Much effort has been made to improve access to quality education. However, to make a truly positive difference education must not only be high quality, but also transformative, provoking at least three layers of transformation: an increased sense of agency, a change in frame of reference and a reordering of values. If education is not intentionally made to be a tool for liberation, it stands in danger of becoming a tool of oppression. As early as the 1960s, Tanzanian educator and president Julius Nyerere critiqued the formal education system put in place during the colonial period as elitist, enslaving and oriented to ‘western’ interests and norms, “catering to the needs of the very small proportion of those who manage to enter the hierarchical pyramid of formal schooling.” (Kassam 251)

In her study of transgressive pedagogy, bell hooks describes attending her all-black grade school in the U.S. prior to integration as “sheer joy . . . I loved learning.” Her teachers, mostly black women, saw their work as mission, as “a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization.” In contrast, when she entered the desegregated school, she was “mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom.” Instead, it became something that reinforced domination. (hooks 2-4)

Today, education systems still reinforce the stories, values and norms of the dominant culture. Those who don’t fit that image internalize the message that they are inferior, while those from the dominant culture are reinforced in their belief—conscious or subconscious—that they are superior. If educators do not intentionally subvert this tendency, they end up reinforcing that message for another generation, despite their best intentions.

One of the most important ingredients for transformation that increases agency is participation. hooks writes that “it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer.” She also argues that learning must be connected to students’ lives: students want to be seen “as ‘whole’ human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge.” (hooks 14-15) This echoes ideas Paulo Freire expressed over 40 years ago.
in Pedagogy of the Oppressed: that education should be participatory, centered on dialogue around questions that are relevant to participants’ lives, through which they discover a new understanding of their reality. Understanding leads to action, reflection and further learning. Action and reflection are woven into an empowering cycle for learning and change. Participation is key.

Anne Hope and Sally Timmel’s book series Training for Transformation, found in many MCC offices around the world, does an excellent job of showing how this participatory learning can be applied in the informal, adult educational settings often associated with community development work. The same ideas inform the “elicitive approach” emphasizing participation at the grassroots level in peacebuilding learning and practice, developed by John Paul Lederach. (Lederach 46-47)

Participation is also critical for provoking increased agency in formal education settings with children and youth: learning through exploration and play helps young children develop confidence in their ability to learn. Participating in defining classroom rules and resolving conflicts helps older children develop self-discipline and see themselves as difference-makers in shaping the social environment around them. Taking part in literature circles helps children improve both their reading skills and their ability to think critically. Instead of memorizing answers, they learn to explore their own answers—and even ask questions—in dialogue with others.

Another key to transformation is critical reflection. Jack Mezirow has defined transformative learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference.” He says we do this “through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based.” This critical reflection is provoked by a ‘disorienting dilemma’ that shakes us from our comfort zones or brings us into contact with people who carry different sets of assumptions. It results in a frame of reference that is more “inclusive, discriminating, and self-reflective.” (Mezirow 5-7) MCC has built decades of ‘connecting peoples’ work on a belief in the transformative power of this kind of experience. (Brenneman 1-4)

Hope and Timmel describe a third layer of transformation: a reordering of values. They claim much of the suffering in the modern world is rooted in the values of greed and power. “To transform society we need to tap into much deeper values of cooperation, justice and ‘concern for the common good’. Christian social teachings, and the social teachings of other faiths such as Judaism, Buddhism and Islam, constantly challenge us to live according to these values, which are essential aspects of love. This is why transformative education is essentially a spiritual process.” (Hope and Timmel 16)

At a recent workshop in Bolivia, MCC education partners brainstormed a rich list of values they hope to see in the children and youth they work with: love, justice, compassion, respect, humility, solidarity, self-esteem, honesty, faith, peace, forgiveness. These educational leaders noted that values are passed on by example, and emphasized the importance of living out the values they proclaim.

Unhealed trauma is a significant obstacle to this level of transformation, creating cycles of violence in which victims become aggressors who inflict new pain. Recent decades have seen increased emphasis on trauma healing.
as a critical step in helping individuals and communities regain the ability to use their agency for positive change. As such, it is a key component of transformative education in many contexts.

In summary, transformative education should provoke several layers of transformation:

1. **Increased sense of agency**: Participants are able to affect the world around them, to be subjects, not objects in the stories of their lives. This includes developing basic skills like literacy, numeracy and technical trades, and also the abilities to think autonomously and imagine creative solutions to conflicts and challenges.

