

Remembering the Forgotten Decade of Peace

by Melinda Salazar

In 1998, three years before the bombing in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United Nations General Assembly anticipated the opening of the 21st century with an eye turned toward peacemaking. 2000 was proclaimed the *International Year for a Culture of Peace*, and the following ten years would mark the *Decade for a Culture of Peace*. Against a backdrop of violence in the Middle East, genocide in Africa, and indigenous struggle in Latin America, members of civil society throughout the world courageously worked to change how people think and act in order to promote peace.

Yet, with the 9/11 discourses that have pervaded our national climate, teachers know little about the UN 2000-2010 Decade for a Culture of Peace. Why would we? US foreign policy—a war in Afghanistan, an unprecedented pre-emptive war with Iraq—and our domestic policies—restricted civil liberties, continued dependence on foreign oil, slashed social programs to pay for our billion dollar wars—certainly aren't promoting peace. Who would ever guess such a global initiative for peace was underway?

In an attempt to remember the forgotten Decade of Peace, a colleague and I collaborated to organize a conference for educators, students, and community activists in New Hampshire titled,



The UN Decade of Peace logo reads, "Peace is in our hands." What do you see in this symbol? go to www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk_sum_chartelogos.htm to read what it represents.

The United Nations defined the Culture of Peace as, "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups, and nations." To learn more about the UN Decade of Peace go to www3.unesco.org/iycp/.

"Teaching Peace" in early April 2005.

Our aim was to support teachers in teaching peace, especially in a time of war, by providing a wide range of workshops on what peace scholars identify as educating for "negative" peace and "positive" peace. Distinguishing between these two positions, or worldviews, provides teachers with an opportunity to reflect on how they define peace.

Curricula for negative peace consider the prevention of war and teach conflict resolution and mediation skills. Unquestionably, these are important

skills to develop and are a part of building a Culture of Peace. Educating for positive peace, on the other hand, goes deeper into eliminating the root causes of violence, promotes values and transformation at the individual and collective levels, and emphasizes social and ecological justice and human rights-based education.

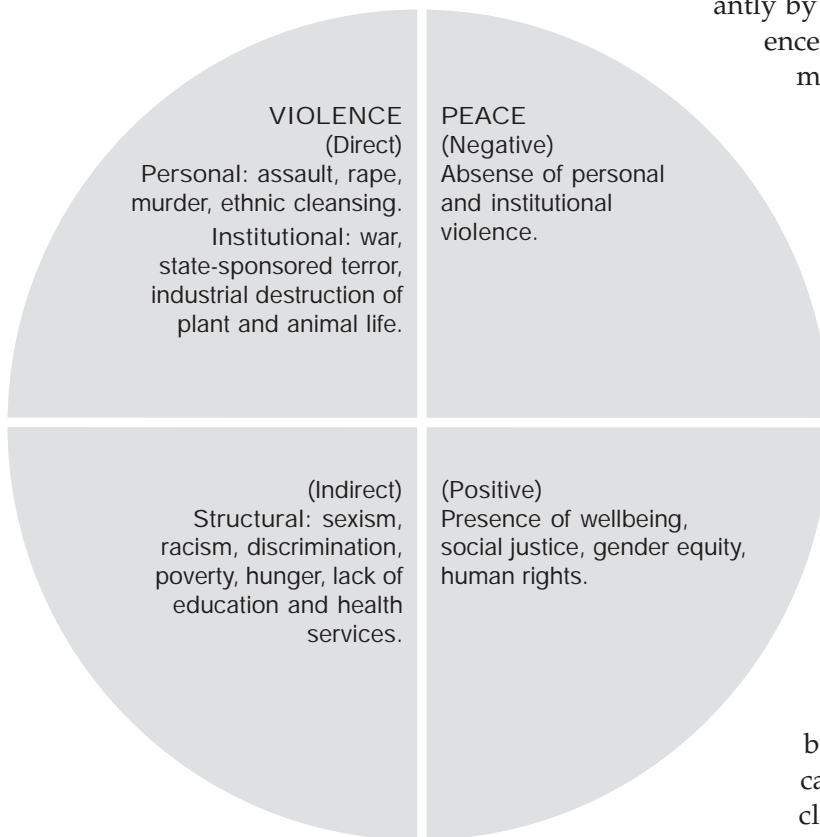
As the conference designers and hosts, we took risks. A Pueblo Elder once said, "You will need to be strong, for you will be called cowards and traitors. But it is an act of courage to choose sanity and peace when others are choosing hate and war." How would a *Teaching Peace* conference be perceived as "supporting the troops?" What did it mean that our event overlapped with the commemoration of a graduate who tragically died earlier that year in training at West Point and in whose name students and cadets were together raising funds for a scholarship?

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The strong positive response from over one hundred participants, including presenters, teachers, community members, and students, took us pleasantly by surprise. The *Teaching Peace* conference restored hope, provided skills, and modeled new behavior. One teacher said, *Teaching Peace* "reminded me

that I have ability to center units around peace even when I'm surrounded by students who are bombarded by a 'patriotic' media."

The conference also provided a place where teachers committed to peace education felt "personal support and hope," and connection to others doing the same work. It emboldened others to consider "infusing peace curricula in all content areas." The *Teaching Peace* conference affirmed for teachers the appropriateness of anti-war critical analysis and non-violent skill building, and invited teachers to educate for life-promoting values in the classroom.



From the Theory and Pedagogy of Education section of the United Nations Cyberschoolbus Web site: <www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace/frame.htm>.

Melinda Salazar, Ph. D. has over thirty years of teaching experience in K-12 classrooms, and Women's Studies at the University of New Hampshire. She lives with her husband in New Hampshire, where their five adult children occasionally return.