Peace-building Stories –

connecting children and young people to peace-building ideas

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Introduction

Peace-building stories are stories, that build hope and peace in hearts and minds, are meant to be shared especially with children. Peace-building stories consider many issues in relation to the creation of peace- ie peace with ourselves, peace with each other and peace with the environment (Mason, 2016). The story themes reflect upon the inherent structural inequalities that have perpetuated injustice and violence and the absence of peace at personal, local and global levels. Rather than focussing upon perpetuating cynicism, fear or despair they purposefully re-focus attention upon building hope and introduce nonviolent, peaceful processes by offering a simple means for the creation of imaginative, nonviolent, collective solutions and introduce ideas to children that reflect all aspects of peace-building ie peace making, peace keeping, restorative practices, environmental sustainability and most importantly peaceful living and being.

One story, *Donald the Drake*, has been written in response to the uncertainty about the future of democratic processes within the United States and the consequential impact upon world peace. It focusses attention upon exploring how citizens can bring out the best in their elected leaders in peaceful, nonviolent ways instead of allowing fear to dictate thinking and action.

A blending and balancing of many different voices, ones that have called for change in our thinking about peace and how to create it, have for many years also called for improvement in systems of leadership and governance in many countries across the world. Their expressed concerns about global forces and the future of the world have also inspired people to act in peaceful, nonviolent ways in order to bring about positive changes. Concurrently, ideas about the development of *a culture of peace* and *peace education* have long been the subject of international discourse. Many of these voices, their expressed hopes, dreams, concerns and consequential positive actions, have provided the impetus for the concept and development of many peace-building stories that can be downloaded at www.brownmousepublishing.com.

The intention then is to offer a way in which everyday adults and children can personalise peace and own peace-building. Michael Jackson's empowering lyrics call for us all to-

heal the world and

…..make a better world for you and for me and the entire human race.

Positive Peace

Peace-building stories can be linked to the ideas that guided the research of Johan Galtung, who in the 1960s, developed the concepts of *negative peace* (absence of war) and *positive peace* (absence of structural violence) (Harris & Morrison 2003, p52). Galtung (1996, 1997) also argued that *structural violence* prevented individuals from reaching their true potential. *Structural violence* occurred when poverty, discrimination and oppression, underdevelopment and illiteracy contributed to the violent state of the world (Harris & Morrison 2003, p52). Peace-building stories reflect Galtung's understandings in relation to the creation of *positive peace* within our homes, communities and across the world.

Care and Compassion

Peace-building stories also reflect upon the enduring philosophies of Maria Montessori, who over eighty years ago, advocated that the two most essential capacities to facilitate the emergence of *a culture of peace*, were *care* and *hope*. Her ideas still continue to permeate educational thinking and practice. Montessori asserted that all children possessed innate tendencies toward *compassion* and *care* (Duckworth 2006, p85). Concerned about the growth of fascism, especially in Italy during the Second World War, Montessori highlighted the importance of education providing a process for creating sustainable peace. She believed it was counter-productive to leave it to politicians. Seeding the idea for the development of *a culture of peace*, she focussed upon how to live peacefully rather than upon peace being the absence of war (Montessori 1949, p70). She also understood that building peaceful communities involved reforming society. Peace-building stories explore possible ways of peaceful living and being by beginning with finding *peace with ourselves*.

In the peace-building story *Donald the Drake*, the animals living on Farmwell Farm live peacefully together until Donald speaks to them about the dangers beyond the fence surrounding the farm.

> *'Inherent in the word peace is the positive notion of constructive social reform.'*
>
> *Montessori 1949, pxi*

By focussing upon nurturing *care* and *compassion* peace-building stories also respond to the work of Nel Noddings, who proposed that *human caring* and *the memory of caring and being cared for* provided the basis of any ethical response, that she contended, was grounded in the feminine, in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness, involving a moral attitude or longing for goodness rather than with any moral reasoning (Noddings 2003, p2). Noddings believed that concern for the other should be the priority and it overrides all over principles of what is considered to be moral or right (Page 2004, p7). Noddings added that every child possessed a special capacity for love and tenderness, even of feeling and reciprocation that developed earlier in their development than reasoning (Noddings 2003, p120). Being intrinsic to the peace-building ideas that guide the unfolding story plots and alternative endings, these ideas are interlaced with characters' thoughts and behaviours. In essence, peace-building stories

deliberately re-connect readers, whether adults of children, to their child-like innocent selves, encouraging openness and receptivity.

