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Community Peace Asset Mapping: Rereading Our World, Rereading Ourselves.

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Abstract: Peace education critically confronts violence in our society and develops peace practices and theories, at the local, national, and global levels. This interactive session will critically explore the concepts and questions linking peace education and lifelong learning to deconstruct dominant social values that perpetuate violence.

On a daily basis, messages of violence are read to us that support the social, historical and political dialogues and structures, which inform our understandings of and experiences in this world. This plethora of messages, informed by patriarchy, militarism and sexism, legitimize our social values on violence (Galtung, 1975; Reardon, 1985, 1988) and the result is that we see our world from a perspective of violence. Stories of peace are not told and thus are not read (to the same quantity as stories of violence) into the socio-cultural dialogues that create our understandings of ourselves and society (Freire, 1999, 2006).

Over the past five years, I have facilitated workshops on peace education and conflict transformation around the world. One of the pedagogical challenges is to disarm the dominant perceptions of violence. While introducing a peace-asset-mapping assignment to a class in Kingston, Jamaica, a student questioned the exercise's feasibility. Didn't I realize there are no peace assets here; after all, we were in the most violent city in the world?

Peace education requires learners to critically analyze and confront the societal structures informed by and perpetuating violence in hope of changing these structures to be peaceable. Peace Education requires the recognition and building of local and global possibilities for peace through analytical, constructive, and reflective learning processes and relationships (Boulding, 2000; Galtung, 1975; Harris, 2003; Reardon, 1989). Peace education, situated within the dynamic, socio-political-economic processes and relations of the immediate and greater contexts, can be both tangible and abstract. To summarize, peace education is learning to see peace as already existing and to build relations and social structures that are peaceable. Peace education requires learners and educators to consider peace not as an object, goal, or theoretical-academic hyperbole, but as a practicable theory (Berry, 1993).

My journey as a peace educator in de-constructing and re-constructing our 'society' necessitates my own active participation as educator and learner, "*edulearner*" (Reardon, 1988, p. 47), to critically reflect on my own praxis of supporting violence and/or peace in classrooms and communities. What biases and assumptions inform my teaching and learning? How do I ensure a peaceable pedagogy in a world informed by violent values?

The course in Jamaica, was an experience of 'seeing the peace that exists'. We analyzed peace and peace education theory and lifelong learning/adult education theories, to develop a comprehensive and dynamic collective understanding of peace education within lifelong learning. Asset maps (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993) identifying, descriptively and geographically, peace education were created to help us see peace assets in the students' communities. Early scepticism forced me to realize that the potential lack of peace assets would enforce the belief in society as violent.

Despite initial expressions of doubt – due to the perception of pervasive violence in Jamaican society, the mapping process produced an excitement of discovery and hope as students found peace in their communities. Over 80 initiatives identified women's, justice, religious, environmental, community development and education assets. There was a sense of great potential for building and adding to the research and work of peace education through integration with lifelong learning as a method for dismantling systems of violence and building and teaching new ways of peace and possibilities. In light of this excitement, we had questions:

- a) How do we begin a critical public dialogue on violence?
- b) How do we build understandings of peace into cultures of learning?
- c) How do we integrate peace education and lifelong learning to ensure serious, sustainable, peaceable change?

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