# EDUCATION FOR PEACEBUILDING CITIZENSHIP:
## A Proposal for Teaching and Learning in the Context of Fragile Peace

**BY** Kathy Bickmore

CANADIANS ARE LIVING IN A FRAGILE PEACE. WE ARE AMONG THE FEW COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD THAT HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED AN ACT OF WAR ON OUR OWN SOIL DURING THE 20TH CENTURY. YET THE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 TERRORIST ASSAULT ON THE US WAS NONETHELESS A WATERSHED IN MANY CANADIANS' ERODING SENSE OF SECURITY. INCREASINGLY SINCE THE 1963 CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, THROUGH THE 1980S NUCLEAR ARMS RACE, THE 1990S PERSIAN GULF WAR, AND NOW IN THIS 21ST CENTURY TERRORIST LANDSCAPE, PROFOUND CHANGES IN COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE HAVE MADE IT MORE AND MORE IMPOSSIBLE TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND OTHER NON-COMBATANTS FROM THIS INSECURITY. CHANGES IN THE PRACTICE OF WAR-MAKING ITSELF HAVE MADE CIVILIANS, EVEN CHILDREN AND THOSE WHOSE GOVERNMENTS ARE SUPPOSEDLY NOT AT WAR, INCREASINGLY TARGETS. AS WITH MANY ASPECTS OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND POPULAR CULTURE, OFTEN THE CHILDREN SEEM TO NOTICE THESE CHANGES EVEN BEFORE THE REST OF US. GLOBAL INSTANT COMMUNICATIONS AND URBANIZED POSTMODERN CULTURE BRING THE NEWS DIRECTLY TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE, INCREASINGLY UN-BUFFERED (ELKIND 1995). PERHAPS THEY ARE MORE OPEN TO THAT NEWS, OR LESS EXPERIENCED WITH DENIAL, THAN MANY ADULTS. SO IT WAS WITH NUCLEAR NIGHTMARES 20 YEARS AGO (MACY 1983), AND SO IT IS TODAY. SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 MADE VISIBLE WHAT WAS ALREADY BECOMING TRUE: OUR SMALL WARRING WORLD KEEPS GETTING SMALLER, AND EVEN CHILDREN IN RELATIVELY PEACEFUL CANADA ARE NO LONGER IMMUNE.

So let's be clear that we're not talking about *whether* to tell the children about terrorism. They know. What we need to talk about is *what* young people need to know, and *how* we can help them to learn what they need, in order to regenerate hope and security in a world that includes terrorism. This article is about how we can help young people to develop their individual and collective capacities for building a more robust, stable peace.

Peace, to be real and sustained, requires vibrant activity, not quiet. Among diverse human beings in a complex and shifting environment, conflict (although not necessarily violence) is a constant. Thus peacebuilding requires *processes* for handling various kinds of conflicts, problems, and disagreements, equitably and nonviolently, so that solutions will last. Equally important, sustainable peace is built upon healthy, reliable, balanced *relationships* (thus connection, communication, and equitable interaction) among individuals and among social groups. Such a vibrant peace would be impossible to impose from the top: since everybody has social relationships and everybody has conflicts, everybody has the need and the opportunity to participate in peacemaking and peacebuilding. To participate in peaceful conflict management and in healthy relationships, citizens need access to justly-exchanged *resources* for sustaining their lives and for helping with difficult conflicts, and a breadth of *knowledge and skills* for handling conflict and human differences.

Where there is weakness in any of these four dimensions – inaccessible or unfair conflict management processes, scarcity or inequitable exchange of resources, inequitable relationships, and/or citizens lacking knowledge and capability to manage conflict – then conflicts tend to be more intense and harmful. Thus coercive peacekeeping becomes necessary, whereas pro-active, sustainable peacebuilding becomes more difficult.

Democracy is essential to peacebuilding (Mousseau 2001). Democratic governance and participation processes are mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution – ensuring equitable access, protecting rights in human relationships, regulating the development and exchange of resources, and engaging in critical reasoning to make other self-governance decisions. In short, peace is built upon active democracy, and thus upon informed citizenship. Thus education for peacebuilding is citizenship education: children need to learn how to become full participants in building and sustaining this vibrant peace.