2. **A change in frame of reference**: Participants recognize and critique their own assumptions, leading to increased recognition of the validity of other points of view. It can even bring a shift in identity, shaking up deeply internalized inferiority or superiority.

3. **A reordering of values**: Participants develop values that drive them to act not only in self-interest, but in the interest of the common good. This can involve healing from trauma to break free from cycles of violence.

When all these layers are involved, education is both empowering and emancipating. Increasing agency empowers individuals, benefitting them and their families even when living in oppressive contexts. As empowered individuals with open minds join for collective action rooted in love, it also becomes emancipating—sparking social change that reshapes the oppressive structures themselves. (Leonard 30-31)

MCC documents are filled with references to “mutual transformation”, underscoring the need for all of us to be transformed. The transformation each experiences will vary depending on one’s position in terms of privilege or oppression, yet the three layers described here remain key for all. As we pursue our mission, let us support education that is transformative—seeking not to simply move more people to the top of the pyramid, but rather empowering people who will change the shape of that pyramid.

*Lynn Longenecker is Education Coordinator for MCC.*

**Literature circles as transformative classroom pedagogy**

Education can either be a catalyst for societal transformation, or a tool for perpetuating the status quo. In Kenya, MCC partners use literature circles to empower learners as critically-thinking agents of change, infusing transformative potential into an exam-oriented school system.

Despite wide-spread belief in education’s role as an engine of development, and the remarkable success of Universal Primary Education campaigns in granting access to primary school for growing numbers of children, recent studies suggest that many primary school graduates in East Africa do not have the basic skills necessary for contributing positively to their communities. The rapid expansion of primary school enrollment has come with insufficient infrastructure development, teaching staff and support for...
increased operational costs, with the result of disconcertingly diluting the quality of public primary education. Without enough secondary schools to accommodate this new bulge of primary graduates, those who miss a place in secondary schools are branded ‘failures’ and are left to look for work in sectors in which their few years of education hold little value or relevance.

Critically, society has bought into the importance of formal schooling as the ticket to a better life. Parents of the most meagre means scrape together hard-earned shillings to send their children to private schools, with the result of education being commodified and formal schooling becoming a great engine of inequality. Against this backdrop MCC Global Family partners in Kenya have been developing new approaches within the rigidity of the existing formal system, seeking to equip students for life, not just exams, with pedagogies that cultivate action-oriented critical thinking.

Paulo Freire details a pedagogy in which education is the practice of freedom through which learners are empowered as Subjects, not objects, of their realities. [Freire consistently capitalizes Subjects in order to underscore learners’ agency.] Through the inseparable processes of reflection and action, learners become participants in constructing reality, and discover their power to transform their world. Freire focuses on dialogue as the essence of transformative education, detailing a ‘problem-posing’ approach through which students are critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. He contrasts this with the ‘banking’ approach, in which teachers ‘deposit’ information into students’ minds, and students receive, memorize and regurgitate. In Freire’s liberatory pedagogy, critical consciousness is awakened through the investigation of ‘generative themes’: topics which have powerful emotional impact and relevance in the daily lives of learners. This pedagogy equips students with critical thinking skills, a consciousness about the historicity and changing nature of reality and tools to be agents of change and development in their own societies. Can such pedagogy take root in formal, exam-oriented education systems?

Amongst the MCC-supported schools in Kenya, literacy in both Swahili and English is one of the most critical areas for improving the quality of education. Literacy—and language more broadly—is the medium through which all subject matter is learned. Heightened language skills translate directly into heightened ability to think, communicate and make connections and applications between school learning and one’s own life.

One of the methods we have been implementing to improve literacy in three of the schools are literature circles: dialogue-driven reading groups in which learners use texts to investigate issues relevant to their own lives. The teacher introduces ‘roles’ to the learners, different response types that one learner per group can practice in the group discussion. Roles are closely linked to the habits of proficient readers, and may include Questioner (asking questions of the text), Summarizer (identifying main point), Connector (making connections between text and self, other texts and the world), Illustrator (visualizing), Prompter (“I like,” “I wonder,” “I am surprised by”), and others. Once these roles have been internalized and a wide range of response options start emerging naturally, the assigned roles are removed, and every learner engages in all response types. Literature circles center on the discussion, in which participants talk about their responses to the text, dialoguing and debating with each other about the text and the issues that it brings up. The teacher acts as a facilitator only, offering mini lessons to improve both content and process.


of discussions. Participants also engage in additional response activities which may include writing letters between two characters, writing and/or dramatizing prequels, sequels and ‘missing’ scenes, and creating news shows reporting their stories as breaking news items.

