which human agency dynamically interacts with structures and forms of violence; and, in turn, contemplates the potential for educational spaces—formal and informal—to be sites of individual and collective transformation” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 4). By transferring the power from the hands of the teachers to the hands of the children, there is a possibility for peace education.

**Montessori Method**

One of the founders of peace education is Maria Montessori. She brought an innovative perspective to childhood and education. She wrote,
Peace is a goal that can only be attained through common accord, and the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflicts without recourse to violence—in other words, to prevent war—and second, a long-term effort to establish a lasting peace among men. Preventing conflicts is the work of politics, establishing peace is the work of education. (Montessori, 1972, p. 27)

Dr. Montessori’s writing explicitly acknowledges the role of education as a means to peace. She believed that traditional forms of education which focus on imposing limits and correcting behavioral issues have the potential of harming students, rather than benefiting them (Duckworth, 2006, p. 40). As a response to these traditional methods of education, the Montessori method was developed to teach explicitly and implicitly about peace.

Montessori’s educational philosophy is grounded in values of “global citizenship, personal responsibility, and respect for diversity… These values in Montessori education are every bit as crucial as the subjects of math, language or science” (Bajaj, 2008, p. 34). These values are taught explicitly through curriculum and through the implicit values of the classroom in order to create an environment that supports cooperation and mutual understanding. The Montessori method also envisions the role of the teacher as facilitator rather than instructor, while also approaching each child’s development holistically—focusing on the “child’s emotional, ethical, and spiritual development rather than merely his or her academic development” (Duckworth, 2006, p. 39). Maria Montessori’s explicit connection between peace education and early childhood education is significant and has influenced the development of this curriculum guide. The project is guided by the implicit and explicit teachings of peace education, the holistic approach to education, and the view that children are intelligent, active participants in their community.
However, this approach to early childhood education is not without its limitations. Underlying the Montessori method is the belief that “exercise of the senses (sensory absorption) is the pathway to knowledge for children under 6” (Edwards, 2003, p. 35). It follows that “From age 6 to 12, children are expected to explore a wider world and develop rational problem-solving, cooperative social relations, imagination and aesthetics and complex cultural knowledge” (p. 36). It is overly simplistic to construct concrete stages of development that suggests children under 6 learn through sensory input alone and aren’t capable of more complex thought, social relationships, and deep investigation of the world around them. In the teaching of peace education to young children, it is important to recognize them as competent human beings, capable of learning from a variety of different experiences.

**Reggio Emilia Approach**

I have also chosen to draw from the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education as another guide in the development of my project. As Santín and Toruella (2017) suggest,

> It can be understood as a philosophical approach which is focused on listening and respecting children and their potential by witnessing their actions towards reformulating everyday practices, ideas and projects. The approach proposes a participatory and democratic educational system, that emphasises research and experimentation… (p. 50)

The methodologies and philosophies of Reggio Emilia classrooms provide a framework that is useful for the development of my project and on the methodologies and the philosophies of early childhood education classrooms. Although, it does not make an explicit connection to peace education, many of the founding principles and values align with those of peace educators.
There are three important elements of the Reggio Emilia approach that I have chosen to draw from: the image of the child, the role of the teacher, and children as citizens.

Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, suggests that “the image of the child is considered a powerful, competent, creative, curious, full of potential, and ambitious entity. Hence, the child is considered a researcher with the ability to question and experiment” (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53). This image of the child deconstructs traditional views of children as incompetent, passive, and lacking in knowledge. Educators following this approach, reimagine children as competent and active participants of their own learning environment.

The role of the teacher in the Reggio Emilia approach sees itself as a co-collaborator; the teacher works in participation with the children in creating and disseminating knowledge through different educational experiences (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). The teacher can be viewed as an “advocate, collaborator, researcher and facilitator. In each of these capacities the role of the teacher supports the development of children but also contributes to his or her own professional identity” (p. 1928). Educators of Reggio Emilia believe “their work should be considered as an educational experience that consists of practice and careful reflection that is continuously readjusted” (Gandini, 1993, p. 5). Through this view of the educator, teachers become more reflective and critical of their teaching practices and are able to adapt and change future practices. This aspect of the pedagogy compliments the concepts of praxis previously mentioned.

Based on the role of the teacher, children become co-constructors of their learning. “Educating children in Reggio Emilia is based on the idea that children have rights. They are considered citizens of the community with all the rights and privileges that it entails”
(McNally & Slutsky, 2017, p. 1933). As active citizens of their community, it is important that children are active participants in their educational experience. In order to do this, teachers and students engage in critical thinking, discovery, and examination of hypothesis and theories together (Gandini, 1993). Through this practice, children are able to generate knowledge and gain independence—cognitively, socially and emotionally.

While the values and principles of the Reggio Emilia approach align with the teachings of peace education, there is a limitation to the accessibility to this type of education. There are many resources involved, including an atelier and an atelierista. The atelier is a special workspace or studio and is led by an atelierista, a teacher trained in visual art (McNally & Slutsky, 2017, p. 1928). In the U.S. educational system, not all early childhood educational settings will be able to provide this carefully conceived space for children or the expertise of an art teacher.

**Significance of the Project**

The quality of education provided to children in the United States varies immensely and peace education is generally lacking in early childhood settings. Peace education should be implemented at this level and offered to children of diverse backgrounds—those who may not receive the education they deserve and those who are otherwise unaware such communities exist. With the limited resources for the integration of peace education for young children, it is necessary to have access to a curriculum guide and model for the implementation of such pedagogical practices in early childhood education.

The project aims to support early childhood education teachers in U.S. school system. Its purpose is to help teachers create a culture of peace in the classroom, where social justice and critical-thinking become the foundations of the child’s learning environment. In the process, the
project seeks to benefit children by creating an environment, pedagogical practices, and curricula that fosters peace education. It is my hope that the project will address social injustices and structural inequalities that affect young children beginning in early childhood education. I anticipate that this project will begin to develop the skills necessary for children to navigate larger issues outside of the classroom. This project provides early childhood educators with a responsive curriculum that lays the foundation for peace education in the classroom.
Definition of Terms

I have chosen to define these terms operationally through my own experiences and from other scholarly resources.

Banking concept of education: a concept taken from Paulo Freire’s framework for education pedagogy in which teachers view their principal responsibility to be bestowing their own knowledge upon the students (Freire, 1970)

Early childhood education: for the purpose of this project, this will focus on preschool ages two and a half to four year olds.

Education for peace: the pedagogical practices used in an educational setting and the process of sharing information between the teacher and the student (Reardon, 2000)

Education about peace: educational content teaching towards peace, such as conflict resolution, peace education, human rights education, multi-cultural education, environmental education, etc. (Reardon, 2000)

Peace education: obtaining knowledge and understanding of what contributes to peace and the challenges of maintaining peace; and learning to apply the knowledge through a process of reflection and action (Reardon, 2000)

Praxis: a process for reflection and action that will develop critical thinking and agency (Freire, 1970)

Problem-posing education: a method of teaching that engages students and teachers to work together in the learning process and accepts that children will research, experiment, and produce knowledge (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008)
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Is it possible for early childhood educators to create a learning environment which fosters socio-emotional development, prosocial attitudes, critical thinking skills, and at the same time address structural inequalities embedded into the educational system? Can educators reconstruct our conception of young children and begin to understand them as complex and competent human beings, full of knowledge, with perspectives and voices of their own which need to be heard? Can educators model principles of peace education to illustrate how students can resolve conflicts, exchange knowledge, and promote agency, etc?

This review of literature highlights the importance of a peace education approach in formal and non-formal educational settings, in both national and international contexts. The literature review also examines literature highlighting early childhood education in the U.S. and misconceptions about children that lead to the perpetuation of injustices within the school-system. The literature review concludes by addressing literature which discusses early childhood peace education, as a tool to reinterpret the student-teacher relationship, amplify the voices of children, and create educational sites fostering wider participation and social justice.

Paulo Freire noted that “Education either functions as an instrument … to bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women … discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (1970, p. 34). Friere’s vision for education aligns well with the possibilities of peace education; specifically, that education has the potential to perpetuate inequalities and hate, or it can be used to foster peace, justice, and respect (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). Early childhood education training programs often focus on helping educators understand important stages of development. However, peace education
provides an opportunity for early childhood educators to expand their toolbox. Peace education is one approach by which early childhood educators can foster peace and social justice in educational spaces and simultaneously seek to more fully understand the lives of children.