People learn through experience, as much as through receiving and reflecting upon information. Thus in *peacebuilding citizenship education*, learners' awareness and competence are developed through models and practice, as they participate in problem-solving processes, in developing, protecting, and exchanging resources, and in their relationships within and between the cultures and communities around them. Also, because human minds rely on language for understanding, explicit knowledge and skills for handling conflict are an essential complement and anchor for this learning through practice. While teaching without authentic practice would be suspect and easily forgotten, practice without thoughtful naming and reflection would tend to be uncritical, inaccessible for some and not easily adapted to new situations or needs. In schools, the lived curriculum of school discipline and governance, resource use, and human inclusion and exclusion educates hand in hand with the peace and conflict topics in the formal curriculum. Peacebuilding citizenship education does not require adding a great deal of new curriculum content, but requires identifying and refining or reorienting the hidden education about conflict that is already embedded in the lived and the formal curriculum. I will illustrate in turn four dimensions of this education.

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## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

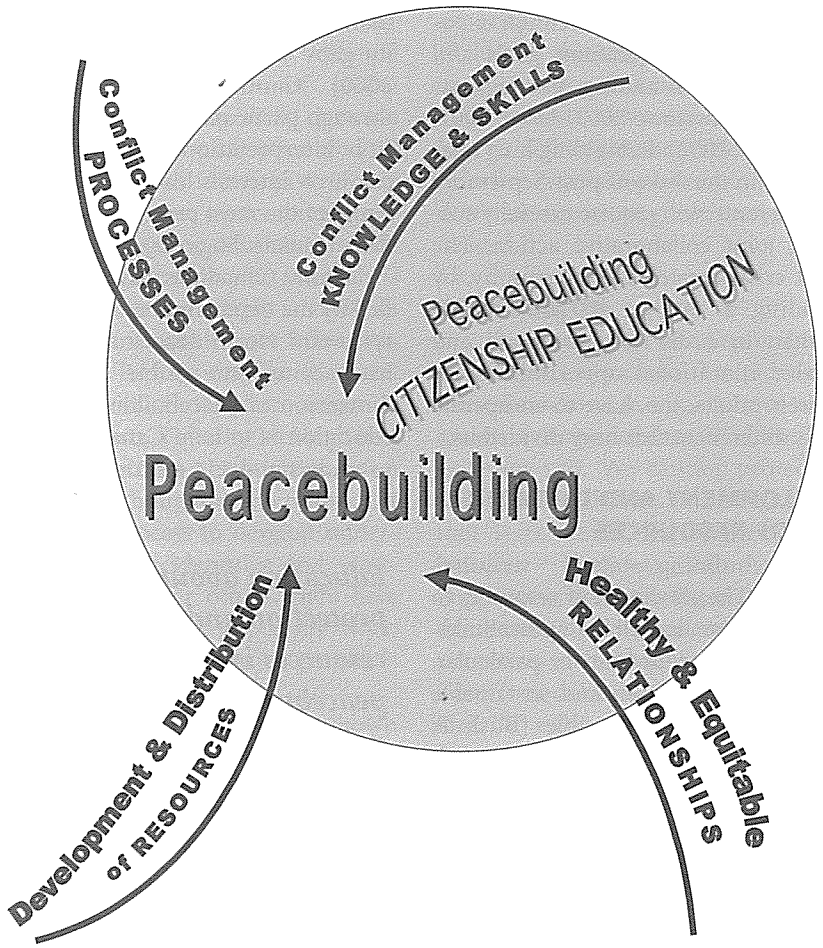
The culture and (implicit and explicit) regulations of any community or school provide a pattern of opportunities and processes for managing conflict. These habits and procedures are important as elements of building, making and keeping peace. Accessible mechanisms for handling conflict can make the difference in whether tensions escalate into violence. As models and practice, these cultural practices are equally important as learning opportunities for their participants (Lederach 1995).