Donald the Drake has to accept the consequences of his actions, especially the unrest he creates on Farmwell Farm. The story can seed discussion about *care* and *compassion*. These ideas intrinsic to the creation of happy, *win win* endings, even for Donald (Mason, 2016)!

Social Justice

Peace-building stories also build upon the concept of *social justice* that began emerging two centuries earlier as a result of the thinking of philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His moral theory of *social justice* was concerned with right and wrong action and an individual's moral worth (Calder 2005, p231). Kant believed an act was wrong if it violated the *categorical imperative* or more simply – *do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* It therefore required individuals to act in ways that respected the equal worth of moral agents by-

- treating people as ends rather than the means
- regarding all people as free, rational and responsible moral agents
- understanding that no matter how people differed as moral agents they all have equal value

(Goodman & Lesnick 2001, p65)

John Rawls, *(1921-2002)* the libertarian, almost two hundred years later, expanded the utilitarian thinking of Bentham and Mill (*perfect duties*), the concept of *social contracts* (Locke) and Kant's *categorical imperative*, and developed a theory of morally sustainable *social justice* that emphasised the principles of justice as-

- fairness
- *doing no harm* (Kant)
- beneficence

(Swift 2006, p10)

These fundamental ideological pillars of *social justice,* incorporating the feminist principles of *care* and *compassion,* are inherent within and are considered to be the most significant ideas driving the development of peace-building stories (Mason, 2016). But once a story is shared, the characters, themes, plots and endings can seed discussions around *social justice* issues especially in relation to creating *peace with each other*.

Donald the Drake chooses to focus the attention of all farm animals upon what is wrong rather than what is working well on Farmwell Farm. The panic and fear he arouses only creates distress, chaos and strained relationships. How fair is this? What harm is being done? Who will benefit from this? These are all questions that can arise after sharing the story with children and young people.

Essential Elements in Education for Peace

According to Peace Education Researcher, Betty Reardon (1999) *education for peace*, the conceptual core of building *a culture of peace*, should focus upon *human rights*, democracy and critical analysis of the global political, social, economic and environmental processes underlying social cohesion and stability. The reduction, prevention or elimination of warfare, she contended, was paramount. Building the conditions for peace and strategies that would enable living in peace, she added, were its major objectives. Embedded within the cornerstone of her work is the concept of *human rights*. Peace, therefore, relies upon a change in human consciousness. Care for the environment has now rightfully been connected and included with *human rights* and *social justice* and considered essential to the creation of *a culture of peace*. Peace-building stories seek to support Reardon's ideas by presenting stories that can be used to explore various local, international and environmental issues and assist with the development of peace-building consciousness. Reardon's idea was that *a culture of peace* could provide the fundamental base upon which peace could be constructed in respect to ecological awareness, cultural competency, global agency, conflict proficiency and gender sensitivity (Reardon 1999, pp30-31). Reflecting Reardon's ideas, the trilogy of significant peace-building ideas, that provide the scaffolding around which peace-building stories are created (Mason, 2016) ie *peace with ourselves, peace with each other* and *peace with the environment*, can be interwoven and understood as being interdependent.

Although the story *Donald the Drake* focusses primarily upon the peace-building idea- *peace with others,* other peace-building stories explore various combinations of related, significant ideas. Examining the concept of *human rights* is then an essential inclusion in every peace-building story theme and plot, especially in relation to the story *Donald the Drake*.

Other voices, such as that of Brigit Brock-Utne (2000), who asserted that *human rights education* should seek to instill a sense of dignity and moral responsibility, can also be heard when reading peace-building stories. Brock-Utne contended that the essential principles of *human rights* should not only pervade educational practice but seed the interaction of ideas, actions and moralising in relation to how the future ought to unfold in building a transformed, more humane and peaceful society. This involved engaging students in responding compassionately to any person's loss of dignity (Brock-Utne 2000, pp133&137) i.e. nurture *an ethics of care and compassion*.

Donald the Drake pays little attention to the rights and needs of the other animals nor does he care about the how their lives will be affected. He speaks to them of fear, using it as a means to unite all of them, by entangling these words with his desire to make Farmwell Farm great again. But the farm is already renown throughout the land for being great. Therefore, is Donald showing any compassion for the other animals that live on Farmwell Farm? Are his motives selfish?

Opening Hearts and Minds

Peace-building stories also reflect the voice of Parker Palmer (2004), who has influenced educational thinking and proposed processes that would make possible the rise of new

individuals who possessed '…. a larger sense of self than the one brought into it – we learn that the self is not a scrap of turf to be defended but a capacity to be enlarged' (p38). *Nonviolent action* or *doing no harm* involved a commitment to always act in ways that honoured and revered the soul (p170). *Nonviolent action* may not change the world, he added, but he believed that individuals were always changed when enacting reverence and respect for others (p172). Palmer added that everyone could be peacemakers in their families and communities but only when they found peace within themselves (p174), which happens to be the first premise upon which most peace-building stories have been created (Mason, 2016).