Over the past two years of implementing these literature circles in upper primary and secondary schools, there has been notable improvement in students’ reading, writing and speaking skills. Students have become more self-directed, more confident in their ability to know, have opinions, back these opinions up with evidence and respectfully disagree. Previously so accustomed to only answering questions, students have learned to ask challenging questions of the texts, and indeed of the world around them. The students’ self-generated discussion topics hit on generative themes that are recognizable by the eruption of conversation they spark. They have discussed qualities of a good marriage, inter-ethnic conflicts, jealousy, competition, tradition-modernity tensions, dating and relationships, colonialism and the nature of freedom. They have also questioned why certain characters and situations are the way they are, what past events may have brought these circumstances about and what potential futures may exist based on different courses of action. By acting out prequels, missing scenes and sequels, they have actively exercised their power to construct different realities.

Although the broader school communities were initially skeptical of literature circles’ value (“But it’s not in the curriculum!” “They won’t be tested on this!”), two years down the line the improved exam scores of literature circle participants have raised enthusiasm considerably amongst teachers and parents alike. Teachers comment that students are much better in group work in all subject areas, writing has improved, and students are becoming more critical and creative. And students’ excitement for reading is palpable. Reading has become alive for them, an empowering process with relevance to their own lives.

Our hope is that literature circles in these three schools are helping equip students not only for exams, but also for life, empowering learners as active change agents in their own societies. We are also wise to note the broader lessons here for ourselves: as tempting as it may be for a teacher (or development worker) to come to share the ‘right answers’, the most powerful spark for transformative action is not an ‘answer’, but rather an invitation to dialogue. In this dialogue, we together seek to awaken critical consciousness, and to live out an understanding of education (and all development) as the practice of freedom.

Monica Shank is Education Coordinator for MCC Kenya.

### Empowering the Batwa through education in Burundi

Too often, education has been a tool for domination and oppression. Yet many believe that education can also be a tool for positive transformation and empowerment of marginalized, oppressed people: MCC supports at least six projects across the globe whose specific aim is to provide educational opportunity for minority ethnic groups that are vulnerable to exploitation as a result of their exclusion from the formal education system.

Students have become more self-directed, more confident in their ability to know, have opinions, back these opinions up with evidence and respectfully disagree.
The Batwa people (roughly one percent of the population in Burundi) are part of the people groups historically referred to as Pygmies. [The term Pygmy is a foreign term with origins in classical Greek, and refers to various groups across Central Africa which share multiple historical ties and cultural characteristics. The term has sometimes had pejorative connotations, although some people referred to as Pygmy have positively appropriated the term as a self-designation.] Most Batwa do not have experience in farming, having been hunters and gatherers, and have been less well integrated into Burundian and Rwandan society than other ethnic groups. Many Tutsis and Hutus regard the Batwa as sub-human and incapable of learning skills such as farming or animal husbandry, much less any type of formal education. Consequently, few Batwa even attempt school, and when they go, they experience prejudice and are often ridiculed or expelled outright. Less than a dozen have completed formal education to the university level in Burundi.

Innocent Mahwikwizi, who directs the Christian Union for the Education of the Disinherited (UCEDD), an MCC partner, is passionate about the Batwa’s situation because he himself comes from a Congolese Pygmy group, born in the forest and chased out to Burundi during Mobutu’s rounding up of Congo’s forest peoples for his army in the 1960s. He proudly identifies as Pygmé and in Burundi refers to himself as mutwa (the singular of Batwa). Innocent had opportunity for formal education and has committed his life to providing this opportunity for other Batwa people in Burundi. In 2002 he and his wife began work that has since developed into the Hope School for the Batwa, offering education from pre-kindergarten to tenth grade (the end of the first cycle of secondary school in the Burundian system). Innocent recently met with MCC Co-Representative for Burundi and Rwanda, Paul Moseley, to discuss how UCEDD works to achieve its threefold vision: the emancipation, participation and integration of the Batwa people in Burundi:

Paul Mosley: Why is UCEDD so strongly committed to providing formal education for the Batwa?

Innocent Mahwikwizi: Formal education is important to the Batwa because it creates a link to all other people in this society and the world, and opens the horizons of our people who receive it. It universalizes experience. This is important because Batwa people already know, and are already known, by the local, regional and international communities, and are part of social systems that extend even beyond the region. To be able to participate as equals in this system, we must have the tools of formal education to do so, not just basic education, but higher education as well.