Contrary to the impression given by the mass media, the incidence of violence among young people has not increased in recent years (Brooks et. al. 2000). However, restrictive and punitive approaches to discipline in schools are increasingly prevalent (Canadian Press 2002a). Unfortunately, these policies often disproportionately punish less-affluent and non-white students (Johnston 2000). Similar racialized biases in our formal legal system have been especially visible in counter-terrorist security measures since September 11, 2001 (Canadian Press 2002b, Walkom 2002). Children learn about conflict management, obedience and social differentiation from their experiences with these processes, in and out of school. Replacing punitive and inequitable discipline procedures with initiatives for student learning through participation in problem-solving – such as student governance and conflict negotiation – can improve students' capacity to handle differing viewpoints and their interest in engaging in school (Adalbjarnadóttir 1992, Sadowsky 1992). Because expertise and planned curriculum are important in formal education, schools are unlikely to practice 'real' democracy: teachers and administrators are not elected, nor are students offered the right to refuse to participate (Raywid 1976).

Nonetheless, schools can offer regular opportunities for students to practice many skills associated with 'civil peace' — thoughtful, equitable, nonviolent decision-making in the context of diversity (Perkins 2002).

Some of the most well-studied school-based conflict resolution programs are alternative conflict resolution procedures that complement discipline regimes. In most cases, a relatively small group of students are trained as peer mediators; the other students learn by observing and participating in this peer-facilitated conflict negotiation process. Where implemented equitably and fully enough to affect some patterns of conflict management, such programs have been shown to improve students' understandings of nonviolent conflict management, their social conflict behavior, and their constructive engagement with school (Bickmore 2003, Cunningham et.al. 1998, Jones 1998). Because of the academic relevance of conflict management skills and safe, engaging learning contexts, peer mediation program implementation is also associated in many cases with strengthened academic achievement (Bickmore 2000). Peer mediation is neither sufficient as a sole approach to student conflict education, nor effective for every conflict such as power-imbalanced situations (Bickmore 2002b, Opffer 1997). However, this research demonstrates the valuable contribution to peacebuilding education of student participation in conflict management and self-governance processes.

**PEACEBUILDING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**
**MULTIPLE DIMENSION OF PRACTICE, REFLECTION, AND LEARNING**




## (RE)BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Canadian society – because of its wonderfully diverse membership of recent and longer-ago immigrants and aboriginal peoples – presents a unique opportunity for rebuilding relationships across the boundaries of difference that often divide the world. We are not one big, happy family: serious conflicts and inequities persist. However, policies such as multiculturalism, hate crime laws, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provide a threshold, were designed to move our relationships in the direction of respectful coexistence. There has been an escalation of hostile incidents against Middle Easterners, Muslims and Jews in Canada over this last year, but also there has been condemnation of such hateful actions, and some attempts at redress, from those in authority (B'nai Brith 2002, Brown 2001, Rushowy 2001).

Public schools are among the first places where children work together and share 'public' space with their diverse neighbors. As such, schools present opportunities for young people to learn to develop healthy, equitable and inclusive relationships with people of different origins, religions, economic statuses and cultural backgrounds (Paley 1992). Unfortunately, schools and classrooms are often organized in ways that actually encourage social competition, bullying, and exclusion (Aronson 2000, Gordon et.al. 2000). It is possible and effective to reorganize learning contexts to encourage respectful co-operative interaction and recognition of diverse abilities (Cohen & Lotan 1997, Oakes et.al. 1997). Certain curriculum and teaching strategies also can effectively reduce bias and intolerance (Avery et.al. 1997, Fine 1995, Ladson-Billings 1994, Mock 2000). Schools do not have a uniformly good record in nurturing peaceful relationships, but there is clear evidence that they can do so.

Relationship rebuilding requires practice, i.e. concrete action. Paradoxically, 'feet first' behavior change probably influences attitude change, more often than 'hearts and minds' attitude change causes behavior change (McCauley 2002). Past behavior, for example having worked with a member of a previously-disliked group, tends to have a strong influence on future behavior. Obviously not all interaction across differences leads to such happy conclusions. Simple contact is not enough, and in fact it can reinforce prejudices and hostilities if interactions are not equitable and safe. However, well-designed

programs of peacebuilding communication among members of conflicting groups can help them to unlearn hostility and prejudice, if they involve close, prolonged and frequent contact, co-operation toward common goals and equalized status among participants (Cairns & Hewstone 2002, Maoz 2002, Tal-Or et.al. 2002). Rebuilding hurt relationships in the wake of post-September 11 intolerance will require carefully sustained, joint collaborative action. The recent crisis creates an opportunity, by providing a catalyst to get moving together. In order to create safe and effective educational opportunities for children, adults, too, have to co-operate across differences that have divided us.

## DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Peacebuilding itself requires resources. The allocation of resources to basic education, as well as to peacebuilding citizenship education in particular, makes social inclusion and sustainable violence reduction possible (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). In Ontario today, such educational resources are often denied to children whose parents' legal immigration status is unclear (Koehl 2002). Such a denial deepens social divisions and puts our society, and these children most of all, at risk. Children learn what their society and government values by observing where tangible resources are placed, and which efforts at resource creation are valued. For example in schools, resources for competitive assessment, regulation and punishment seem to outweigh those for pro-active relationship-building and problem-solving learning activities.

Resource scarcity, contamination, or unfair exchange – whether local or global in scope – may cause and exacerbate conflict as well as inhibit efforts at resolution. Education about development, protection and exchange of resources is not sufficient for peacebuilding, but this awareness and capacity to analyze is a necessary condition. In Canada, as in other places that on average have high standards of living, many are not very conscious of the world's rapidly-increasing gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Rogers 2000). Meanwhile, modern mass communications have made that gap appallingly obvious to those experiencing relative deprivation. There is no more important source of global conflict and violence than this resource gap, and the 'ingenuity gaps' it exacerbates (Homer-Dixon 2000). Conflicts are often filtered through particular ideologies and identity interpretations, but underlying resource interests cause or exacerbate many of the most protracted social conflicts (Mukarubuga 2002, Ross 1993).

Some Canadians have seemed baffled by the depth and breadth of hostility toward North America that recently has become more visible. An important dimension of peacebuilding citizenship education is to help Canadian children to understand 21st century processes of global resource development and trade, and the poverty, disease, war, and terrorism that are the deadly consequences of the current inequitable exchange. This is not intended to discourage: only awareness can unleash the creative ingenuity needed to overcome these problems. Priorities in the allocation of physical and human resources limit what we can do in education, and are themselves educational topics that deserve more attention in the context of our fragile world system.

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## KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

Peacebuilding citizenship education will be best served by systemic changes that model and encourage tangible practice of nonviolent conflict management processes, healthy and equitable relationships, and development and just distribution of resources. At the same time, citizens' capacity for such peacebuilding depends upon their development of awareness, understanding and skills for making sense of conflict, violence and alternatives. There is a continuous interdependence between problem-posing and problem-solving, between the word and the world: "The unfinished character of [humans] and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity" (Freire 1970, p.72). Thus knowledge development – in dialogue with new patterns of behavior – is an important dimension of peacebuilding.

While it is true that schooling needs constantly to catch up with the world, there is already significant space for peacebuilding citizenship education in our formal curriculum. Ontario's 1998 Science and Technology curriculum expects grade 4 children to determine positive and negative effects of human alteration of the landscape (p.96), and Grade 5 children to evaluate the effects on natural and human environments of our use of different natural resources for energy (p.63). Ontario's 1998 Social Studies curriculum expects Grade 2 children to understand similarities and differences in the ways communities around the world meet their needs (p.30), and Grade 5 children to understand the rights and responsibilities of Canadians and how immigrants become Canadian citizens (p.37). By Grades 7 and 8 History, children are expected to examine conflicting viewpoints regarding historical issues (p.47) and to understand factors including social movements that contribute to change in society (p.53). Meaningful school curriculum faces the real-life conflicts that make science, geography, civics and history worth knowing.