**Peace Education**

**International Peace Education and the United Nations**

Peace education scholars are exploring the potential benefits of peace education programs. The incorporation of peace education within an international context has become more widespread. In an international context, the primary concern of peace education is the violence and instability that many young children face, especially in countries plagued by conflict. The United Nations (UN) is shaping the field of peace education globally. The UN is defined as a global intergovernmental organization, whose main objective is the promotion of international peace and cooperation (Bajaj, 2008).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an organization within the UN system which recognizes peace education as a fundamental aspect of basic education. As it happens, UNESCO explicitly addresses peace building in the preamble of its constitution, which states, “...as war begins in the minds of individuals, so too should the defenses against war be constructed in the minds of individuals” (Bajaj, 2008, p. 76). UNESCO not only commits itself to peace education in its constitution, but has also established a culture of peace program, which has been implemented by 176 countries and 7,900 educational institutions (p. 76). The main objectives set forth by UNESCO include, “the linking of schools from different countries, student projects, local and regional networking, international camps, conferences, discussions, campaigns and student competitions, all oriented towards improving the quality of education and towards enhancing respect for other cultures and traditions” (as cited
in Bajaj, 2008, p. 77). UNESCO’s programs, thus, demonstrate a commitment to peace education globally.

The UN also recognizes peace education in its *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, a document which asserts the natural right of children to protection and education (Bajaj, 2008). Bajaj (2008) writes, “The seventh principle expressly states that a child has the right to an education that will develop a sense of moral and social responsibility” (p. 77). It is reasonable to contend that the UN has established that all children have the inherent right to peace education (Bajaj, 2008).

While the UN does work on a global level, there are other initiatives that implement peace education on a smaller scale. The work that is often characterized as peace education internationally tends to focus on sites of conflict. One location that has been the target of peace education initiatives is Israel-Palestine. Israel has initiated a new peace education strategy that brings together Israeli and Palestinian students in bilingual, binational schools (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2011). The Palestinian-Jewish integrated schools are committed to equality and coexistence, which is indicated by their secular values and curriculum, bicultural programs, and representation of each group’s historical narratives and culture (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2011). Although the implementation of the curriculum is multi-faceted and complicated by a long history of national conflict, research suggests that parents and teachers believe that a deeper understanding of culture and religion can create cohesion (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2011). Also, the students themselves were found interacting socially regardless of identity (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2011). In reflecting on the effectiveness of peace education in sites of conflict, it is important to note that,
Peacebuilding has to be a cross-societal effort, not one that only targets an interface or an area where communities are in conflict. It also has to be supported through institutions and processes, and through leadership. For educational reforms to contribute to meaningfully and substantively to peacebuilding, they must be integrated into a wider framework aimed at repair and reconstruction. (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2011, p. 50)

In areas of conflict, it is important to facilitate peace building that is transformative, sustainable, and restorative. These efforts must also take place outside of formal educational settings.

**Non-formal peace education.** Peace education is not limited to activities that take place through formal education. Leveraging the role of the media in children’s lives is one tool that has been used to send positive messages of peace education to young children around the world. One such program that holds the transformative potential to reach a large audience of young children and promote peace building skills is *Sesame Street.* The program was developed in 1969 to cover multiple elements of peace education, including “human rights, women’s (and girls’) rights, emotional regulation, respect for differences, multicultural education, and environmental conservation” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 216). In the case of *Sesame Street* programming in the United States, studies indicated there was a positive effect of peace education efforts, specifically documenting a reduction in prejudice (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). Researchers found that “African-American and White children who watched the series expressed more positive attitudes toward African-American and Latino children than those who did not” (p. 227). *Sesame Street’s* incorporation of peace education has demonstrated that children are able to gain a deeper sense of understanding and respect through the use of media.
Formal Peace Education in the K-12 U.S. School System

While there has recently been greater proliferation of peace education globally, research indicates that it has not been fully integrated into the formal educational system (Bajaj, 2008). Bajaj pointed out, with some concern, that “formal school systems have largely ignored the educational insights provided by peace activist educators, mostly because of cultural and economic pressures to ramp up their curricula to include more math and science…” (p. 22).

Despite the limited general integration of peace education into the formal school system, specific components of peace education have been more widely accepted as part of the curricula. In the United States educational system, some elements that have been included—to a certain extent—are conflict resolution, socio-emotional development, multicultural education, and environmental education, all of which are considered to be aspects of peace education.

Leading peace education researchers, however, have highlighted the importance of a more holistic approach to peace education which not only addresses curriculum content, but also deals with structural inequalities inherent in the school system, pedagogical methods of teaching, and the student-teacher relationship. For example, “…critical peace education should embrace dialogical, problem-posing, and participatory/praxis methods; multiple, varied, and alternative viewpoints and content; and flattened organizational structures that foster collaboration and connection rather than hierarchy and compartmentalization” (Hantzopoulos, 2011, p. 225).

Peace education is essential to encourage students to engage in dialogue, critical thinking, and self-reflection. It also positions students as active participant in the educational process. However, for peace education to be successfully incorporated into the school system, it must be interwoven into the very fiber of the school culture—through its values, principles, and practices.
Educational systems, however, do not always encourage the implicit teachings of peace education because of inherent structural violence towards children. This can manifest in multiple ways—discipline by an authoritative teacher, for example, or perpetuation of the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970). Harris takes it one step further and suggests that “the pedagogy of competition, rather than cooperation, as well as systems of tracking, and curriculum about which students have no say, constitute structural violence” (as cited in Duckworth, 2006, p. 45). The pedagogy of competition is evidenced by a greater emphasis on testing and performance than by actually meeting the needs of students. This focus on testing has particularly increased inequities for students who have been the most marginalized in the school system—including “students of color, multilingual students, and those with diagnosed disabilities” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 179). There are a variety of influences that affect the students’ test scores, including language performance, cultural biases, and availability to additional resources (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). Because of these policies and practices, schools may be considered sites of oppression, since they are actually functioning to perpetuate structural inequalities. Peace education offers the opportunity to critically evaluate the U.S. educational system and to implement a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of the students. Schools can then truly become places of equity and peace. Without peace education, educational structures are working within a deficit framework and sustaining structural inequalities.

Much of the literature resulting from research on peace education has focused on older children, or on students involved in higher education. Recent studies focused on peace education in the United States school system document the importance of a comprehensive approach—one which informs school culture, the classroom curriculum, and the teaching methods employed.
Such a comprehensive approach is described by Hantzopoulos’ (2011) 2-year ethnographic study at the Humanities Preparatory Academy (HPA), which highlights the implementation of critical peace education in a New York public school (p. 226). HPA works primarily with marginalized students that are particularly vulnerable to structural inequalities in the school-system (Hantzopoulos, 2011). The study reveals that students responded well to the participatory and democratic nature of the new curriculum content, the classroom culture, and the school functional structure—all of which fostered the critical thinking, reflection, and social change (Hantzopoulos, 2011). Some of the main ways in which HPA reconceptualized the school system included: implementing a student advisory council and associated democratic decision-making process, de-tracking academics, and waiving standardized testing (Hantzopoulos, 2011). The success of the school is indicated by an average graduation rate of 91% since the school’s inception, compared to the city-wide average of 62% (Hantzopoulos, 2011). These data demonstrate how successful peace education can be in supporting the needs of students.

Like the educators at HPA, some educators have been able to work within a school system devoted to the implementation of peace education system-wide. However, many have not. This has resulted in limited research and available empirical data. More commonly, peace educators have found ways to incorporate this education directly into their classroom. Susan Gelber Cannon (2011), a peace educator, works under three principles—think, care, act. She encourages students to think more critically, to care about their community (inside the classroom and beyond), and to find ways to act for the greater social good. Cannon (2011) found that students—through this addition of peace education into her middle school class—became more prosocial, improved academically, and felt empowered to work for peace in their own way. Students can thus benefit from the implementation of peace education, even when it is limited to
the classroom setting. But it reaches its greatest potential in the form of a holistic approach embedded into the entire school structure.

It is imperative that researchers and scholars continue to explore how and where peace education initiatives are being implemented by educators in the United States educational system as well as in international settings. As Galtung (1969) contends, the term peace cannot be limited to the absence of overt violence or what he refers to as negative peace. It also encompasses the absence of structural and cultural violence or positive peace (Galtung, 1969). Whether it is being incorporated in formal or informal settings, nationally or internationally, peace education initiatives must transmit “educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that can provide learners—in any setting—with the skills and values to work towards comprehensive peace” (Bajaj, 2008, p. 1). In order for the educational system in the U.S. to fully incorporate all aspects of peace education, justice and peace must be identified and fundamental aspects of school culture.