PM: What evidence of transformation have you seen? What are you still waiting to see?

IM: The first evidence of transformation we have seen on the ground is a reconciliation and acceptance of the Batwa community where the school is located, with other ethnic groups in that community now seeing them as capable of learning. Those from other ethnic groups are also happy to have a place to send their own children that offers a good education. There has also been a real reduction in the Batwa’s underestimation of themselves. They have carried the stigma of being uneducable for so long that they have internalized this lie themselves. Emancipation from this internalized inferiority can be the biggest step toward overcoming the obstacles to their success.
We are still waiting to see high rates of success at the school and especially beyond in university. We only have had 2 classes graduate from the secondary school since it was opened. Beyond that we are waiting to see Batwa able to integrate into social structures of governance at the community, national and eventually international levels. At this time Batwa near the school do have their own structure of community elders but are not integrated into the official communal government.

**PM:** Are you concerned that there are risks of formal education undermining traditional Batwa culture in the long run?

**IM:** It is true that formal education does pull one into a larger culture, often at the cost of one’s own culture. This is why at Hope School we instill in students a pride in their culture and include supplementary lessons in some of their cultural traditions, singing, dancing, stories and even the accent that is distinct to them when they speak. While the Hope School is open to all ethnicities it is considered a school for Batwa because of its location, and its emphasis is on Batwa culture. Many Batwa students who come had left other schools because they were ridiculed or chased out. Here they can be Batwa with pride in who they are.

The mission of the school is to create a definition of Batwa which is not an insult but rather a respected identity which has a distinct history and culture that is known by students themselves as well as others in the community and about which they can be proud.

In the past any Batwa who was educated was often complimented by others by saying ‘Now you are no longer Batwa, you have been promoted.’ It has been our commitment to give students a pride in their ethnicity so that when they do graduate they will not hide their ethnicity but rather claim it boldly.

Innocent Mahwikwizi, together with his wife Beatrice, directs the Christian Union for the Education of the Disinherited (UCEDD). Paul Mosley is MCC Co-Representative for Burundi and Rwanda.

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### Lessons from the Global Anabaptist Peacebuilders Institute

West Coast MCC’s Global Anabaptist Peacebuilders (GAP) Institute exemplifies how transformative learning can inspire and empower young people in the United States to become peacebuilders. GAP is especially effective because: learning occurs through dialogue and immersion in real-world settings; it provides a three-tiered experience connecting local and global issues; and it intentionally involves participants from historically marginalized ethnic communities.

Every summer West Coast MCC organizes an opportunity for college age students primarily from historically marginalized ethnic communities who live in this region to explore social justice issues. California’s Central Valley itself serves as the laboratory of learning as students wrestle with issues related to immigration, restorative justice, food systems, water and the environment.

How students see the world is directly linked to their exposure to it. So the classroom becomes the packing houses where undocumented workers
labor for minimum wage, the substandard housing projects that contribute
to marginalization of the poor, the holding cells that house criminals
who are serving longer sentences than others convicted of similar crimes,
the fields where migrant workers produce the country’s food and the
community water supply as we are challenged with the need for more
water. Students spend a week exploring these issues in the surrounding
community and connecting them with biblical passages.

Students agree to an intense dialogue as they discover how these issues
affect them, their communities and communities around the world. They
identify issues that are not only biblical but contextually relevant. Because
many of the students have limited experience with peace and justice
issues this model allows them the space to explore and consider becoming
advocates for change.

What makes this model transformative is that students meet others from
Anabaptist communities and churches in their region who share the same
interests and commit to “caminar en conjunto” (walk and learn together).
In addition, sessions are facilitated by two faculty members from Fresno
Pacific University who have a passion for the issues and are interested in
pouring themselves into engaging these eight to ten young adults. The
conversations with peers, faculty and speakers both in the classroom and
in the field give students the opportunity to ask questions and formulate
their own thoughts based on what they experience, see and hear.

By combining GAP with other initiatives, we created a three-tiered
experience that includes students’ local community, a national internship
and a global cross-cultural setting (such as Guatemala, Bolivia or Mexico).
Exploring similar issues in different regional and national contexts is
a critical part of the transformative process. The travel to a foreign
country creates energy and excitement that most GAP students have never
experienced. Traditional cross-cultural experiences offered at institutions
of higher learning and in church communities often target participants
from white middle-class communities. Because of the cost and time
commitment, economically and ethnically marginalized students tend
to be left out of these cross-cultural learning experiences. GAP targets
underserved ethnic communities and works best when at least 50% of the
participants are Latinos. The work of recruiting, funding and convincing
the nuclear families of the participants to support their students in this
cross-cultural study tour is hard work. Nevertheless, the participation of
these students makes the experience much richer for all involved.

