1000 Peace Cranes: Exploring Children’s Meanings of Peace

Elizabeth Collardey

Abstract

This article reports preliminary findings of an exploratory project of a peace education program piloted over the course of three months to a group of children ages 7-14 at a Boys & Girls Club in a Midwest city. Participating in a class structured in a curriculum of peace education, the group of children met weekly to discuss peace topics and to work together towards the goal of folding and putting on public display 1000 origami peace cranes. Profound meanings of peace emerged from children’s narratives that immediately involved experiences of food insecurity in their families.

“Peace is when I stop thinking ‘bout food and start thinkin ‘bout livin.” Ten year old Timmie eloquently defined what peace meant for himself after participating in a peace education class in a Midwest city. At the end of a three month program sponsored by the Boys & Girls Club of America, a group of ten children, ages 8-12 years old, discovered their meanings and experiences of peace extended far beyond themselves to include unimaginable numbers of children worldwide.

Although the literature on what is known regarding children’s conceptions of peace and peacemaking is growing, a glaring omission is the absence of studies in the United States. Perhaps it is time to change this for the sake of the 75-90% (Gabarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992; Kuther & Wallace, 2003; Samaan, 2000; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003) of children in America’s inner cities who, because of the exposure or victimization to community violence, live at-risk for various psychological and social problems not to mention academic problems and emotional consequences. This article reports on the 1000 Peace Cranes project [1] and the meanings children discovered about peace.

Literature Review

Peace, stability, and sustainability are at the forefront of the international development agenda, as set forth in the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (Ishaq, 2006, p. S27). Prevailing theories of peace are mostly Western, as the academic discipline of peace research/studies itself (Udayakumar, 1998, p.14). For many people, peace still exclusively means nuclear peace and is a security concern rather than a matter of bare existence. Johan Galtung’s theory of peace as the absence of violence has been commonly referred to in classical peace studies (Barnett, 2008). In this sense, peace has not been an issue of justice but more an interest in maintaining dominant Western status quo agendas. Thus, our conception of peace is shaped by our worldview—our view of reality, human nature, purpose of life and human relationships. If this is true for adults, what are children’s worldviews of peace?

Social movements emerging in the last decade attempt to demonstrate that children who have fewer ideas about peace than they do about war are the long-term consequence of a society that legitimizes violence (http://www.acei.org/; http://www.atriumsoc.org/). What about the United States? Peace educator and activist Colman McCarthy’s premise is that the United States is so violent because we are peace “illiterate” (For example, scholars such as Jones (2007) document how the rest of the world is engaging in critical and
complex efforts to use conflict resolution education (CRE) to strengthen communities. Throughout global regions reported in the literature of peace studies, the attention to teacher preparation as a support for effective CRE initiatives is far more advanced than in the United States.

Yet, peace education as a paradigm is evolving and has yet to become established as a unified discipline (Danesh, 2006). A multitude of curricula of peace education exists with different foci. For example, peace education is commonly referred to as having an ultimate goal of the prevention or elimination of violence through various approaches (Daniel, Doudin, & Pons, 2006). Danesh (2006) stated that peace education is an “elusive concept” (p. 55). Grounded on the insights emerging from peace education research and lessons learned from five years of implementation of the Education for Peace (EFP) programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Danesh outlined four prerequisite conditions for effective peace education. These main components of peace education are: a unity-based worldview (versus conflict-based worldview), culture of healing (i.e., culture of reconciliation or forgiveness), culture of peace, and peace-oriented curriculum. The last prerequisite is perhaps the most challenging of all to achieve. This requires that peace education becomes the framework for all children’s educational activities. The literature noted by Danesh shows that peace is currently more an add-on than a foundation for children’s education.