**Early Childhood Education**

It is important to consider the circumstances children in the U.S. educational system encounter in early childhood education in order to implement peace education at this level. The main priority for an early childhood educator is to focus on the needs and rights of children in order to encourage their development and provide rich learning experiences. As early childhood educational programs meet the basic needs and safety of the children, some educational settings move beyond the basic needs and work toward social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Early childhood education lays the foundation for children’s future educational endeavors. Unfortunately, the educational experiences of young children in early childhood
Educational settings in the United States vary greatly and does not always address the most basic needs.

Early childhood education in the United States is not compulsory, unlike K-12 educational settings. Thus, educational environments vary from providing basic caregiving needs, such as changing diapers, napping, and feedings, to educational environments that teach curriculum and foster the development of multiple domains of early childhood, including cognitive, physical, and social emotional development (The Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce, 2012, p. 6). The varied educational experiences are

...offered in a variety of settings (e.g., private homes, centers, elementary schools, workplaces, or houses of worship), funded by numerous sources (e.g., parent tuition, child care subsidies, state funds, and federal dollars), and licensed or unlicensed. Many children are cared for by family, friends, and neighbors, both paid and unpaid. (p. 6)

Because many educational settings in the United States are private and do not require formal teacher training, there is a wide range in the quality of early childhood education.

Furthermore, most high quality early childhood education is unattainable for many children from minority or low-income families. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) states,

While Latinos are the fastest growing and largest minority group in the United States, making up a quarter of 3- and 4-year-olds, Latinos demonstrate the lowest preschool participation rates of any major ethnicity or race. The participation rate for Latinos is 40 percent, compared to 50 percent for African-American children, and 53 percent for white children. In addition, children from low-income families are less likely to be
enrolled in preschool than their more affluent peers – 41 percent compared to 61 percent (p. 5)

There is an unmet need for quality early childhood education programs for many U.S. families. Their race and socioeconomic status are correlated to lack of access.

Another report by Gilliam (2015) demonstrates similar patterns of inequality in early childhood education based on race. His report revealed, “African-American preschoolers were about twice as likely to be expelled as European American (both Latino and non-Latino) preschoolers and over five times as likely as Asian-American preschoolers” (p. 4). The study additionally suggests that “The likelihood of expulsion decreases significantly with access to classroom-based mental health consultation” (p. 1). These studies demonstrates that children of color have limited access to high-quality publicly funded early childhood education programs and when they gain access, are met with the threat of suspension due to teachers that are ill-equipped at handling disruptive behavior.

However, there is work being done to address the needs of students of color and those from low-income backgrounds by attempting to close the achievement gap in early childhood education. In order to meet the “need for high quality preschool, states and the federal government have invested in initiatives to expand access” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 5). One such resource for quality education is through public preschools, such as Head Start. The Head Start programs, however, have limitations—“...the Head Start Impact Study suggests that while short-term gains were positive when compared to a control group, long term gains were mixed” (File, Mueller, & Wisneski, 2012, p. 128). One of the main issues of concern in these programs is the link between early childhood curriculum with national and state standards in elementary school (File et al., 2012). Early childhood education is becoming more
standardized and is more likely to neglect social-emotional development in the pursuit of greater academic improvement. In a push for quality education, there is a need of a more holistic approach to education.

It is important to understand some of the foundational concepts and theories that guide early childhood education in the U.S. It is important to remain critical of some of the commonly held assumptions, in order for educators to help children reach their full potential. The two main concepts that will be addressed in the next section include—childhood as a critical period of development and the construction of the child.

**Childhood as a Critical Period of Development**

One of the most notable beliefs is that the early years of a child’s life is a critical period of development that has a lasting influence on attitudes and behaviors later in life. As stated by Hinitz and Stomfay-Stitz (1995), “The field of early childhood education has been bolstered by decades of research that confirms the developmental importance of the early years, as a window of opportunity to influence positively children’s future lives” (p. 5). This guiding principle is depicted in child development literature, portrayed in the media, discussed amongst parents, and practiced in law, medical, and educational fields (Cannella, 2002).

The assumption that a child’s early experiences are the sole defining factor for attitudes and beliefs later in life is too deterministic—privileging some and disadvantaging others. For example, early experiences of a child’s life are subject to greater societal issues such as race, class, and gender biases and discrimination. Children’s attitudes and beliefs can be negatively affected by ideas adults in their lives model. Chopra (n.d.) states, “Research has already established that children can identify racial cues in adult faces as early as 9 months of age, and can begin forming their own stereotypes and prejudices around the age of 3 to 4 years”
These prejudices may be perpetuated by experiences in formal and non-formal educational settings such as cultural misunderstandings or lack of cultural competence of teachers, family beliefs, or the media. A child’s early experiences need to be viewed in relation to greater societal norms and not just questioned on an individual level.

Educational experiences have the potential to foster biases and stereotypes at the earliest stages of development if unchecked by dominant society. One particular study that highlights the prejudices acquired by young children focuses on Israeli children and the development of their concept of an Arab. The results found

...that very young Israeli children, aged 2.5-3.5, as they begin to use the word and construct the concept, are still neutral in their evaluation of Arabs. Soon, however, information coming from the environment shapes their view, and by the age of 6, the majority of children already have a negative stereotype of Arabs. (Bar Tal, 1996, p. 366)

The results of the study are significant because they exemplify the ability of early experiences to negatively affect children’s conception of another social group. It is necessary for a critical intervention of greater societal norms for children’s earliest experiences to be unencumbered by class, race, and gender biases.

**Construction of the Child**

An overly simplistic view of children is perpetuated by the belief that children do not have the same competencies as adults. As Cannella (2002) states, “Children are described today as innocent, weak, needy, lacking (in skill or knowledge), immature, fearful, savage, vulnerable, undefined, or open-ended, as opposed to adults who are intelligent, strong, competent, mature, civilized, and in control” (p. 34). When childish attributes are used to describe an adult, they are
considered deficient, immature, and dependent (Cannella, 2002). An alternative view to this dichotomous conception of children and adults, recognizes children as competent and knowledgeable with a wealth of expertise, and capable of engaging in critical thinking.

The false conception of children as deficient, not fully developed human beings, has subsequently resulted in a silencing of their voices. As Cannella (2002) asserts,

Voices of ‘silent knowing’ are those of the actual children with whom we work as they live their real lives in settings that we have not comprehended, as they display strengths and understandings that we have not dreamed of, and as they construct knowledges that would challenge the boundaries of our own worlds. (p. 3)

In practice, early childhood educators must provide children with more time and momentarily suspend their agenda, in order to fully listen to their voices. Children may need more time to express themselves because their language is continually developing, or they may need more time to take the steps needed to be more autonomous (Hall & Rudkin, 2011). A commitment of early childhood educators must be to honor the voices of the children and value their perspective, be open to learning from them, and flexible to using new approaches. The Reggio Emilia approach to education demonstrates the importance of amplifying children’s voices and recognizing them as capable citizens of their community (Hall & Rudkin, 2011).

One of the main guiding principles of The Boulder Journey School in Colorado, which is guided by Reggio Emilia, suggests that “all children have the right to participate in the communities in which they reside, not as future citizens, but as citizens of the present” (p. 2). At the school, attempts to understand children’s perception of human rights began shortly after a 4-year-old student brought a sign to school protesting the Iraq War (p. 7). Teachers saw this as an opportunity to guide their curriculum and encouraged the children to compose a comprehensive
list, which included over 60 children’s rights. Some of those rights included, “children have a right to solve their own problems whenever they can,” “children have a right to be listened to,” and “children have a right to tell silly jokes” (p. 9). The children’s articulation of their own rights demonstrates their profound thoughts and understanding of their world. The Boulder Journey School exemplifies the ways in which educators can honor children’s voices and perspectives.

The Reggio Emilia approach to education has been applied to educational settings within the United States, as demonstrated by the Boulder Journey School. However, it first emerged in Reggio Emilia, Italy and developed out of parents’ interest to provide educational experiences that challenged traditional teaching methods (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). The educational philosophy is guided by “an underlying belief that every human being has an equal yet incalculable value and that even the youngest among them are citizens with rights” (McNally & Slutsky, 2017, p. 1932). This approach envisions children as agents of social change that help to produce culture, values, and rights (Edwards, 2003). Children are considered partners in school—which leads to classroom projects that are influenced by the children’s collective interests, ideas, and experiences—and partners in the community with equal rights and responsibilities (McNally & Slutsky, 2017).

