

Unesco's Work in Peace Education

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UNESCO's Charter

The Constitution of UNESCO, was written immediately after the end of the Second World War, during which education had been misused to indoctrinate students in such a way that they became uncritical and fanatical supporters of military dictatorships. The founders of the United Nations were anxious to correct this misuse, and to make education instead one of the foundations of a peaceful world.

UNESCO's Charter

The Charter stated that:

“The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.”

Revision of Textbooks

A meeting of French, German, British and American teachers was organized in 1952, with the goal of removing national prejudices from textbooks. Every two years after this date bilateral and multilateral consultations of history teachers have taken place under the auspices of UNESCO.

Some Voices From UNESCO

Ellen Wilkinson (United Kingdom) (Former UK Minister of Education, Chairwoman of the conference establishing UNESCO in 1945): *What can this organization do? Can we replace nationalist teaching by a conception of humanity that trains children to have a sense of mankind as well as of national citizenship? That means working for international understanding*

Some Voices From UNESCO

Maria Montessori (Italy), pioneer of modern education and education for peace, Fourth Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Florence 1950: *If one day UNESCO resolved to involve children in the reconstruction of the world and building peace, if it chose to call on them, to discuss with them, and recognize the value of all the revelations they have for us, it would find them of immense help in infusing new life into this society which must be founded on the cooperation of all.*

Some Voices From UNESCO

Jamie Torres Bodet (Mexico), Director-General of UNESCO, 1948-1952, (The UNESCO Courier, 1951): *Knowledge and understanding of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and their practical application must begin during childhood. Efforts to make known the rights and duties they imply will never be fully effective unless schools in all countries make teaching about the declaration a regular part of their curriculum...*

Some Voices From UNESCO

Lionel Elvin (United Kingdom), Director of the Department of Education of UNESCO, 1950-1956 (UNESCO Courier, 1953): *If UNESCO were only an office in Paris, its task would be impossible. It is more than that: it is an association of some sixty-five countries which have pledged themselves to do all they can, not only internationally but within their own boundaries, to advance the common aim of educating for peace. The international side comes in because we shall obviously do this faster and better and with more mutual trust if we do it together.*

Some Voices From UNESCO

Jawaharlal Nehru (India) Prime Minister, 1947-1964 (Address on a visit to UNESCO, 1962): *It is then the minds and hearts of men that have to be approached for mutual understanding, knowledge and appreciation of each other and through the proper kind of education... But we have seen that education by itself does not lead to a conversion of minds towards peaceful purposes. Something more is necessary, new standards, new values and perhaps a kind of spiritual background and a feeling of commonness of mankind.*

Some Voices From UNESCO

James P. Grant (United States). Executive Director of UNICEF, 1980-1995, (International Conference on Education, Geneva, 1994): *Education for peace must be global, for as the communications revolution transforms the world into a single community, everyone must come to understand that they are affected by what happens elsewhere, and that their lives , too, have an impact. Solidarity is a survival strategy in the global village.*

Decade for a Culture of Peace, 2001-2010

During the time when he was Secretary-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor Zaragoza of Spain introduced the concept of a *Culture of Peace*. He felt, as many did, that civilization was entering a period of crisis. Federico Mayor believed this crisis to be as much spiritual as it was economic and political. It was necessary, he felt, to counteract our present power-worshipping culture of violence with a Culture of Peace, a set of ethical and aesthetic values, habits and customs, attitudes towards others, that express:

Decade for a Culture of Peace, 2001-2010

- Respect for life and for the dignity and human rights of individuals.
- Rejection of violence.
- Recognition of equal rights for men and women.
- Upholding the principles of democracy, freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance and the acceptance of differences.
- Understanding between nations and countries and between ethnic, religious, cultural and social groups.

Decade for a Culture of Peace, 2001-2010

The UN General Assembly drafted a Program of Action on a Culture of Peace (53rd Session, 2000). The Program of Action obliges its signatories to “ensure that children, from an early age, benefit from education on the values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life to enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity and of tolerance and non-discrimination”, and to “encourage the revision of educational curricula, including textbooks...”

<http://www.culture-of-peace.info/>

Conclusion

Why doesn't the United Nations have its own global television network? Such a network could broadcast documentary programs on global problems. It could produce programs showing viewers the music, art and literature of other cultures than their own. At New Year, the Secretary General of the United Nations could broadcast a "State of the World" message. A United Nations television network would at least give viewers a choice between programs supporting militarism, and programs supporting a global culture of peace. At present they have no choice.

Conclusion

We urgently need a new global ethic, - an ethic where loyalty to family, community and nation will be supplemented by a strong sense of the brotherhood of all humans, regardless of race, religion or nationality. It is this sense of a universal human family that we need to cultivate in education, in the mass media, and in religion.