As students begin to identify and compare the same issues on foreign
land they begin to link both similarities and differences. For instance
on the issue of immigration, they understand that people’s migration to
the United States is more than a desire to “break the law” but in many
cases is linked to the results of war and violence, family economic crisis,
a desire to reunify with family, etc. As students hear immigrants’ stories
first-hand, learn about the struggles and hopes of these global communities
and experience the hospitality of impoverished people, they begin to self-
examine, reprioritize and commit to the work of justice in new ways.

How do we know if transformation has occurred? Many college age
students take courses to meet a degree requirement but it is often difficult
to measure how much students change or adopt what has been learned.
Here the evidence of transformation is most visible through the way
students live their lives. Many alumni find themselves forming new
patterns of behavior, reexamining what they thought they knew and adopting new frameworks for making judgments on these issues. It gives us hope to see alumni doing things like: leading an intentional community in Fresno; becoming the first two Latina board members for a local MCC Relief Sale; leading an incarnational ministry called Chestnut Apartments and providing daily tutoring for low-income children; and serving as youth pastor at a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Reedley, California.

These and many other stories affirm our belief that transformative learning experiences like GAP are key for inspiring young U.S. Anabaptists of all backgrounds to become active peacebuilders in their local community and the broader world.

*Dina González-Piña is Assistant Dean of Multicultural Ministries at Fresno Pacific University and a member of the MCC U.S. board.*

**The anti-racism workshop and the building of beloved community**

The anti-racism workshop is a space of critical learning on one of the most pernicious social phenomena in human history—race. Race as a social construct has been bound up with some of the most heinous atrocities in history, including the genocide of Native Americans, the African slave trade and the extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany. These acts were validated by the idea of white supremacy, the ideology that lays at the foundation of the concept of race. And although one could argue that this ideology is not as wholly embraced today as it was during these historic moments, the concept of race upon which it is founded still has tremendous currency within our society and world.

Race is not a biological reality, yet racism remains real. Race is not a scientific truth. Rather, it is a social construct, conceived at a time in history to give European settlers power and authority over the lives of Africans and Native Americans, and, later, Asians. Over generations Americans of all hues have been taught to accept race as biologically true, and with it the very power dynamics of racist oppression and exploitation. If racism is to be unlearned, dismantled and replaced by the creation of a truly just society, it will begin with the collective unlearning of these racialized notions.

The anti-racism workshop grows out of the Civil Rights Movement with its emphasis on a moral vision of beloved community. The goal of the workshop is threefold: 1) raise critical consciousness regarding the reality of racism; 2) create space for critical self-reflection and transformation; and 3) establish time for formulating strategic goals, both personal and organizational, toward the achievement of racial justice. It exists as a critical pedagogical device, an incubator of consciousness and community, a sanctuary for the necessary soul-work that can bring about personal renewal and spark social transformation.

The anti-racism workshop exists as a critical pedagogical device, an incubator of consciousness and community, a sanctuary for the necessary soul-work that can bring about personal renewal and spark social transformation.
of our personal beliefs. Most Americans would say that they believe all people are equal. Yet that belief has done little to establish actual racial equality.

An effective workshop will thus address the institutional reality that lies at the center of race, namely, the privileged social status of whiteness. Whiteness as a racial identity is the result of the oppression and exploitation of those peoples not classified as white. This historic truth creates the racial dynamic we live with today.

Whereas some workshops focus on how race troubles the lives of people of color, an effective workshop experience centers on whiteness and examines what it means to be white. Social systems function to make whiteness arbitrary, even invisible, allowing it to operate as the normative standard for humanity, when it is actually a social identity constructed out of the oppression of the rest of humanity.

This knowledge is difficult to accept for most whites and even some people of color. It runs counter to just about everything we have learned in our schools and churches. Thus, the workshop is a necessary intervention in that it creates the critical space for self-reflection, leading to a cognitive dissonance that has the potential to bring about authentic change.

Ideally, the anti-racism workshop can become a life-giving space where the seeds of beloved community are planted and watered. In this way, it becomes an affirmation that true change and racial justice can only emerge collectively. Either we arrive together or not at all. This requires certain practices to be in place, otherwise the workshop risks becoming a space of reinforced oppression and trauma for those already victimized within the system. These practices include the principles of accountability and self-determination.