On a global level, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human treaty that recognizes children’s rights. Children are entitled to these human rights regardless of their age. This document highlights the need to recognize children as competent human beings. The UNCRC “was the first legally binding international instrument to recognize the civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights of children” (Hall & Rudkin, 2011, p. 2). Article 29 of the UNCRC focuses on education as a way to help children develop to
their fullest potential (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). Specifically, education should encourage respect for others, knowledge about the environment, and tools to live peacefully (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). Unfortunately, the United States is one of only two countries that has yet to ratify such an important treaty. The other country is Somalia. Upholding children’s rights is at the forefront of the work of early childhood educators as is a commitment to early childhood education that is framed by peace education principles.

**Peace Education in Early Childhood Education**

Peace education seeks to understand children’s complex understandings of their world, appreciate their insights and perspectives as they learn, and engage them as participants of their community. One major contribution to the formal inclusion of peace education into the field of early childhood education today is through Montessori classrooms. Research indicates that many Montessori teachers provide explicit and implicit curriculum that fosters “the development of conflict resolution skills, independence, tolerance, confidence, kindness and a respect for other opinions…” (Duckworth, 2006, p. 42). Duckworth profiles multiple Montessori classrooms both internationally and nationally, focusing on the Montessori classrooms in Washington, D.C., Thailand, and India.

The Boyd Schools in Washington D.C. contain curriculum that explicitly teaches about empathy, reflection, conflict-resolution, and international-mindedness (Duckworth, 2006). The schools work to promote international-mindedness by integrating Spanish language classes, international festivals, and geography lessons (Duckworth, 2006). There is also a large emphasis on social emotional development—engaging children in reflection and peaceful negotiations to conflict resolution (Duckworth, 2006). The teachers work to model the values of peace education in their teachings.
The Montessori classrooms in Thailand and India recognize that the methods of education cannot be fully transferred to another culture, but rather, should be adapted to meet the needs of the host country (Duckworth, 2006). The Kornkaew School in Thailand utilizes mixed age classrooms to help promote cooperation and respect (Duckworth, 2006). In mixed aged classrooms, children are valued for their expertise and knowledge production amongst their peers. The City Montessori School in India teaches towards the values of peace education by including curriculum relating to cooperation, civic responsibility, and global understanding (Duckworth, 2006).

Through Duckworth’s (2006) findings from multiple case studies of Montessori schools it is evident that the social and emotional development can be considered equal, and at times more important, than traditional academics. There is also a large value placed on community, in which teachers stay with their students for several years (Duckworth, 2006). Montessori classrooms present one type of education for peace in early childhood education, although there are overarching limitations to this method.

One of Montessori’s main limitations is the conception of the environment. Montessori considered beauty and order as an essential component of the learning environment in order for children to learn how to be orderly (Mooney, 2001). Montessori classrooms provide children with work, which is “arranged carefully in a developmentally progressive manner on open shelves…” (Cossention & Whitcomb, 2007, p. 118). Critiques of this philosophy suggest that the structured way in which the materials are presented actually hinders and restricts the development of a child’s imagination (Duckworth, 2006, p. 41). With the strict and constraining nature of the classroom, children do not have the liberty to mix materials and to engage in exploration on their own accord. Another limitation to the Montessori method is the emphasis
placed on teaching children through sensory experiences (Mooney, 2001). While this is an important element of early childhood education, it diminishes children’s capacity to engage in other styles of learning.

Summary

As noted above, young children are competent, knowledgeable, and offer a great amount of expertise to their learning environment. The skills and values that are taught to older children through peace education can be applied to their younger counterparts, which include critical thinking, reflection, participation, peace, and acts of social justice. Three foundational principles of peace education in early childhood education recognizes children as co-researchers of their own learning experience, children as human beings that have voice, and children as active agents of change within their community. Children are full of potential and should be acknowledged for their confidence, strength, resilience, and capabilities.

The idea that children are co-researchers of their own educational endeavors calls into question the hierarchical student-teacher relationship that is prevalent in most educational settings. As peace educators, it is important to focus on the exchange of knowledge between student and teacher as a tool for collaboration and connection. This conception of the student-teacher relationship influences curricular content and pedagogical practices because it recognizes the children’s expertise and life experiences, which guides them in their learning.

In order for children to be co-researchers of their learning environment, it is imperative that educators listen to their voices. It is through the attention to dialogue, questions, and varying viewpoints that children can be listened to and recognized as human beings. Children’s abilities and competencies to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection must be honored and respected. One of the main objectives as educators is to “…conceptualize a field in which
education is viewed as learning and responding to the voices of younger members of society, in which we continually search for ways to connect our human lives to each other” (Cannella, 2002, p. 167). This leads to the final point, which values children’s participation in their community, whether that be inside the classroom, the greater preschool, or outside of the formal educational setting.

As professionals of early childhood education, it is critical to recognize students as active participants of their environment. By recognizing children’s competencies and listening to their voices, educators can begin to create sites of equity and peace, which creates socially just classrooms. Peace education is disseminated to children in multiple ways—through formal and non-formal educational settings and in international and national contexts. Research has pointed out the value of teaching peace education in school and the benefits that children receive from teaching a holistic approach to peace education. However, translating these ideas into classroom practices has been limited because of the large emphasis on academics. Thus, it is necessary to improve the existing resources available to teachers and develop a curriculum guide for teaching towards a culture of peace. This requires an examination of school philosophies, teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, pedagogical practices, and curricula content.

In order to reconceptualize the field of early childhood education in which peace and equity are the foundation, educators must be willing to expand their previous conceptions of the child, to think beyond the current educational system, and to open themselves up to new possibilities. In order for that to happen, children’s perspectives, identities, knowledge, and experiences must be valued and respected. As Cannella (2002) asserts, “When any of us must endure inequity or injustice, when there are those who are not heard, as human beings we are all diminished” (p. 173).
CHAPTER III
THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Brief Description of the Project

This project was designed to provide early childhood education teachers with a curriculum guide for teaching peace education, keeping in mind the diverse educational settings in the United States. It is especially targeted for preschool classrooms of children aged two and a half to four years old. However, it can be modified for use in early elementary school where teachers hope to incorporate peace education into their classrooms. Early childhood educators are the primary audience for this curriculum guide, but any educator, parent, or caregiver can benefit from the concepts of peace education.

For peace education to be effectively integrated into the classroom and to create sustaining change, it is important to consider not just what is taught in the classroom, but how it is taught. Thus, my project is divided into three major parts. The first two parts focus on how peace education should be incorporated into the classroom and the third part offers suggestions for activities, which is broken down into three different sections:

- Part One: Role of the Teacher as Peace Educator
- Part Two: Establishing a Culture of Peace in the Classroom Environment
- Part Three: Activities to Help Promote Peace and Social Justice in the Classroom
  - Section 1: Children’s Perception of the Self
  - Section 2: Relationship with Peers
  - Section 3: Connection to Community and the Greater world

This curriculum guide should stem from a critical engagement between teachers and the communities within which they work, as well as a reflection between the needs of the students and the pedagogical practices of the educator. In providing a handbook on the workings of peace
education in early childhood education, it should be considered as a dynamic tool, in which educators can reflect on their particular educational environment and transform it to meet the needs of the children and communities with which they work. The curriculum included will be used as provocations, or experiences that provoke interest, for children’s learning. Ultimately, the child’s interest in the experience should guide the educator.

**Development of the Project**

The development of this project grew from my educational experience over the past two years at USF. I found Freire’s critical pedagogy to be a central thread throughout my courses—deeply embedded into the pedagogical practices of the professors and explicitly discussed in relation to the varying course topics. In the classroom, teachers and students alike engaged in a critical reflection of their own and others’ actions and ideologies.

While taking a course titled Peace, Conflict and Education in Global Contexts by Professor Bajaj, I began to understand how this process of reflection and action informs peace education. Peace educators emphasize the importance of not only the content, but also the *methods* in which they teach. These insights sparked my own critical reflection of my past and current experiences as an educator of early childhood and how these same practices could be applied toward the educational experiences of young children.

The project itself was developed over the course of half of a year and grew out of my desire to create an early childhood educational setting that teaches towards a culture of peace. Peace education addresses policies and practices that perpetuate social inequalities in the traditional school system that privilege some, while disadvantaged others. It does this by engaging teachers in a critical reflection of their assumptions towards children and how those assumptions perpetuate inequalities and reinforce a hierarchical student-teacher relationship.
Since a large emphasis is placed on critical reflection and action, it is important to consider this project as a dynamic tool, which can continually be reflected upon and recasted to meet the needs of the community that it serves.

