

## MAHATMA GANDHI ON VIOLENCE AND PEACE EDUCATION

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At first reading, Mohandas Gandhi's writings on nonviolence, peace, and education seem uncomfortably naïve and simplistic. Those familiar with philosophical literature may be stunned by his seemingly oversimplified, uncritical, and inadequate treatments of difficult, complex, metaphysical, ethical, cultural, and other philosophical concerns relevant to Gandhian views on education.

My own view is that Gandhi's simplicity, as evidenced in his seemingly inadequate philosophical positions on peace education, can be misleading. It is true that Gandhi is not a philosopher in any specialized sense, and he has little concern for highly abstract and technical philosophical formulations. Nevertheless, beneath the apparent surface of oversimplified, naïve, and inadequate philosophical affirmations, one often uncovers surprisingly complex, subtle, enigmatic, and contradictory aspects of Gandhi's philosophy. Most important, his reflections on peace education serve as a challenge and as a catalyst for rethinking dominant positions and have more value for significant philosophical reflection than most mainstream "academic" philosophy.

My approach to Gandhi on peace education is necessarily selective. Because of the sheer volume of Gandhi material, the limited contextual situatedness of any interpreter, and the phenomenological insight that all knowledge is perspectival, any scholar is necessarily selective in his or her focus. This means ignoring or devaluing other Gandhi data, structuring and privileging data in terms of significance, and formulating and arguing for one of a number of possible interpretations of Gandhi on peace education.<sup>1</sup> One is necessarily selective not only in terms of Gandhi's writing, but also in comparing Gandhi with other philosophical approaches and assessing their respective contributions.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to violence, nonviolence, peace, and education, Gandhi does not have all the answers. My position is that a highly selective approach to Gandhi, when integrated with compatible non-Gandhian approaches, provides invaluable insights and potential for creative and more adequate formulations of peace education.

Before turning to Gandhi's analysis of peace education, I offer several qualifications and clarifications. First, I comment on texts, contexts, and interpretations. Second, I comment on the inadequacy of antithetical essentialist and anti-essentialist interpretations. Third, I clarify my use of Gandhi's "peace education." And finally, I emphasize that Gandhi is misleadingly simplistic by citing his approach to such normally overlooked phenomena as educational violence.

After these introductory clarifications, I submit that Gandhi serves as a valuable catalyst, allowing us to rethink our positions on violence, nonviolence, and peace education. This is followed by consideration of Gandhi's valuable insights about peace education as long-term preventative education and socialization. Gandhi's approach to education is then seen to focus on character building and values and on the educational dangers of separating means from ends and becoming trapped in endless cycles of escalating violence. A brief formulation is given of Gandhi's key distinction between relative and absolute truth and how this shapes his approach to peace education. After noting the importance of Gandhi's analysis of self, self-other relations, and *swaraj* or "self-rule," I conclude by suggesting that Gandhi's approach to peace education faces many significant challenges and formidable difficulties. Nevertheless, his approach has much of value in challenging dominant philosophical approaches and offering creative alternatives.

### *Qualifications and Clarifications*

#### *Texts, Contexts, and Interpretations*

A difficulty in interpreting and applying Gandhi's writings to peace education arises from complex relations between texts, contexts, and interpretations. Much of this challenge comes from the sheer volume of writings by and about Gandhi. Although he never wrote a lengthy book, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* comes to one hundred volumes of very diverse and highly fragmented newspaper articles, correspondence, speeches, and other writings. One cannot understand Gandhi's various concerns, specific use of language, and diverse formulations without understanding the specific economic, political, cultural, and ethical contexts within which he lived, read texts, and struggled with opponents and alternative approaches. For example, Gandhi describes the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as his favorite scriptural text, and he arrives at his central interpretation of the activist path of *karma yoga* through a very unusual nonviolent political reading of the *Gītā*. This has to be situated within a context of positive and negative Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, and Western influences, including a contextualized political struggle for national independence from British colonial domination. True, his formulations of peace education are shaped by his commitment to the absolute ideals of *ahimsā* (nonviolence) and *satya* (truth), but they are also shaped by his changing and conflicted reactions to the specific contextualized structures of a British colonial education. These had socialized "modern" Indians to adopt Western models and to devalue or feel ashamed of traditional Hindu and other Indian values.