Children and peace studies are found in the literature surfacing in the themes: creating peace (i.e., healing) through art media (McCarthy et al., 2005; Ishaq, 2006; Apprey & Howell, 2003; Anderson, 2000); treatment of children affected by war, particularly child soldiers (Cohn, 1999); parents as peace educators (Almon, 2008; Myers-Walls, Myers-Bowman, & Pelo, 1993; Vietze & Hildebrandt, 2009); and interventions/peace building between historically hostile and violent cultural/national groups (Gassin, Enright, & Knutson, 2005; Darvin, 2009). Peace education specifically in U.S. public schools can be identified under several sub-themes including: multicultural education (Andrea & Daniels, 1996; Kenan, 2005; Porter & Lorimer, 2005; Rennebohm-Franz, 1996), conflict resolution (Andrea & Daniels, 1996; Ashton, 2007; Boyes-Watson, 2005; Crawford, 2005; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Jones, 2007; Lane-Garon, 2000), anti-bullying and violence prevention (Hamburg & Hamburg, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Greene, 2006; Morris, Taylor, & Wilson, 2000; Slee & Mohyla, 2007; http://www.atrariumsoc.org/; http://www.nationalpeaceacademy.us/), community engagement through service learning (Porter & Lorimer, 2005), nonviolence and justice (Lane, 2000), and human rights education (Human Rights for Children Committee, 1993; Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009; Langley, 1997; McGivern, 1975).

The existing literature on children and peace studies serves as a backdrop for this study which explored children’s experiences in a peace education program grounded in a curriculum focusing on strengthening children’s skills of cooperation, collaboration, group problem solving, and peaceful conflict resolution. One glaring limitation of the previous studies is the exclusion of low-income, limited educational background, and people of color. These studies open a dialogue pointing to the necessity of how society itself must become peaceful. Peace education should move beyond talking about war and peace to teaching peace by example. What one also notes is how educational tools for parents are similar to educational curricular materials encouraged by K-12 teachers. Out of all these studies comes the call for programs to move beyond just teaching peace to transforming spaces into peaceful learning environments where children feel safe and supported in their efforts to work cooperatively and resolve conflicts harmoniously.

Scholarship from a global lens has documented how children are drawn into lives as soldiers and terrorism as a result of their inability to obtain security, food, power, prestige, education, and positive life opportunities through civilian means. For these researchers, peace education is an essential element in a holistic approach to the reintegration of former child soldiers and to the prevention of youth’s engagement in violence and terrorism. Securing basic necessities for children in war parallels what children in economically disadvantaged urban areas experience, although the threat of violence does not bear clear political lines of demarcation.

Recent peace agreements in Sierra Leone (1999), Burundi (2000), and Liberia (2003) have drawn the world’s attention to the necessity and benefit of including explicit child rights provisions during and after
peacemaking processes. Ilene Cohn (1999) provided an overview of war’s impact on children, a discussion of why peacemakers have tended to overlook children’s concerns, and an assessment of opportunities afforded by peace processes to improve child protection. Cohn’s scholarship sheds light on the shameful failure of child rights advocacy and program agencies to assess the impact of interventions on behalf of war-affected children. We still know very little about the meaning of peace in children’s lives, locally or globally, past, present, or future.

**Program Description**

The primary goal of this creative, earth-friendly, and peace-teaching after-school program for children was to support, enhance, and strengthen peace making in local communities. Designed as a weekly class held during an entire academic year, children learned how to fold origami peace cranes, learned about human and environmental interdependence, and deepened their own evolving understanding about peace. Grounded in the principles of peace making, the program’s curriculum incorporated semi-structured discussions about children’s experiences of peace, experiential group-building activities, and the actual task of folding origami peace cranes. The culmination of the peace crane project was the creation of 1000 peace cranes which the participants assembled into an object of their design and placed on display to be shared publicly.

The specific objectives of this project, which were assessed to demonstrate the project’s effectiveness, were for participants to:

1. define what peace means for one’s self;
2. begin to describe diverse possibilities for what peace could look like for the individual, family unit, organizations (e.g., schools) community, state, nation, and world;
3. begin to identify what is necessary for one’s individual experience of peace;
4. begin to recognize the challenges to the presence and sustenance of peace as a consequence of diversity;
5. deepen sensitivity to the interdependence of human life and the physical environment;
6. increase acceptance of personal growth and change both as individuals and as members of a larger community; and
7. strengthen skills of collaboration in a group that shares a common goal.