Some people of color come to the workshop with the desire for whites to better understand and appreciate the difficulties people of color experience in this country due to institutional racism. But in order for the workshop to truly engage the work of dismantling racism, it must do more than this. As Peggy McIntosh reminds us, “Disapproving of the systems won’t be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. A ‘white’ skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.” Workshop participants are challenged to think beyond mere awareness-raising to conceptualizing and modeling just human relations. In part, accountability as an anti-racism principle is the recognition that the system of racism places disproportionate and unearned influence and power in the hands of whites. Accountability is present when white people are actively engaged in changing the power dynamic with people of color committed to ending racism. Racism functions by enabling white people not to be held accountable for their actions that impact the lives of people of color. Anti-racist pedagogy calls on whites to testify to the ways in which they embody privilege at the expense of those not classified as white. Naming white privilege and giving an account about how one benefits in an unjust system provide people of color the opportunity to be affirmed in their experience and, most importantly, make critical decisions that are life-affirming for themselves and their communities.

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Learn more


Another function of racism is to keep people of color at odds with each other. To understand and transcend these divisions, people of color must also enter into mutually accountable relationships with each other. Accountability encourages people of color to acknowledge their cultural differences and similarities even as it encourages people of color to build community around common goals of freedom, justice and equality. This is the work of self-determination: the expressed will for liberation of people of color resisting racist domination.

Effective anti-racism workshops provide time and space for these acts of accountability to be learned and modeled. In fact, the workshop should be seen as an incubator for the development of anti-racist communities made up of individuals and groups committed to growing together as they engage the work of resistance.

When whites who are invested in dismantling racism join with people of color invested in liberation for themselves and others, the anti-racism workshop becomes a space of affirming fellowship, crucial community and inspired sanctuary. In this way, the anti-racism workshop plays a critical role in the building of the beloved community, a new paradigm where all our humanity is equally embraced and uplifted.

Ewuare Osayande is Anti-Oppression Coordinator for MCC U.S.

**Peace education and restorative discipline**

Peace education is as important for students’ transformation as traditional content areas like literacy, sciences and mathematics. Through peace education students are empowered to think critically and constructively about conflict and to use new skills to creatively address conflict and prevent violence. This transformation occurs most effectively if students experience participatory pedagogy and a restorative, nonviolent discipline model consistent with the peacebuilding principles they are being taught.

Peace education is about helping students develop a new way of thinking about peace, conflict and violence through critical and creative engagement and learn new methods for peacefully handling conflict in their schools, homes and communities. Because of the constantly changing and contextually embedded nature of violence and conflict, we want students to learn how to be critical and creative thinkers when they face unexpected situations. They will encounter a wide range of conflict and violence in their lifetimes, and peace education helps to prepare them at a young age.

Effective pedagogy is built on freedom and dialogue among students. This is different from the concept of education as an instrument of oppression, critiqued by Paulo Freire. Our workshops include strategies like small and large group discussion, role playing, demonstrations, drama and video viewing discussions. Dialogue offers the chance for students to discuss conflicts or situations that are relevant to their own experiences. It also allows the students the chance to apply the nonviolent conflict transformation skills that they have learned in their sessions.

Our strategy includes two key layers of work: teacher training and student training. Teacher training is a five day series of workshops for teachers who are running peace clubs in schools, with the aim of empowering them with

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We start with problem identification: a problem is brought to our attention by a concerned teacher or parent. Then we gather and analyze information from the school, which assists us in the next step, code creation. We decide which ‘code’ (drama, workshop, video viewing or demonstration) to use in order to reach the target audience effectively, presenting this to the teachers and parents and following up with discussion and evaluation.

The second layer is student training. It is very important that teachers apply what they have learned by working with students through Peace Clubs to promote the culture of peace in their schools and communities. Students, in turn, are expected to use the knowledge and skills in three different ways: sharing knowledge with other non-Peace Club members; sharing with their parents and friends in the community; and applying the knowledge in their daily lives.

Restorative justice and non-violent discipline, important aspects of peace education, have the potential to help young people realize that they have the ability to use their own power for positive change. Young people in this modern world easily fall into the same cyclical violence that they have been exposed to their entire lives. Children who are exposed to forms of violence grow up mentally and emotionally handicapped and fail to contribute meaningfully to society. Although corporal punishment is officially illegal in Zambia, it is still common. Some say it is just part of our culture, but in truth it is the legacy of our colonial masters. They controlled us with violence and so we learned to control our children with violence. We need to rediscover our true culture which was not so violent and help teachers and parents practice non-violent alternatives that help children develop self-discipline.