What this means is that in formulating Gandhi's views on peace education, we must become aware of complex and dynamic interactions of texts and contexts and the creative, open-ended project of interpreting meaning. This is true of the interpretative horizon of meaning within which Gandhi lived, provided linguistic formulations, and interpreted meaning; and it is true of our own linguistic interpretative horizon within which we are contextually situated, read Gandhi's writings, and

formulate our own interpretations of meaning. Our reading of Gandhi's texts on peace education, our symbolic and other linguistic formulations, and our interpretations of meaning involve the complex, dynamic, and often contradictory interactions and mediations between two horizons of meaning: Gandhi's contextualized textual world of meaning and our own.

This leads to my hermeneutical orientation, in which there is not one static or absolutely true Mahatma Gandhi view of peace education. In fact, there is not one static or absolutely true view of the "real" Mahatma Gandhi. What we select, privilege, interpret, and write about Gandhi and his views of nonviolence, truth, and peace education is mediated and shaped by our own contextualized situatedness and our linguistic and interpretative horizons of meaning. This unavoidable contingency in our interpretative projects means that we are presented with multiple Gandhis and multiple Gandhian views of peace education. Every reading of Gandhi is a rereading, every interpretation is a reinterpretation, and every formulation is a reformulation that is integral to dialogue and a complex, dynamic, open-ended, evolving process of the constitution of meaning. We are involved in a creative, dynamic, open-ended process of contestation in which we consider and argue for different Gandhian views of peace education in terms of consistency, adequacy, significance, and contemporary relevance.

#### *Essentialist and Anti-Essentialist Interpretations*

My position can be contrasted with dominant essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to Gandhi's writings and interpretations of meaning. Most interpreters have presented essentialist versions of the real Mahatma Gandhi and his universal, ahistoric, absolute philosophical values and positions. The debate is over the real Gandhi and his true philosophy. Many essentialist interpretations uphold a very rigid, conservative, reactionary Gandhi, who idealizes premodern societies and uses absolute ethical and spiritual norms to reject alcohol consumption, meat eating, materialism, consumerism, modern medicine, technology, industrialization, globalization, and other features of a violent modern West. Other essentialist interpretations uphold a very radical, forward-looking Gandhi, who is engaged in a revolutionary project of using absolute ethical and spiritual norms to transform human relations in the direction of nonviolence, compassion, love, peace, and truth.

Essentialist interpretations have characterized diametrically opposed pro-Gandhi and anti-Gandhi approaches. On the one hand, pro-Gandhi essentialist interpretations, whether conservative reactionary or revolutionary, present an idealized, at times even deified, larger-than-life Mahatma, who possesses the truth and gives us the true formulation of peace education. On the other hand, anti-Gandhi essentialist interpretations present an equally rigid, absolute, decontextualized Mohandas, who possesses little or no truth, is uncompromisingly dogmatic and irrelevant to the contemporary world, and gives us false or useless formulations of peace education.

Although I am more sympathetic to certain pro-Gandhi formulations of a revolutionary Gandhi, all essentialist versions fail to do justice to a more open-ended,

contextualized, flexible, dynamic, modest Gandhi. A more nuanced and adequate approach to Gandhi, consistent with his title *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments in Truth*, approaches Gandhi and his writings as continually engaged in “experiments in truth.” Such experiments lead to successes or verifications, as well as to failed experiments, often very instructive, and to reformulations of Gandhi’s views on peace education.