**Research Design**

This study incorporated both exploratory and descriptive goals that intended to provide a richly detailed understanding of children’s meanings of peace. With a primary purpose of evaluating a peace education program (did it work?), the research relied on both formative (how was the program implemented, who was involved) and summative evaluation methods (how well did the program fulfill its objectives). An additional basic research question asked: What does peace mean to children and how do those definitions change after participating in a peace education program?

The research design included both quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analyses. There were two specific evaluation processes or measurements. Evaluation process #1 relied on qualitative observations of the affective dimensions of peace; data were gathered from pre-program and post-program interviews using open-ended questions and analyzed using grounded theory content analysis. Evaluation process #2 was a quantitative evaluation of group cohesion among the children participants using a pre-test and post-test Likert scale. The researcher also relied on anecdotal records of the program staff as well as serving as a participant observer in order to collect data and record field notes on the program’s implementation.

**Research Sample**

The sample in this study was purposively selected because of the population’s relevance to the research topic. Purposive sampling is a common sampling method in exploratory research or in field research...
(Babbie, 1998). Because recruitment of participants for the program evaluation paralleled recruitment of children for the peace education program, selection of child participants relied on the expert judgment of the staff of the Boys & Girls Club who identified children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who might potentially benefit from participating in a peace education program.

Initially, seventeen children between the ages of 7-14 years old registered for the year-long program on a first come, first serve basis. Part of the program’s curriculum included establishing group norms and group-building processes from the very beginning. After the initial first few weeks, seven children withdrew from the program for a variety of reasons including lack of interest in the topic and lack of family support for regular, consistent participation. The final core group of ten children were between the ages of 7-14 years old; two were male (both white); eight were females (3 African-American, 1 Hispanic American, and 4 white); all children were living at or below the region’s poverty line established by their enrollment in the School Lunch/Breakfast program.

Data Collection and Analyses

Field notes recorded the children’s own words. Qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory methods of content analyses. Open, axial, and selective coding were used to identify patterns and themes and relationships among themes in the children’s responses to open-ended questions (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, the researcher gave special emphasis on identifying themes focusing on changes in pre- and post-program meanings of key concepts.

Likert-scale items on both the pre- and post-program questionnaire were analyzed to detect changes in participants’ acceptance, and group collaboration skills. Additionally, the seven specific program objectives were operationalized into Likert-scale items for summative evaluation purposes. Because of the small sample size (N=10), Wilcoxon test of rank-ordered means was used to test for statistical significance in changes in the subjects’ quantitative pre- and post-test responses. The Wilcoxon test for paired samples is the non-parametric equivalent of the paired samples t-test. It was selected because the sample data were not normally distributed, and they could not be transformed to a normal distribution by means of a logarithmic transformation. SPSSx, version 17.0, (PASW) was used to perform all statistical analyses.

Qualitative Findings

Due to the early termination of the program, in-depth post-program interviews were not conducted. The discussion section addresses program implementation issues with the early termination of the program and the implications for research. Table One displays the program outcomes aligned with the specific open-ended interview questions. Typical responses from participants are given with the open coding of the data collected during pre-program interviews.

Pre-program themes could be understood in terms of polarized experiences: the presence of certain attributes and the opposite absence of certain attributes. Children described peace as the presence of: good, open, positive communication; social connections; basic necessities and support for school success. In opposition to these, children described peace as the absence of: food insecurity; violence in the home; and violence in the larger environment. In defining peaceful actions, children situated peace within their ability to: control one’s own anger and/or behavior; and to make good decisions.