**The Project**

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the curriculum guide is divided into three parts. Part one focuses on the role of the teacher as peace educator—providing principles that guide the educator in reimagining the student-teacher relationship and a peace education critical reflection tool used to guide teachers in a process of reflection. Part two offers suggestions on how to establish a culture of peace in the classroom environment through a critical reflection of the classroom materials, conflict resolution practices, and family involvement. The third part suggests activities that help promote a culture of peace and social justice in the classroom. Part three begins by looking inward at the children’s perception of the self, moves outward towards children’s relationships with their peers, and further extends to their connection with the greater community and world. I have included a sample from each of the three parts, while the complete project can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper.
The Peace Education Critical Reflection Tool highlighted by the infographic above consists of five different stages. Stage one is context, stage two is observations, stage three is questions, stage four is action, and stage five is reflection. The context may be a problem, pattern, need, circumstance, project, or activity. The context is followed by the teachers’ observations about the children and any questions they may have for themselves. The first three stages are the planning stage, which occurs before the teacher engages with their students. The fourth stage, or the action stage, is the implementation of the project or the steps it takes to address the problem or need. During this stage, the teacher works collaboratively with the children. The final stage is a critical reflection of the action stage, which occurs after the teacher’s engagement with the students. The critical reflection tool is applied toward the classroom environment and the activities. However, as the teacher gains experience in working with this tool, they can become more specific in both the goals they are accomplishing and the reflective questions. They can take ownership of this model to best meet the needs of their community and their classroom.
Part One: Role of the Teacher as Peace Educator

A huge responsibility of teaching peace education depends on the teacher. The teacher requires the tools to work toward a more equal and just educational environment. First, peace educators should reflect on their own potential biases and reflect on the practices that cultivate inequalities in the classroom. Secondly, teachers must question the hierarchical student-teacher relationship and consider how their teaching methodology provides opportunities for agency, critical thinking, decision-making, and community building. As peace educators, we must consider ourselves co-learners and co-collaborators with the children in their experimentation and curiosities. Integrating the Peace Education Critical Reflection tool into the classroom can encourage educators to be reflective of their teaching practices and their curriculum content.

Part Two: Establishing a Culture of Peace in the Classroom Environment

As stated above, the Peace Education Critical Reflection Tool can be applied to the classroom environment. One example of a context that a teacher may address is the classroom materials. During the observation stage, the teacher might make specific observations about the process of choosing classroom materials. They might notice that it requires deep thoughtfulness and intentionality to support the values of peace education and that children should be a part of the decision-making process when choosing certain materials for the classroom. The teacher may have a variety of questions, such as: How are the materials selected for the classroom? Does the process promote agency and community building within the classroom? Are the children’s voices represented in the classroom? Are the materials easily accessible to the children? Is the placement of materials fostering independence and self-help skills? If the teacher is choosing a classroom material, such as paint, the action stage may include mixing paints with the children and offering the children the opportunity to name the colors. During the
reflection stage, the teacher may consider how the process went, whether the children had the opportunity to participate, what they may do differently in the future, and whether their actions were teaching toward a culture of peace.

**Part Three: Activities to Help Promote Peace and Social Justice in the Classroom**

The Peace Education Critical Reflection Tool is also applied to each of the activities in part three. One of the activities from section two, focuses on children’s relationships with their peers. The activity is broken down into all five stages of critical reflection: context, observations, questions, action, and reflection. The context outlined in the activity is to create a culture of peace in the classroom by engaging children in an exchange of knowledge and expertise with their peers. Through this sharing of knowledge, the children are able to celebrate their individual strengths and abilities, as well as build a deeper peer-to-peer connection. Observations a teacher might notice are that children sometimes seek to demonstrate their strengths, while at other times they search for support in areas where they feel less comfortable. A teacher may have questions about these specific observations and consider how they can help promote agency and independence in order for children to feel valued as part of the classroom community.

The implementation of the activity, or the action stage, offers children an opportunity to choose something they feel they are an expert at and then teach it to the class. Examples of areas of expertise include: scrambling eggs, drawing a cat, rolling snakes out of clay, or identifying shells. After the children have the opportunity to share their expertise, the teacher should engage in a critical reflection about the process. The educator may consider whether they taught to the core principles of peace education and whether their own actions helped to promote a culture of peace in the classroom.
For this activity and the other activities provided in part three, it is important to remember that children may change the energy of the activity, suggest new ideas, or have questions the educator did not consider. As the student and teacher work as co-collaborators of the educational environment, a change in the course of the activity is appreciated and welcomed, as long educators continue to teach towards the core principles of peace educations.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Children in the United States encounter highly diverse educational experiences. Many children experience low quality educational programs, which are under resourced and provide untrained teachers. Inadequate professional development often results in educators that rely on traditional banking method systems (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, most high quality educational settings are unattainable to minority or low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Educational settings that do provide high quality education tend to place a large emphasis on academics, disregarding the rich experiences provided outside of the formal school system. Given the varied educational experiences for young children in the U.S., it is necessary for educators to cultivate a responsive curriculum that reaches across these two different educational contexts in order to provide quality educational programs to children that may not have their needs met and to children that may not know such communities exist.

This project aims to provide educators from diverse classroom settings with a holistic approach to peace education to address these inequitable educational experiences. Teachers are provided with the tools necessary to engage in critical reflection of their pedagogical practices in order to diminish social injustices and inequities in the classroom. Through the process of reflection teachers are encouraged to consider their personal biases towards young children and to reimagine the student-teacher relationship. Only then, are students valued for their active participation in dialogue, construction of knowledge, and agency within the classroom and beyond. For peace education to create sustaining change, it must address the structural inequalities inherent in the U.S. school system and critically reflect on the values, principles, and practices of the school culture.
The integration of such a dynamic curriculum in early childhood education is a privilege not afforded to all teachers. The purpose of this project is to provide early childhood educators with a responsive curriculum that lays the foundation for peace education in the classroom. The project hopes to create a socially just classroom environment, pedagogy, and curricula. In turn, developing the necessary skills for children to engage in critical-thinking, agency, and self-reflection. Through the integration of peace education, children are able to come to an awareness of the inequalities around them by engaging in a critical reflection of their own self-concept, their responsibility towards their peers, and their role in the greater community.

**Recommendations**

The natural progression in the development of this project would be the implementation of the curriculum in an early childhood education classroom. The critical reflection, both from the educator and the students, should guide the evaluation and relevancy of the project. Collaboration and input amongst educators will further strengthen the curriculum. Children’s energy, ideas, or questions may also change the course of the project, which is expected and desired seeing that they are co-constructors of their educational experience. The project should be considered as a dynamic tool that can be continually recast and transformed to meet the needs of the educator and the students. As peace educators, it is most important that the core principles and values of peace education be upheld even if the educational environment guides the project in a different direction.

Peace education is most effective and sustainable if it is integrated as a system-wide approach. Initiating conversations about the importance of peace education with colleagues, school administrators, and families is an important next step in the development of this project.
This would ensure that justice and peace are integral aspects of the school culture and larger systems.

This project was developed for educational settings within the United States. However, from my experience working as an early childhood educator in an international context, I believe the foundations of peace education are applicable to a variety of educational environments. Educators from different cultural settings can model principles of peace education to demonstrate how students can work towards social justice and peace. I hope that this project can be used as a responsive tool which can respond to diverse educational settings, both nationally and internationally.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

A Curriculum Guide For Early Childhood Educators

Teaching Towards a Culture of Peace in Early Childhood Education Classrooms
A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

TEACHING TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

BY: SAMANTHA FERBER
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INTRODUCTION:

- Inspiration
- The Power Of Education
- The Value Of Peace Education In Early Childhood Education
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INSPIRATION

This curriculum guide was borne out of my experiences in two very unique early childhood educational settings. My first experience began as a Peace Corps Volunteer in a rural village in Morocco. I found the traditional practices of the teacher to include call-and-response, rote memorization, and a general lack of creative outlets. The classrooms had almost no resources—no markers or crayons to do art projects, no toys to play with, and no books to read. Children, ages 3 to 4, were being taught how to sit at a desk for hours at a time in preparation for future schooling. Following this experience, I began teaching at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of San Francisco as a preschool teacher. Academics were highly prioritized by parents and there was little value placed on experiences outside of a community with little diversity—both economically and socially. The varying experiences were highlighted by an extreme difference in the pedagogical practices of the educator, the values inherent in the school system, and the resources available.