Interpersonal conflict resolution skills are also important to success in the elementary curriculum. Ontario's 1997 Language curriculum expects children to present and justify their viewpoints to specific audiences in Grade 5 writing (p.19) and to make judgments about an author's content and viewpoint in Grade 5 reading (p.34). Nearly all literature plots involve some kind of conflict, so reading and writing are natural places for conflict education. In oral and visual communication by Grade 7, students are expected to respond constructively to alternative ideas or viewpoints, expressing opinions confidently but without try-

ing to dominate (p.46). Ontario's 1998 Health and Physical Education curriculum's healthy living strand includes personal safety and conflict resolution skills, for example describing exploitative behaviors in Grade 1 (p.12) and identifying challenges such as conflicting opinions in their relationships with family and friends in Grade 4 (p.15).

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At the interpersonal and relatively non-controversial level, conflict concepts and skills are easily integrated into the existing curriculum in many academic subjects. To really do peacebuilding citizenship education, however, we also need to find a little more space for the difficult questions — those that touch upon human fears, injustices and struggles over problem-solving.

More crucial than ever in this terrorist era, young people need to distinguish conflict (problems) from violence (symptoms). Conflicts are inevitable, and it is important to understand that they present choices because they can be handled in many different ways. To try to explain a problem, or to seek alternate solutions, is not to excuse a violent act. Even when hurt feelings might make retaliation seem attractive, other responses are more likely to be effective in eliminating the causes of future atrocities. Peacebuilding citizenship education includes vocabulary, examples and reflection on the ways conflicts may arise, evolve, escalate and de-escalate, and on the ways participants, bystanders, advocates, third party peacemakers and institutional changes can help to move conflicts away from violence and toward resolution.

Second, peacebuilding citizenship education must examine human diversity, including particular global and local conflicts, their contexts, and their participants. Bland multicultural awareness is not sufficient: building peace requires facing deep differences and felt enmities. The particular problems and players in conflict will change in our students' lifetimes, but today's preoccupations nonetheless present concepts and skill-building opportunities that will be useful in the future. In the wake of the September 2001 attacks, key knowledge that often is inadequately covered includes the geopolitics of global resources and trade, especially our own relation to energy consumption and oil interests in the Middle East (Klare 2001). Studying and overcoming ignorance and bias against Muslims, including the 18% of Muslims who are Arab, is important in its own right and as an instance of anti-intolerance education (Alavi 2001). Perhaps the Christian and 'white' identities of other terrorists, such as David Koresh, Timothy McVeigh and the anti-abortion murderers, also deserve more thoughtful attention. It is an on-going process to develop understanding for the identities and viewpoints of unfamiliar others, right here and across the world, especially when they are also parties to major geopolitical conflicts.

The September attacks have shown the need to study the changing character of war itself, including terrorism, and the evolving national and international institutions for conflict management and security. It can be daunting to teach questions without clear answers, but there are indeed places to begin. For example, many political change initiatives and international conventions already have invented successful ways to handle sticky transnational problems and even massive human rights violations (Ackerman & Duvall 2000, Boulding 1988, Soudien 2002). Our individualistic culture misleads us when it suggests that individuals are somehow so independent that we are not particularly influenced by, or influential in, big social institutions such as the state, the military and the 'globalized' business infrastructure. We make up those social structures, and we need to learn to see and understand them in order to change them (Bellah et.al. 1991).

Last and most important, peacebuilding citizenship education needs to help young people develop the capacity to think, speak and make decisions for themselves (while at the same time they expect and respect others' disagreement). Democracy and innovation depend upon this capacity. Open discussion of controversial matters in the classroom can help students to develop interest in the social and political world, capacity for reflective analytical and evaluative thinking, and a sense of efficacy as actors in their own lives (Hahn 1996, Houser 1996). Canadian curriculum guidelines do not preclude this kind of active citizenship education, but they don't encourage or guide it as well as is needed.

## CONCLUSION

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Canadians have an opportunity and an awesome responsibility. We have had a wake-up call. We cannot protect our children by closing our eyes, hoping that wars would be fought far away between professional soldiers. Supporting the bullying tactics of our southern neighbor will only give more people reason to think of us as enemies. The foundations of positive peace already exist in this country: our responsibility and hope is to build on those foundations an education for peacebuilding citizenship that can give our children the opportunity to create, together, a more nonviolent world.

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A complete list of the references for this text can be found at http://www.acs-aec.ca/e_magazine.html