To gather information about what peace looked like in children’s environments or contexts, children were asked to describe what peace looked like for the individual, family unit, organizations (e.g., schools) community, state, and nation. In response to what do families feel, think, or do when they are at peace, children reported increased communication patterns and a lack of “what is normal” (no arguing, no yelling at me). In response to what is life like when schools have peace, children responded again with describing a lack of what is “normal” (no fighting, no detention, no parent meetings). In other words, the children’s normal environment at school involved fighting, detention, and multiple parent meetings.
In response to what is life like in your neighborhood (the area where you live) when there is peace, again, children described the absence of “what is normal” (no smoking, no booze bottles and cans everywhere, and no cop cars, no sirens at night). Finally, in response to what is life like in our country when there is peace, children responded referencing what they saw on the media: “no wars and no bad news on tv.”

For the program objective aiming to help children identify what is necessary for one’s individual experience of peace, children identified the following themes during pre-program interviews: basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, health, and safety; school support; and connections with others.

For the program outcome of participants recognizing the challenges to the presence and sustenance of peace as a consequence of diversity, children’s pre-program responses fell under a theme of conflict where the behaviors of arguing, fighting, or lack of communication were predominant responses. The open-ended questions intended to elicit children’s understanding of the effects of diversity were poorly written for the children’s developmental stages and as a result, yielded vague responses that could not be interpreted. This is addressed as a research note in a future article.

For the program outcome of participants deepening sensitivity to the interdependence of human life and the physical environment, children’s pre-program responses described the spaces in which they and their families’ lived. Common characteristics of those spaces included: small spaces; extreme temperatures; lack of basic utilities; lack of privacy or protection; and pest or animal infestation.

In describing those things that are needed that come from a person’s living space, children’s pre-program responses identified basic necessities: food (refrigerator), clothing, shelter (out of the cold), safety (safe place from the street), water, and family love. To protect the environment from being hurt or destroyed, children readily identified recycling efforts at their schools. Additionally, children’s families re-used plastic grocery bags.

Table 1. Pre-Program Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Outcomes #1 and #2</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Typical Pre-Program Responses from Participants</th>
<th>Open-Coding Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does peace mean?</td>
<td>“food, clothing, house, safety,” “food in the fridge,” “talking to each other at home,” “mom isn’t getting hurt,” “no wars;”</td>
<td>Presence of: good, open, positive communication; social connections; basic necessities; support for school success. Absence of: food insecurity, violence in the home, and violence in larger environment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What do you feel, think, or do when you are at peace?</td>
<td>“I’m not hitting my [older] brother,” “I’m not getting in trouble;”</td>
<td>Ability to control one’s anger and/or behavior; ability to make good decisions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What do families feel, think, or do when they are at peace?</td>
<td>“Family talked to me,” “no arguing,” “no yelling at me”</td>
<td>Presence of: increased communication patterns. Absence of: what is “normal” (arguing, yelling)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is life like when schools have peace?</td>
<td>“No fighting,” “no detention,” “no parent meetings”</td>
<td>Absence of: what is “normal” (fighting, detention, parent meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is life like in your neighborhood (the area where you live) when there is peace?</td>
<td>“No smoking,” “no bottles or cans everywhere,” “no cop cars,” “no sirens at night”</td>
<td>Absence of: what is “normal” (smoking, drinking, police)</td>
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<td>What is life like in our country when there is peace?</td>
<td>“No wars and no bad news on tv”</td>
<td>Absence of: what is “normal” (presented by media)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What do you need to have, to feel, or to do for you to feel at peace?</td>
<td>“food so I’m not hungry all the time,” “my mommy to get better, she’s sick a lot,” “help with my homework, my parents don’t know how to help me,” “quiet time, no tv that is so loud,” have friends come over after school, parents don’t want no one over.”</td>
<td>Basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, health, and safety. School support. Connections with others.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Program Outcomes #3 and #4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happens when people who are different from each other live, work, or go to school together?</th>
<th>“there’s arguing and fighting,” “no one talks to each other,” “people don’t get along,” “I think we’re afraid.”</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are some ways that people who are different can live and work in peace together?</td>
<td>“be nice,” “don’t know,” “don’t unnerstand”</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Program Outcome #5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe the physical environment or spaces that you live in.</th>
<th>“crowded cuz we have others living with us,” “hot in summer, cold I winter,” “no hot water, sometimes we boil water to drink,” no curtains, no locks on doors or windows,” “bugs and animals running inside and outside the building,”</th>
<th>Small spaces; extreme temperatures; lack of basic utilities; lack of privacy or protection; pest/animal infestation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are those things that you need for living that come from your environment?</td>
<td>“Refrigerator,” “clothing, “out of the cold,” “safe place from the street,” “water, “my family,” “love.”</td>
<td>Food, clothing, shelter, safety, water, family love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you do to protect your environment from being hurt or destroyed?</td>
<td>“We recycle paper at school,” “paper and plastic bags.”</td>
<td>Recycling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal circumstances compelled the researcher to end the evaluation prematurely in anticipation of a move. Because of the early termination of the program, in-depth post-program interviews could not be completed. Instead, a final meeting with the children was held and a focus group was used to find out children’s perceptions of peace upon completion of the peace education program. With the cooperation of agency staff, the researcher acquired informed consent from the parents for their children’s participation in the focus group held at the final meeting. Due to time constraints, the focus group could not engage in in-depth discussions and so, in addition to the original pre-program questions using a Likert scale for responses, only three open-ended questions were asked to find out the children’s perceptions and experiences of the peace class. Those questions were: What did you really like about the 1000 Peace Cranes Program? And why?; What have you learned about peace? or Peace is _______?; and What changes would you make to the 1000 Peace Cranes Program to make it better? Table Two presents the findings from the focus group.