> *'The soul of humanity is like a bird with two wings; one wing is wisdom, the other compassion. The bird will only fly if both wings are in perfect balance.'*
>
> **Ancient Buddhist saying**

The most significant ideas from Palmer, ones that have further guided the creation of peace-building stories and the scaffolding that underpins them, involve his expansion of Bohr's concept of paradox (Palmer 1998, p63). He contended that a person's right understanding of truth was not determined by dividing the world into 'either-ors' but 'by embracing everything or thinking the world together again' (Palmer 1998, pp63-64). Palmer defined this process as involving a linking of heads and hearts. Aware that minds were unable to feel and hearts were unable to think, the associated process then connected thinking and feeling as if an individual's heart and mind operated as one (pp66&83). *Moral reasoning* (head) and *an ethics of care* (heart) would then be operating together balancing reasoning with *care* and *compassion*. Consequently, Palmer's ideas fueled the creation of the story guide that accompanies the peace-building stories-
Opening Hearts Opening Minds

Palmer (1998) also believed that within every person there existed a desire for *connectedness* that necessitated linking the souls of every person, everything upon Earth and the distant stars. This innate yearning was essentially a reflection of an individual's desire for community with others and incorporated the awareness that every human being was integral to the great web of life. Dialogue that allowed for 'listening with both ears and being trained to voice both sides of an issue' (as also promoted by Rosenberg in *nonviolent conflict resolution* programmes, Rosenberg, 2005), would assist in the reclaiming of humanity's *connectedness* (Palmer 1998, pp58&62). He added that this knowing provided the necessary bridge between community need and private action.

Unfortunately, *Donald the Drake* has only one issue upon his agenda. Unable to see beyond it or appreciate there might be another side to the issue, he also has no idea how promulgating fear will negatively impact upon the lives of the other animals living on Farmwell Farm. Unconcerned about any possible negative consequences of his actions, Donald allows fear to dictate his thinking and conversations. Is it his thinking then that leads to the unfortunate events that occur? What are the changes in his and the other animals' thinking that can possibly turn the situation around?

> *'Man does not weave this web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. All things are bound together. All things connect.'*
>
> *(Chief Seattle)*

Hope for the Future

The author's intention is for peace-building stories to be shared with adults or children in homes, classrooms, anywhere in which time and space allow for free, open discussion about the themes and the alternative endings provided (Mason, 2016). Paulo Friere believed any dialogue seeking to explore constructive, peaceful processes could not be carried out in a climate of hopelessness (Freire 1990, p80). Frank Hutchinson (1996) argued that in this rapidly changing and completely interdependent world, *globalisation* has impacted in varying degrees upon not only the daily lives of our young people and children but also upon their consciousness affecting their hopes, fears, aspirations and dreams (p20). Educating for peace, according to Hutchinson, involved the deconstruction of the prevailing and unjust colonising images of the future that have incorporated 'educating beyond fatalism' to students learning skills in lateral thinking and 'social imagination' within a pedagogical framework of hope (Hutchinson 1996, p81; Hutchinson 2002, p1) ie developing skills of imagination, social inventiveness and foresight (p3). Therefore, It is proposed (Mason, 2016) that discussion about peace-building stories with children can lead to hopeful and creative thinking and actions in relation to resolving present day issues but also in the imagining of a peaceful future. This relies upon the primary focus during discussions being upon caring for and creating positive, peaceful outcomes rather than over examining negative possibilities that could instill a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. It involves guided questioning that leads to more attention being placed upon creating positive solutions rather than the problem.

War and Peace

The impact of the actions of the character *Donald the Drake* can be directly linked to the following ideas. Kevin Clements (2005, p57) proposed that conflict with the western political policies perpetuate fear and revenge. He added that glorification of war or promulgation of patriotic values muddle the purpose of *peace education* in relation to encouraging new ways of thinking about political systems, policies and the development of *a culture of peace*. Other peace-building stories presented at www.brownmousepublishing.com deliberately avoid inciting biased political or religious commentary. Yet in relation to the story *Donald the Drake*, its theme, plot and alternative endings can seed an open discussion about current political events. Unlike George Orwell's story *Animal Farm* (1945), there are no power hungry pigs on the farm in the story of *Donald the Drake*. The transformative power of hope and belief that peace is possible hopefully overrides the need for such associations to be contemplated, especially as happy, *win-win* endings are considered possible in all peace-building stories (Mason, 2016).