I found that my experience in Morocco was not unique to Morocco—there are many preschools in the U.S. that are under resourced, lack quality educational experiences, and promote traditional teaching methodologies. There is also a limited amount of high quality early childhood educational settings—such as the JCC—and they generally reach a specific demographic. I found that there was a need for educators to cultivate curriculum and pedagogical practices that reaches across these two different dynamics to help children come to an awareness of the inequalities around them. With this curriculum guide, I hope to provide teachers with the tools necessary to make this possible and to work toward a more equal and just educational environment.
THE POWER OF EDUCATION

“Education either functions as an instrument ... to bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women ... discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 1970, p. 34)

Educational systems may be sites of oppression because of inherent structural violence towards children. This can manifest in multiple ways—discipline by an authoritative teacher, for example, or perpetuation of the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970), in which teachers view their principal responsibility to be bestowing their own knowledge upon the students. Freire (1970) explains that “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits that the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). This type of learning promotes complacency and conformity as the child receives information without any active engagement in the learning process.

Problem-posing education contradicts the banking concept of education, which is commonly practiced in the U.S. educational system. Problem-posing education engages students and teachers to work together in the learning process and promotes critical thinking. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) define problem-posing education as “the education for freedom and emphasizes that teachers must see themselves in a partnership with their students. As part of this relationship, the teachers must see themselves as teacher-student, ready to accept that their students possess knowledge and solutions they can share with the teacher” (p. 34). By creating an educational space that is driven by problem-posing education, even the youngest learners of the educational system will research, experiment, and produce knowledge. For this reason, the curriculum included in my project will be used as provocations, or experiences that provoke interest, for children’s learning. Ultimately, the child’s interest in the experience should guide the educator.

The goal of problem-posing education is praxis, simply understood as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 126). The curriculum will establish a process for reflection and action that will develop critical thinking and agency; teachers will consider how their beliefs about the world are formed and how they will advocate for those beliefs. My project intends to deconstruct the traditionally held assumptions early childhood educators have of young children and how these beliefs perpetuate injustices and discrimination. Using
praxis, educators are provided the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about children and exercise agency by deciding on how they will partake in the student-teacher relationship.

Problem-posing education and praxis are two defining components of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy requires both students and teachers alike to become part of both dialogue and knowledge production within its educational system. A central aim of critical pedagogy, then, is: to engage teachers and students in a critical, dialectical examination of how power relations (particularly connected to the construction of knowledge) operate in schools and society and create or sustain hegemonic structures; and to equip teachers and students with the language of critique and the rhetoric of empowerment to become transformative agents who recognize, challenge, and transform injustice and inequitable social structures. (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 22)

Through the implementation of my project, teachers will examine their power, hierarchical structures, and privileged knowledge, which works to sustain inequalities within the school system. Teachers will be provided with a tool to engage in a critical reflection of their environment, conflict-resolution, and engagement with the community within which they work. This process leads to a transformation of the traditional educational system, one that deconstructs hegemonic values and assumptions that benefit the oppressor and maintain social inequalities (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016).

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally grounded in the development of my project because children are considered active agents of social change with the competencies to engage in their own knowledge production and voice their beliefs and rights in the classroom. This view of children works to disrupt the commonly held belief that children are incompetent and lacking knowledge. These values and image of the child influenced the development of my curriculum.
THE VALUE OF PEACE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Peace education “considers the ways in which human agency dynamically interacts with structures and forms of violence; and, in turn, contemplates the potential for educational spaces — formal and informal — to be sites of individual and collective transformation” (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 4).

Peace education can participate in addressing the greater structures of inequality in education, which allows students and teachers to work collaboratively in the learning process, recognize students’ capabilities within themselves, amongst their peers, and within their community, and engages students as agents of social change. Reardon (2000) describes peace education as:

The transmission of knowledge about requirements of, the obstacles to, and possibilities for achieving and maintaining peace; training in skills for interpreting the knowledge; and the development of reflective and participatory capacities for applying the knowledge to overcome problems and achieve possibilities. (p. 399)

Peace education shifts the pedagogical practices of the educator, the curriculum, the environment, and reconceptualizes the educational system as a whole. It requires early childhood educators to reimagine the role of the child as a researcher of their own learning environment, acknowledge their competencies and strengths, recognize each individual voice in the classroom, and promote values of peace through curriculum and daily practices.

One way to reimagine educational spaces as sites of transformation rather than oppression is through peace education. To understand peace education, it is important to note that it is not just a subject in school like English or math. Peace education is the approach to instruction just as much as the actual subject matter. Reardon (2000) a seminal scholar in the field, makes a distinction between “education for peace” and “education about peace.” Education about peace, in the context of early childhood education, may teach a lesson about celebrating our similarities and our differences. Education for peace is more concerned with the pedagogical practices used in an educational setting and the process of sharing information between the teacher and the student. It is critical that peace education involves education about peace and education for peace for the process to be effective and create sustaining
change. Peace education should be integrated into the entirety of the curriculum and the greater culture of the classroom.

The quality of education provided to children in the United States varies immensely and peace education is generally lacking in early childhood settings. Peace education should be implemented at this level and offered to children of diverse backgrounds—those who may not receive the education they deserve and those who are otherwise unaware such communities exist. With the limited resources for the integration of peace education for young children, it is necessary to have access to a curriculum guide and model for the implementation of such pedagogical practices in early childhood education.
WHO CAN USE THIS CURRICULUM GUIDE?

This curriculum guide was conceived keeping in mind the diverse educational settings of early childhood education in the United States. It is especially targeted for preschool classrooms of children aged two and a half to four years old. However, it can be modified for use in early elementary school where teachers hope to incorporate peace education into their classrooms. Early childhood educators are the primary audience for this guidebook, but any educator, parent, or caregiver can benefit from the concepts of peace education.

This curriculum guide should stem from a critical engagement between teachers and the communities within which they work, as well as a reflection between the needs of the students and the pedagogical practices of the educator. Peace education needs to be “...in constant redefinition and its meaning critically recast in relation to contexts that are authentic to the moment” (Verma, 2017, p. 9) in order to address the varying experiences young children have in early childhood education. In providing a handbook on the workings of peace education in early childhood education, it should be considered as a dynamic tool, in which educators can reflect on their particular educational environment and transform it to meet the needs of the children and communities with which they work. The curriculum included will be used as provocations, or experiences that provoke interest, for children’s learning. Ultimately, the child’s interest in the experience should guide the educator. Thus, the activities are provided as suggestions that the educator can build upon or morph according to their classrooms.
PART ONE:
ROLE OF THE TEACHER AS PEACE EDUCATOR
REIMAGINE THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD

Children are full of potential and should be acknowledged for their confidence, strength, resilience, and capabilities. There are three foundational principles that should guide peace educators in early childhood education:

1. Children are co-researchers of their own learning experience.
2. Children are human beings that have voice.
3. Children are active agents of change within their community.

The idea that children are co-researchers of their own educational endeavors calls into question the hierarchical student-teacher relationship that is prevalent in most traditional educational settings. As peace educators, it is important to focus on the exchange of knowledge between student and teacher, as a tool for collaboration and connection. This conception of the student-teacher relationship influences the curriculum content and pedagogical practices because it recognizes the children’s expertise and life experiences, which guides them in their learning.

In order for children to be co-researchers of their learning environment, it is imperative that educators listen to their voices. It is through the attention to dialogue, questions, and varying viewpoints that children can be listened to and recognized as human beings. Children’s abilities and competencies to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection must be honored and respected. One of the main objectives as educators is to “…conceptualize a field in which education is viewed as learning and responding to the voices of younger members of society, in which we continually search for ways to connect our human lives to each other” (Cannella, 2002, p. 167).

This leads to the final point, which values children’s participation in their community, whether that be inside the classroom, the greater preschool, or outside of the formal educational setting. As professionals of early childhood education, it is critical to recognize students as active participants of their environment. Peace education seeks to understand children’s complex understandings of their world, appreciate their insights and perspectives as they learn, and engage them as participants of their community.
IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTION

Teachers—like children, and everyone else—feel the need to grow in their competences; they want to transform experiences into thoughts, thoughts into reflections, and reflections into new thoughts and new actions. They also feel the need to make predictions, to try things out, and to interpret them. Teachers must learn to interpret ongoing processes rather than wait to evaluate results. (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 73)

A huge responsibility of teaching peace education depends on the teacher. The teacher requires the tools to work toward a more equal and just educational environment. First, peace educators should reflect on their own potential biases and reflect on their own practices that cultivate inequalities in the classroom. Secondly, teachers must question the hierarchical student-teacher relationship and consider how their teaching methodology provides opportunities for agency, critical thinking, decision-making, and community building. As peace educators, we must consider ourselves co-learners and co-collaborators with the children in their experimentation and curiosities. Integrating the Peace Education Critical reflection tool into the
classroom can encourage educators to be reflective of their teaching practices and their curriculum content.