**Table 2. Responses from Final Focus Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Final Focus Group</th>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
<th>Typical Participant’s Responses (Data)</th>
<th>Open-Coding Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you really like about the 1000 Peace Cranes Program? And why?</td>
<td>“folded 1000 cranes together!” “teaching each other how to fold cranes,” “circle games”</td>
<td>Group Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What have you learned about peace? Peace is _______?</td>
<td>“everyone has food,” “No one is hungry—ever,” “no wars,” “people in different countries get along,” “I like going to school,” “I can go play outside at night,” “I can do something different than arguing or fighting,” “teaching others what I know”</td>
<td>Food for everyone in the world. Lack of violence in home, school, community, and world. Connections to others in the world. Empowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What changes would you make to the 1000 Peace Cranes Program to make it better?</td>
<td>“play more games,” “have more kids join,” “nothing”</td>
<td>Sharing the fun experiences with others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The children’s responses identifying what they liked best about the class reflected their experience of group bonding and cohesion. In some ways, this theme overlaps with their responses about proposed changes to improve the peace class. The children responded with sharing their enjoyable experiences with others, a theme that parallels their pre-program response themes of connections with others as an aspect of peace. Children’s responses to the question of what is peace included the following themes: food for everyone in world; lack of violence in home, school, community, & world, and empowerment.

**Quantitative Findings**

Quantitative data gathered and analyzed for program objectives #6 and #7 were analyzed to measure change in participants’ acceptance of personal growth and change both as individuals and as members of a larger community. A Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that children’s ratings of self-acceptance of personal growth and change were higher at the end of the program (Mdn=4.0) than at the beginning (Mdn=3.0), Z=2.27, p<.05, r=.72. A separate Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that children’s perceptions of how others people accepted their personal growth and change were higher at the end of the program (Mdn=5.0) than at the beginning (Mdn=4.0), Z=2.57, p<.05, r=.81. The last analysis conducted for program objective #7 revealed that children’s self-ratings of collaboration skills in a group were higher at the end of the program (Mdn=4.0) than at the beginning (Mdn=3.0), Z=2.33, p<.05, r=.74.