The Language of Peace

Anita Wenden (2007) expressed her concerns in relation to the absence in *peace education* programmes of linguistic knowledge and critical language skills that support *nonviolent conflict*

resolution. Critical Language Education frameworks, ones that can be utilised to organise *peace education,* have been developed and researched by her (p3) and can influence and mold social action, that as she stated 'facilitate our transition to a culture of peace' (p11). The concepts underpinning her frameworks attend to delivery of course material, the knowledge and skills to be taught and the specific peace capacities that result (p3). Wenden's ideas indicated the importance of language structures providing the scaffolding for *the development of moral reasoning* and *an ethics of care* as proposed by the voices upon which previous comment has been made. The words considered and then woven together to create peace-building stories have been purposefully chosen by the author, who is endeavouring to positively and constructively respond to and incorporate Wenden's ideas. Peace-building stories introduce readers to the language of peace-building. Avoided are any words or associations that can possibly fill children's hearts and minds with fear or instill a sense of hopelessness and helplessness (Mason, 2016). But there are real and pertinent issues to which the story themes can be linked.

'Be the change that you wish to see in the world.'

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Enduring Legacies of Peace-builders

Although these many notable voices have considerably influenced the development of the idea of peace-building stories and how they can be utilised, the very powerful voices of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandella, The Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King Jr., all calling for *nonviolent action*, also permeate story themes and plots. But one outstanding peacemaker, Dr Jane Goodall, the UN Messenger of Peace, has particularly stirred the mind and heart of the author. Dr Jane, the personification of *care* and *compassion*, constantly travels the world inspiring children and youth but also people from any background, who listen to her messages of *hope* and *peace.* Her intention (as so aptly expressed in Michael Jackson's song *Heal the World*) is to create a better world and *make a difference* (MAD – the underpinning philosophy of her programme for youth titled *Roots&Shoots*). Magically she weaves her stories, sharing her life and her work while carefully choosing every word and ensuring that she personally engages with everyone who is fortunate to meet her. Inspiring positive, constructive action that connect people with animals and our shared environment Dr Jane can speak using just the right words that ensure this connection occurs - ie using words that are filtered by her gracious, peace-loving heart and incredible, open and curious mind.

'Each one of us matters, has a role to play, and makes a difference. Each one of us must take responsibility for our own lives, and above all, show respect and love for living things around us, especially each other.'

Dr Jane Goodall, 2015

Conclusion

The story *Donald the Drake* offers three alternative endings for possible discussion. The author invites readers to explore and create other possible endings. But hopefully, by being guided by the peace-building ideas provided, any further endings can reflect an understanding of and appreciation for the significant peace-building ideas that underpin all of her writing. By the beginning of the 21st Century the idea of transformative *education for peace* was being promoted by the United Nations. Therefore, by reflecting an understanding of the essential elements involved in *education for peace,* peace-building stories can seed hopeful conversations between adults and children about building a future that is socially just, peaceful and environmentally sustainable by seeding their critical thinking, creativity and 'social imagination'

….***and contribute to healing the world and making it a better place for you and for me.***

Peace-building stories are offered as tools that can be easily utilised within classrooms, homes and centres and become a part of any *peace education* programme being undertaken. The story *Donald the Drake* is only one peace-building story that promotes the possibility of happy, *win win* endings and open minded thinking in relation to the creation of a peaceful and just world.

The story suggests ways in which individuals can deal with their fears. Nonviolent action is one constructive way for any persons, who are feeling angry or are fearful, to respond. By recognising these feelings and not acting upon them to bring about harm, they rather choose to act in helpful, peace-building ways that transform their feelings into a power that is beneficial to themselves and others. The author invites everyone to think of peace-building ways to help themselves, their neighbourhoods and communities, ones that prevent us from seeing each other as one united humanity.

Finally, after reading the story, one might ponder what really lies ahead for Donald, his farm companions and for the world beyond Farmwell Farm. How can peace-building stories truly help in the making of a better world?

> *'Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however undramatic the pursuit of peace, the pursuit must go on.'*
>
> *John F Kennedy*

> *'Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing there is a field: I'll meet you there.'*
>
> *Rumi, 13th Century mystic and poet*

> *'Democracy buckles when we give into fear…..Let's be vigilant and not afraid.''*

The story *Donald the Drake* and the peace-building story guide *Opening Hearts Opening Minds* can both be downloaded for free at www.brownmousepublishing.com

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