The Peace Education Critical Reflection Tool provided in the infographic above consists of five different stages. Stage one is context, stage two is observations, stage three is questions, stage four is action, and stage five is reflection. The context may be a problem, pattern, need, circumstance, project, or activity. The context is followed by the teachers’ observations about the children and any questions they may have for themselves. The first three stages are the planning stage, which occurs before the teacher engages with their students. The fourth stage, or the action stage, is the implementation of the project or the steps it takes to address the problem or need. During this stage, the teacher works collaboratively with the children. The final stage is a critical reflection of the action stage, which occurs after the teachers’ engagement with the students. The critical reflection tool can be applied toward the classroom environment, including the classroom materials, conflict resolution, and family engagement or it can be used toward the activities. As the teacher gains experience in working with this model, they can become more specific in both the goals they are accomplishing and the reflective questions. They can take ownership of this model to best meet the needs of their community and their classroom.
PART TWO:
ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF PEACE IN THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT
THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The classroom environment consists of the materials in the classroom, as well as the culture created by the educator. As peace educators, it is important to continually reflect on the classroom environment. Is the environment supportive of the values that you would like to teach? Does it encourage inclusivity, critical thinking, community building, and social justice? Is the classroom open and inviting? Here I utilize the peace education critical reflection tool to focus on three aspects of the classroom environment—classroom materials, conflict resolution, and family involvement.

Context 1: Classroom Materials

Observations: Choosing classroom materials requires deep thoughtfulness and intentionality to support the values of peace education. Children should be part of the decision-making process when choosing certain materials for the classroom.

Questions: How are the materials selected for the classroom? Does the process promote agency and community building within the classroom? Are the children’s voices represented in the classroom? Are the materials easily accessible to the children? Is the placement of materials fostering independence and self-help skills? Is the literature provided promoting diversity and inclusivity?

Action: If you are making play-do with the children they can collectively vote on what color to make it or you can incorporate them into the process of mixing paints for the classroom and choosing names to represent the new colors. It is also important to offer students opportunities to partake in classroom care. For example, they can assist in spraying and wiping down the tables, sweeping, organizing the books, or sorting materials. By taking the time to engage the students in these processes, children feel a sense of ownership and belonging to their community.

Reflection: What questions do you have for yourself about the process of choosing classroom materials? Did the children participate in the selection of the classroom materials? What would you have done differently? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context 2: Conflict Resolution

Observations: Educators must actively work against traditional teacher-student relationships in order to create a more socially just classroom. Children want to be acknowledged for their agency and decision-making when resolving conflict.

Questions: Do the conflict resolution practices align with a socially just classroom environment? When you are feeling frustrated as a teacher, how are you responding? What values are you suggesting based on your responses? Do you respond this way universally to all children? Are you modeling values of peace and social justice when navigating a conflict? When is it appropriate to step in and when is it appropriate to step back?

Action: It is important to be in constant reflection of actions and practices that might create a hierarchy between teacher and student. Consider the ways you are modeling peace education for children when handling a conflict. Allow opportunity for them to be heard. Think about initiating conflict resolution by asking the children: “how we can solve this problem?”

Reflection: How did you navigate conflict resolution in the classroom? What would you have done differently? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?

Context 3: Family Involvement

Observations: Early childhood education is often a child’s first introduction to a broader social environment outside of the home. Until now, much of their identity is rooted in their family. It is the aim of peace educators to integrate the child’s family cultural knowledge into the classroom to deepen community and celebrate diversity.

Questions: Is the classroom environment welcoming and inviting to families? Is it open and accessible to all families? Are you meeting the needs of the families? What are the realistic expectations of these families? What are the not so realistic expectations? What needs are your responsibility to meet?

Action: Create a classroom that is open and welcoming to all families. Consider different ways to include families into your classroom.

Reflection: How have you incorporated families into the classroom environment? What more can you do to encourage inclusivity? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
PART THREE:
ACTIVITIES TO HELP PROMOTE PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- be encouraged to think about their identity.
- engage in a thoughtful reflection and dialogue of their similarities and differences.
- celebrate their own and others’ individuality and uniqueness.

Observations:
- children seek to be seen, heard, and valued.
- children are building their self-concepts.
- children are working to develop a sense of belonging and connection, as well as a sense of uniqueness.

Questions:
Is the suggested literature promoting diversity and inclusivity? Are the materials for the activity supportive of the values that you would like to teach? How are the materials selected for the activity? Are the children participating in the selection of the materials? Does the process promote agency and independence? Are the children’s voices represented?
**Action:**
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
- It's Okay to be Different by Todd Parr
- I Like Myself by Karen Beaumont
- Whoever You Are by Mem Fox

Activity Duration: 30 min for the activity and 30 min for the extension activity

Materials Needed: Use recycled materials as a way for children to create an art representation of themselves. Some materials may include: sticks, straws, CDs, beads, tiles, pom poms, small wooden blocks, yarn, etc. As a canvas for each child to work on, tape down a white piece of paper to the table.

Step 1: Begin the lesson by sharing with the children that they will be creating a self-portrait of themselves. Ask the children if they know what a self-portrait is and listen to their responses. Step 2: Provide examples of famous self-portraits, such as Frida Kahlo, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, and Amedeo Modigliani. Provide children with the opportunity to discuss the self-portraits and offer any thoughts, ideas, or wonderings. Step 3: When finished with the discussion, suggest to the children that they first work together to create a self-portrait of the teacher as an example. Begin by asking the children what parts of the body they notice, such as the body, face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hair, legs, arms, hands, feet, etc. Have each child, one at a time, choose a material to represent a different part of the body and place it on the paper. Step 4: Upon completion of the example, offer the children the opportunity to create their own self-portrait and remind them to carefully consider the different parts of their own body. Throughout the process, gently ask the children what they are using the material for in their self-portrait. Step 5: Before cleaning up the materials, offer the children the opportunity to discuss their thoughts, ideas, or wonderings of their artwork. Ask the children if they notice any similarities or differences in their self-portraits. Allow students adequate time to express their thoughts and ideas. Step 6: When the children are finished, photograph each one to print out at the end of the day.

Other activities/extensions:

Step 1: Offer each child the photograph of their self-portrait. Provide children with black markers to create drawings of their self-portraits. Step 2: Upon completion of their drawings, provide watercolor to add color. In the process of filling in color, pay close attention to the different colors in skin tones. Offer
children the opportunity to mix their own colors and create a name for their color. Encourage them to think about how their skin color might be a combination of more than one color. It may be helpful to photograph the child’s skin up close and provide them with a picture to use as a reference as they are mixing colors.

Step 3: Continue the discussion of their thoughts, ideas, or wonderings of their drawings. Guide the children in a discussion about the similarities and differences amongst their self-portraits and a reflection of the experience as a whole.

Home-school connection (optional):

A large part of a child’s identity is rooted in their family. Families work to develop a child’s initial sense of belonging and connection, as well as a sense of uniqueness. An “All About Me” book provides children with a connection to their family identity within the classroom and allows the children to share in their similarities and differences amongst their families. Here is a list of suggested pages to include in an “All About Me” book: When I was young, Family near and far, What we do in my family, The Languages we speak, My favorite experiences, Things that give me comfort, What makes me special, and so on. Ask the parents to make a book with their children. The book will live in the classroom and be easily accessible to the children in the book area for them to openly explore.

Reflection:
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children change the direction of the activity? If so, did you still teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- embrace gender diversity in themselves and in others.
- engage in conversations around gender through diverse literature.
- have the opportunity to participate in imaginative play and creative expression of identity with a drag queen.

Observations:
- children seek to be seen, heard, and valued.
- children are developing their self-concepts.
- children are working to develop a sense of belonging and connection, as well as a sense of uniqueness.
- children may not follow traditional gender norms.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature encourage diversity and inclusivity? Is the art activity supportive of the values that you would like to teach? Is the drag queen prepared to teach at a developmentally appropriate level? Are the children’s voices represented?

*Idea developed and adapted from Drag Queen Story Hour*
**Action:**

List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
- Jacob’s New Dress
- Red: A Crayon’s Story
- Introducing Teddy: A gentle story about gender and friendship

Activity Duration: 1 hour for the activity and 1 hour for the extension activity

Materials needed: Prior to the activity, discuss with the Drag Queen what materials they will need for the art project.

Step 1: Inform the children that today they will have a special guest visiting for storytime—a drag queen. Introduce the idea of a drag queen by sharing with the children that a drag queen is a person that dresses up as a way to express different parts of who they are.

Step 2: Follow the curriculum developed by Drag Queen Story Hour, which includes reading a few books, song, dance, and an art activity.