**Discussion**

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A change in the staff of the peace crane class necessitated an unplanned early termination of the program. As a result, issues affecting the implementation of the research project surfaced. The immediate positive effect was, upon learning about the early termination, the children’s motivation to complete the folding of 1000 origami peace cranes was clearly increased. The researcher learned that the children completed their project one month later and displayed their 1000 origami peace cranes strung on an artificial tree in the public library which was adjacent to the agency. This enabled the children to share with their family and friends the outcome of their participation in the program.

Because the program ended during the nineteenth week of the 26 week curriculum, the findings of the program evaluation were incomplete. There were no post-program interviews with the children, no follow-up interviews with parents nor school data gathered to provide collateral data on the children’s changes. Despite the interruption of the original research design, meaningful data were gathered and yielded rich findings into the meanings of children’s experiences of peace.

Based on this study’s findings, one can begin to imagine children’s understandings of peace. The children in this study extended definitions of peace beyond the prevailing absence of violence as identified previously in the literature. Moving away from a conflict-based understanding of peace, the children in this study spoke of peace in terms of the presence of positive communication among family, social connections, basic necessities, and support for school success. They articulated an ability to control one’s own anger and/or behavior as well as good decision-making as essential elements in their definitions of peaceful actions. These themes were reiterated in the final focus group when children were asked at the end of the peace class to, once again, define what peace meant to them. Food security and basic necessities, connections to others in the world, and empowerment emerge as profound qualities of children’s definitions and experiences of peace along with the all-too-familiar absence of violence.

On a different note, informed consent issues emerged early in the evaluation where twenty percent of the children demonstrated trust issues with the researcher who was a stranger. In general, the children’s parents easily provided parental informed consent because of the established trusting relationship with the agency. It is understandable that some of the children would have difficulty in being interviewed privately with an adult stranger. As a result, the researcher invited agency staff to accompany children who were mistrustful of the research interview process. The staff were graciously present during the pre-program interviews with children who felt unsure about being interviewed by a stranger. Although this created a cost of time in the scheduling of research activities, the flexibility of the agency staff facilitated full participation of the child participants.

The children’s anxiety about being interviewed by a stranger raises an important issue concerning children as research participants. Social work, whose mission has historically led the way in minimizing “risk” with vulnerable populations in both research and practice, has an opportunity to inform empirical methods about how to treat children as subjects. This is a new topic that was initially explored in 2001 with Hall, Stevens, and Pletsch’s study of family focused qualitative interviewing. This study demonstrated that exploring and testing new methods of gaining child assent as well as the treatment of child subjects in research is necessary if the profession is to advance best practices of children’s programs. Hall, Stevens, and Pletsch found that interviewing families as whole units led to greater child participation in research as well as strengthened the protection of children as human subjects.

The two research issues emerging from this study of gaining informed consent and alleviating anxiety of children as research participants became a focus of a study that replicated the peace education program in a different region (Collardey, 2011, under review). This article analyzes the process of acquiring informed consent from poor parents of children ages 7-13. Weaving the experiences of gaining informed consent from parents of children living in poverty with the current literature on conducting research with children, Collardey highlights the unavoidable environmental conditions that impinge even more immediately in these times of economic crisis on the lives of people living in persistent poverty. Gaining an invitation into the lives of the most vulnerable living in poverty becomes a privilege that must be earned.
Implications for social work practice

Children’s perspectives have become an important focus for research in general (Christensen & James, 2000; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; McCallum, Hargreaves, & Gipps, 2000). Recent research acknowledges children as “unrivalled experts in their own fields” (Cooper, 1993) who are active and knowledgeable participants with rights. This program evaluation shed a spotlight on the meanings of peace from the perspective of the experts—the children. The peace education class as well as the children’s meanings of peace hold important implications for social work practice.