I believe that the development of the world will arise primarily at the skilled hands of the people themselves living in this world, especially the next generation of young people. Peace education is imperative to enable the next generation to build a healthy and prosperous world. In order to be able to learn, our children need to attend schools without violence; children and young adults need to know how the government and other institutions protect them and how to protect themselves from violence and aggression. Peace scholars, peace activists and other peace lovers should influence decision makers including our government and the international community, so that education about peace is integrated in all the levels of education so our children and young people are empowered to build a peaceful environment in which to learn.

Peace education combined with non-violent discipline helps create a culture of peace, where individuals will live non-violently in the world with access to the necessities of life while fully participating in the affairs of their society in freedom and enjoyment of all fundamental human rights.

Issa Sadi Ebombolo is Director of Peace Clubs, an MCC partner in Zambia.

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For various peace clubs curricula, see: http://tinyurl.com/peacematerials.

Measuring transformation: a tool for continuous improvement

Peace educators have long been challenged by an elusive goal: how do we know if peace education efforts work? At Help the Afghan Children (HTAC), we applied a business model approach to a humanitarian effort that is driven by performance metrics and continuous improvement as a powerful way to measure and improve the performance of peace education and its impact on Afghan children over time.

In Afghanistan, we were concerned that our pre- and post-project surveying methods were not the best predictors of performance. Results from one initiative involving 2,800 Afghan students at seven schools suggested that students’ attitudes had dramatically changed over the course of a school year, where they overwhelmingly rejected violence and embraced peace principles. However, when HTAC observers returned to these schools 6 months later, they discovered fighting, bullying and harassment levels nearly as high as when the project began. We later learned that the overwhelming majority of students as well as teachers and even parents gave us answers they believed we wanted to hear. This unfortunate episode suggested a new approach was necessary.

Our shift to metrics began with a question. What would an ideal picture of a peaceful Afghan school look like? This resulted in the following list of observable success indicators:

- An absence of corporal punishment practices among teachers
- Teachers role modeling nurturing behaviors that made learning safe (e.g. teachers encouraging students to ask questions or express their feelings without fear of being hit)
- An absence of fighting and other aggressive behaviors among students
- Students using non-violent conflict resolution techniques to resolve their differences
- Students role-modeling positive, collaborative behaviors (e.g. students working together to solve common problems).

Our challenge was identifying reliable ways to measure these success indicators in the field. We were concerned that relying on any one source (i.e. either teachers or students) could result in skewed data for a variety of reasons, such as teachers reporting what they thought we wanted to hear. So we collected data through three sources: trained HTAC observers who made periodic unannounced visits to observe classrooms and school yards; teachers; and a sampling of students who each confidentially recorded their observations for a one-week period several times throughout the year.

The data from these three sources was surprisingly consistent. By comparing the most conservative numbers, we felt confident that we had an accurate estimate of success. For example, if the success indicator was the absence of fighting and aggressive behaviors among students, we could measure success in two ways, as either the % of school days in the month with no fighting or the ratio of the number of fights or aggressive conflicts in a month to the number of school days in the month.
To measure changes in corporal punishment, observers noted which teachers were physically or verbally abusing their students. Again, we compared our data with random, confidential discussions with students and found their feedback amazingly consistent with our observations.

With these success indicators in place, HTAC elected to import and customize a business improvement model that had been around for decades and apply it in a humanitarian setting: a continuous improvement cycle that combines metrics and feedback tools to set goals, measure, evaluate and improve performance over time. A closer look at the cycle reveals the role metrics play in continuously improving performance:

1. What can we measure?: # of teachers not engaged in corporal punishment (CP)
2. Obtain baseline: 6 of 150 teachers (4%) don’t use CP
3. Begin implementing the initiative
4. Measure and evaluate improvement: after four months, 87 of 150 teachers (58%) don’t use CP. Evaluate why improvements occurred and brainstorm solutions to remaining barriers.
5. Make changes, try new strategies
6. Measure the improvement: after six months, 119 of 150 teachers (79.3%) don’t use CP. Get feedback from teachers and students on how to improve. Redesign and recycle.

Rather than using participant feedback to measure changes in students’ attitudes, we focused measurement on observable behavior change and used student and teacher feedback to discover how to make the learning and teaching process better. This leads to an on-going redesign and improved results. As an example, former school bullies exposed to peace education asked to become student peace mediators, helping teachers break-up or prevent fighting among students. Because of their involvement, fighting and harassment levels steadily decreased.