Step 3: Offer the children the opportunity to ask the Drag Queen questions.

**Reflection:**

What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children change the direction of the activity? If so, did you still teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?

**Definition:**

Drag:

...an artistic way of expressing yourself and showing the world different parts of who you are and who you want to be. Drag queens often express their feminine sides or different aspects of their gender and personality through dressing up, putting on performances, marching in parades, and volunteering in their communities. There are drag queens, drag kings, drag princes, and drag princesses—anyone can be any of the above! All that matters is that, when you play and dress up, you feel comfortable and creative (Drag Queen Story Hour, n.d.)
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- develop prosocial attitudes and empathy.
- build friendships within the classroom community.
- establish agency and independence.
- broaden their perspectives of themselves in relation to others.

Observations:
- children have a voice and want to be heard.
- children seek to contribute.
- children are practicing effective communication to build relationships.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature promote friendship and empathy? Are the children’s voices represented? Does the process promote agency, independence, as well as community building?
Action:
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
You Are Friendly by Todd Snow and Melodee Strong

Activity Duration: 30 min - 1 hour for lunchtime

Materials Needed: White paper to line the tables and crayons or markers to color the tables.

Step 1: Ask the children: What does it mean to be a friend? What does friendship mean to you? Listen to and record their answers. Possible responses may include sharing toys, helping someone, playing together, etc.
Step 2: Remind the children that an important part of being a friend is sharing. Inform them that one day for lunch they will be sharing their favorite food from home for a friendship potluck.
Step 3: Follow-up with the parents before the potluck and ask them to provide a small serving of the child’s favorite food for lunchtime. The food provided can be as simple as the child’s favorite fruit.
Step 4: On the day of the potluck, bring the lunch tables together (if they are not already) and line them with paper for the children to decorate. If there are flowers available, gather flowers with the children to decorate the tables. During lunch, bring out the food the children brought to share and reflect back on their responses about what it means to be a friend.

Reflection:
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children change the direction of the activity? If so, did you still teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- develop autonomy and independence.
- engage in an exchange of knowledge and expertise with their peers.
- celebrate their individual strengths, abilities, and knowledge production.
- build a deeper peer-to-peer connection through acts of reciprocity.

Observations:
- children may seek others to demonstrate a strength, or to seek support where they feel less comfortable; to extend an experience, or to express knowledge or feeling; to learn a new skill, or take a new risk
- children want to feel useful and competent.
- children seek to be seen, heard, and valued.
- children seek independence.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature promote peer-to-peer learning and self-help skills? Are the children’s voices represented? Does the process promote agency, independence, as well as community building?
**Action:**
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
Penguin’s Hidden Talent by Alex Latimer
The Dot by Peter H. Reynolds
The Most Magnificent Thing by Ashley Spires

Activity Duration: 5-15 min per child

Materials needed: will be determined after dialogue with the children.

Step 1: Begin the lesson by asking the children if there is anything they feel like they are really good at now that maybe they couldn’t do when they were younger.
Step 2: Continue the discussion by posing questions to the children: What is an expert? Do you know of anyone that is an expert at something? What makes them an expert? Provide examples, if needed, about experts within your preschool community such as an art specialist.
Step 3: Then suggest to the children that they choose something they feel like they are an expert at that they would like to teach their peers. Examples include: an expert at scrambling eggs, an expert at drawing cats, an expert at rolling snakes out of clay, or an expert at identifying shells, etc. Keep in mind that for some children, deciding on an expertise might be more challenging. Be open to utilizing a family’s knowledge about their child to help come up with their experience or even incorporating a family member into the teaching of their talent.
Step 4: Give the children adequate time to share their expertise with their peers.

Home-school connection (optional):

The process of reflection is important because it provides children the opportunity to analyze and interpret their experiences and come to new understandings. Creating a timeline of the child’s past experiences, engages them in a critical reflection of what is important to their life history so far. Things to possibly include on the timeline are: when they were born, when they first started walking, when they first ate solid food, when they went to the emergency room, etc. Upon completion of the timeline, children can bring them into the classroom to share and have discussions about similarities and differences in their timelines.

**Reflection:**
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children change the direction of the activity? If so, did you
still teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- celebrate family cultural knowledge.
- feel their classroom is open and welcoming to their families.
- celebrate diversity.
- develop a deep sense of community.

Observations:
- children’s identity is rooted in the home.
- children want to make connections and feel apart of a community.
- children make comparisons and connections about their families and themselves.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature promote diversity and community building? Are the children’s voices represented? Is the activity welcoming and inviting to all families?
**Action:**
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
The Family Book by Todd Parr
Who's In My Family? All About Our Families by Robie H. Harris
The Colors of Us by Karen Katz

Activity Duration: 30 min to 1 hour

Every child comes from a unique family background and it is important to know what makes the families in your classroom special. By inviting families to share an important aspect of their personal culture, it provides an opportunity to celebrate family's cultural knowledge and diversity. These celebrations may be extensions of a family's culture, based in an old or new tradition, related to a funny story, or a special place in the world. Examples include: sharing about opening day for their Alma Mater's football team, the special dinner a family prepares, Dia de los Muertos, New Year holidays, a traditional story or song, or an annual family reunion camping trip. It is also important to encourage families to use this opportunity as a way to connect and dialogue with their child about what makes their family special. This activity should be suggested to the families, but it is ultimately their decision as to whether they would like to participate. The teacher should also be open to any interpretation of family defined by their students and community.

Home-school connection (optional):
Ask the families to work with their child to create a family portrait. As the families come into the classroom to do their cultural share, they can also share their family portrait and add it to a class book titled “Our Families,” which will be kept with the “All About Me” books in the reading area.

**Reflection:**
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children guide the direction of the activity? Did you teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- engage in an exchange of knowledge and experiences with another community or culture.
- celebrate similarities and differences amongst larger communities or cultures.
- build connections across different communities or cultures.
- broaden their perspectives of the world.

Observations:
- children are interested in peer-learning and exchanging knowledge.
- children seek to demonstrate their agency.
- children are developing their literacy skills.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature promote diversity? Are the children's voices represented? Does the process promote diversity and community building?
**Action:**
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
Dear Dragon: A Pen Pal Tale by Josh Funk
Same Same But Different by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw
Children Just Like Me: A new celebration of children around the world by Catherine Saunders, Sam Priddy, and Katy Lennon

Activity Duration: Varies depending on level of engagement

The idea of the penpal project is to reach out to another classroom outside of your preschool community. This could be in the United States or internationally. By writing to a penpal, children have the opportunity to learn about someone outside of their own preschool. In the process of asking questions and sharing thoughts and ideas, children are able to broaden their perspectives of the world. While children at this level do not have the full literacy skills to compose letters, the questions should be written down by their teacher and the responses read aloud during meeting time. The questions should be produced by the children. The children should also partake in the letter writing by writing to their own capabilities. This may be making marks on a paper, practicing letters of the alphabet, or writing words depending on the age of the child. It is important to start by telling the children about the other class and showing their location on a map. You should inform them that they will be writing letters back and forth to learn more about each other. Begin by asking the children what they would like to know about the children from the other class. If they struggle to come up with ideas, you could offer suggestions such as: what do you eat for lunch, what does your school look like, how many children are in your class, etc. As the children correspond with one another, the questions should become more detailed.

**Reflection:**
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Do the children guide the direction of the activity? Did you teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
Context:
To create a culture of peace in the classroom, children should
- address a social justice issue pertinent to their lives.
- engage in a service learning project.
- participate in community engagement.
- broaden their perspectives beyond their classroom.

Observations:
- children want to experience autonomy and decision-making.
- children want to feel a sense of community.
- children seek to be seen, heard, and valued.

Questions:
Is the literature promoting the values that you would like to teach? Does the literature promote social justice and community engagement? Are the children’s voices represented? Does the process promote agency and community building?
**Action:**
List of suggested books leading up to the activity:
- A is for Activist
- Last Stop on Market Street

Activity Duration: Varies depending on the depth of the project

It is important to create a classroom environment that values the voices and perspectives of the children in their classroom. Through this activity, teachers will engage in a discussion of a real-world issue that affects the children’s everyday lives. Once students have discussed a social injustice pertinent to their lives, teachers will guide them in a service learning project to act upon the issue. This project will ultimately connect the children to issues in the larger community. Possible activities include: gardening or beautification projects, bake sale, book or food drive, peace march, etc.

**Reflection:**
What questions do you have for yourself about this process? What would you have done differently? Did the children guide the direction of the activity? Did you teach to the core principles of the activity outlined in the context section? Are your actions teaching toward a culture of peace?
REFERENCES