The peace education class demonstrated that group work with disadvantaged children supports stronger bonds among the group, an increase in the relationships among the children’s social networks, and alternative strategies for problem-solving leading to a greater sense of self-efficacy. Both qualitative and quantitative data support this in the qualitative theme of group cohesion emerging from the focus group along with the quantitative significance of the improved change in the children’s ratings of group collaboration. Additionally the final focus group’s theme of empowerment reflected children’s ability to make choices in conflict-resolution that are different from their norm of violence and aggression. These findings parallel Nelson, McClintock, Perez-Ferguson, Shawver, and Thompson (2008) who similarly reported outcomes of prosocial achievement, positive peer experiences, and new skill acquisition.

This study also speaks to children’s understanding and experience of peace in their families. As D’Cruz and Stagnitti (2010) similarly found, children’s experience of peace became clearer and more accessible through affirming communication from their family members. As the children in this study reported, peace was present when there an overall general increase in interaction among family members. Future research could explore potential cause-and-effect relationships in frequency of family interaction and the quality of family interaction. This study hinted at how an increase in positive communication within a family correlates with the experience of peace in children.

Food insecurity and hunger were telling themes in the children’s meanings of peace. One knows that food insecurity is associated with poor behavioral and academic functioning in low-income children (Murphy, Wehler, Pagano, Little, Kleinman, & Jellinek, 1998). The children’s worry, anxiety, and sadness about their family’s food supply mirrors the findings in the literature on factors associated with child hunger (Connell, Lofton, Yadrick, & Rehner, 2004). Children bear and act out the fear and shame of being labeled as poor (Raine, McIntyre, & Dayle, 2003). Wehler et al., (2004) identified family size, housing stability, and the effect of violence as significant factors increasing the risk of child hunger.

The meanings children give to peacemaking have implications for how children will work toward achieving peace. Social interaction becomes the means by which children discover and create meaning. Asking young children about what they think they can do to make peace becomes an important first step in encouraging them in their peace-making efforts (Walker, Myers-Bowman, & Myers-Walls, 2008, p. 379). Timmie’s words in the beginning reflect the power of children to identify not only the problems they/we face but a power to shine light on society’s priorities for its children’s learning, development, well-being, and peace. The question becomes, if the children lead, will we adults follow?

References


Footnotes

[1] Research on this project received IRB approval from Clarke College, Dubuque, IA, where the principal
investigator served as a full-time faculty member of social work.

**Pre- and Post-Program Interview Schedule for Evaluation of 1000 Peace Cranes**

**Program Outcomes #1, #2**

What does peace mean?
What do you feel, think, or do when you are at peace?
What do families feel, think, or do when they are at peace?
What is life like when schools have peace?
What is life like in your neighborhood (the area where you live) when there is peace?
What is life like in our country when there is peace?
What is life like in our world when there is peace?
What do you need to have, to feel, or to do for you to feel at peace?
How do you think you can make/create peace?
If you were boss of the world, what would you do to make peace?

**Program Outcomes #3, #4**

What happens when people who are different from each other live, work, or go to school together?
What are some ways that people who are different can live and work in peace together?

**Program Outcome #5**

Describe the physical environment or spaces that you live in.
What are those things that you need for living that come from your environment?
What do you do to protect your environment from being hurt or destroyed?
Who are all the important people in your life, right now?

For Program Outcomes #6, #7, and #8, respond using the following Likert scale:

How often is this statement true for you?

0=never true for me
1=true for me only once in a while
2=true for me sometimes
3=true for me frequently
4=always true for me

**Program Outcome #6**

Because I am growing and learning new things, I feel good about how my friends and family see me.
Because I am growing and learning new things, I feel good about me.

**Program Outcome #7**

I know how to get along and work well with other kids.
I know how to help kids who are different from me feel accepted and that they belong.

**Questions for Post-Program Interviews only:**

What did you really like about the Peace Cranes and Peace Gardens Program? And why?
What have you learned about peace from the program?
What changes would you suggest to make the Peace Cranes and Peace Gardens Program better?

**About the Author**

Elizabeth KimJin Collardey, PhD, LMSW, Assistant Professor, School of Education and Human Services Social Work Department, University of Michigan Flint.