Customizing a business performance model for use in the humanitarian field has produced highly encouraging results. Since applying this approach in three major initiatives involving 42,148 students and 1,653 teachers at 38 diverse schools, incidences of fighting were reduced by an average of 75% per school. 79% of teachers abandoned corporal punishment and 84% of students were role modeling key peace related behaviors in the classroom. Such results do not conclusively prove that HTAC has mastered the best methods of measuring peace education performance. They do, however, suggest that a careful balance of metrics and feedback tools can provide us with a potential hybrid model that can drive improvement over time.

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Experience and relationship: keys to transformation

Marta confessed she was terrified of earthquakes in a talking circle at the safety and emergency preparedness workshop for the staff at the Shalom Center in the Andes Mountains of Chile. “I don’t remember having been in an earthquake, but you need to know that I won’t be able to care for myself, much less anyone else, if we ever have one during camp.” At 3:34am, just five hours after that confession, the sixth strongest earthquake in the world devastated central Chile. Through this significant experience and the safety of caring relationships—two critical elements for transformation—Marta was able to reach out beyond her fears to help others heal from their own traumas. Months later, when a tremor interrupted her class one day, Marta stood in front of her young students with an outward appearance of calm that covered her inward panic and led them in breathing techniques and a calming hand massage.

After the 2010 earthquake, Marta and other Shalom Center staff used the creative potential of safe relationships and of significant experiences, even profoundly difficult ones, to initiate processes of personal and group transformation. They organized Mediacción (a mediation, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and trauma healing program for youth in two areas of the Maule Region of Chile) as a preventive response to the possibility of adolescents “acting in” with violence toward themselves or “acting out” with violence toward others after the collective trauma of the earthquake and tsunami.

In the year after the earthquake, the reported cases of bullying in schools nationwide had increased by over 50%. Youth participants in the Mediacción project came from rival high schools and different churches. Through previous community summer programs in Sagrada Familia, one of the project areas, Marta had already developed personal relationships with many of the young people and their families. Even though still healing from her own trauma, Marta dared to enter into pedagogical relationship with the youth while risking her own emotional involvement. Over the course of weekly meetings with the youth, she built on her previous relationships and created a community of trust.

The word *acompañamiento* in Spanish describes the kind of relationship that leads to transformation. *Acompañamiento* includes a strong physical and spiritual sensation of being in the presence of another person. This walking alongside is not only an emotional or intellectual exercise but a holistic commitment. The mutuality of *acompañamiento* creates a safe space, a container where deep listening, trust, appreciation and encouragement shape the learning process. The sanctuary of this relationship has room enough for trial and error, forgiveness and second chances. The transformative power of relationship “is found in connection, that profound meeting when the truest part of one soul meets the emptiest recesses in another and finds something there. . . . When that happens, the giver is left more full than before and the receiver less terrified, eventually eager, to experience even deeper, more mutual connection.” (Crabb 31)

C.S. Lewis observed: “Experience: that most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn.” The first-hand experience of the earthquake was brutal, not only for Marta, but for the youth with whom she was working. However, the experience by itself did not bring about their
transformation. Rather, true learning and transformation came through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection and application.

The Association for Experiential Education describes experiential education as purposeful engagement “with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities.”

Paraguayan author Merardo Arriola Socol suggests that the point of departure for all learning is the rich, significant and complex experiences where each person seeks to integrate and understand physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects through the process of reflection/action. (Arriola Socol 15)

As the youth processed their emotions, thoughts, physical sensations and spiritual struggles during and after the earthquake, they integrated previous learning into new actions. Eight months after the earthquake, the Mediacción participants from Sagrada Familia came to camp at the Shalom Center where we put their learning to the test through group problem-solving activities. During one particularly difficult exercise when frustration began to take over the group, participants suddenly stopped what they were doing, took a step away from the problem and self-initiated a circle process. For these teens, new behavior became action not only through relationships and dialogue, but also by testing their newly formed theories in new experiences.

Almost three months after the Mediacción program ended, we again met with the youth from Sagrada Familia. Under the grape arbor over the patio at Marta’s house they told us how they had used their new skills to handle different challenges ranging from the death of a family member to conflicts at school. Most were sharing their learning with other groups, some had become involved in the student government at their schools, several had taken on leadership positions in their local churches, and two were selected as motivators (counselors) at the Shalom Center. The youth agreed that the two most important factors in their transformation were the committed friendships they had developed and the newly acquired conviction that every crisis is also an opportunity to grow.

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