In recent decades, many scholars have adopted certain anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, more contextually sensitive approaches. This orientation can be seen in various approaches described as cultural relativism, postmodernism, deconstructionism, multiculturalism, much of feminism, and versions of pragmatism. Using such an anti-essentialist approach, I would typically submit that I am constructing my Gandhi narrative on peace education. You may accept or reject my Gandhi narrative on aesthetic or other grounds, but there are no objective, absolute, or essential criteria for evaluating the truth or falsity of my account.

Although I am sympathetic to approaches that avoid interpretative closures of rigid essentialist interpretations and that are more contextually sensitive and open to new creative interpretations of meaning, there are problems with such anti-essentialist orientations. Interpreters are rarely satisfied with claiming that their narratives are simply works of fiction or simply their own personal reflections. They usually claim that their anti-essentialist writings are more truthful or adequate in terms of interpreting Gandhi’s writings. In addition, the dynamic of texts, contexts, and interpretations of meaning is very open-ended and flexible, but Gandhi’s texts are not completely malleable, and interpretations of his writings are not completely subjective and arbitrary. An interpreter can give an inadequate or “false story” of Gandhi’s philosophy of peace education. While avoiding weaknesses and inadequacies of essentialist approaches, we still need criteria for assessing the truth or falsity, adequacy or inadequacy, of competing formulations of Gandhi’s philosophy of peace education.

### *Peace Education*

Gandhi wrote extensively about education. His writings include hundreds of pages of critiques of the evils and deficiencies of British and other modern educational models and his proposals for positive alternative approaches. Throughout his adult life, he was involved in innovative and sometimes controversial educational experiments, and he learned from their successes and failures. His specific formulations can be found in numerous articles, pamphlets, and other publications contained in his *Collected Works*. His many experiments and reflections finally led to his Wardha Scheme of Education, formulated at the educational conference held on October 22–23, 1937, in Wardha, and this became known as the Nai Talim or New Education of Gandhi. The most emphasized part of this New Education was Gandhi’s Basic Education, which focused on the eight years of elementary education. The New Education was an essential component of Gandhi’s famous Constructive Programme, which presented his positive moral and spiritual vision for a new independent India.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi offers many valuable insights on education. Educators can benefit greatly by studying his formulations of the true goal of education as liberation: providing a means for service to meet the needs of others, for liberation from all forms of servitude and domination, and for one's ethical and spiritual liberation. Gandhi presents challenging insightful formulations of basic and new education with regard to character building as the goal of education,<sup>4</sup> the centrality of work and productive manual labor, the focus on real needs and simple living, the development of non-violent relations, and a holistic approach that involves the integrated training of body, mind, and spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Many of Gandhi's specific educational proposals are valuable, but others, in my view, seem very idiosyncratic, provisional, outdated, and in need of radical revision or complete rejection. There may be valuable insights, as well as serious weaknesses, in, say, Gandhi's specific formulations about the need for a local "mother tongue" as the medium of instruction, the role of technology, the centrality of crafts in the educational process, the focus of education in reviving village life, and limited state support for universities and higher education. In many cases, Gandhi's specific educational views were clearly directed at his specific Indian contexts, and, consistent with his dynamic, open-ended, pragmatic approach, he would have revised his views in terms of contemporary developments.

In any case, such specific writings by Gandhi on education are not my focus. Instead, I shall concentrate on what I consider Gandhi's major contribution to peace education by examining his larger philosophical orientation and framework. It is within the larger philosophical, ethical, and spiritual orientation, grounded in such concepts as nonviolence and truth, that we can best comprehend what is of lasting value and significance in Gandhi's approach to peace education.

### *Misleadingly Simplistic*

Gandhi's seemingly simplistic, naïve, and inadequate formulations can be misleading. For example, it is tempting to identify Gandhi with a common view that "peace" is simply a particular example of "nonviolence," whereas "war" is simply a particular example of "violence." Nevertheless, as one becomes immersed in Gandhi's writings, it becomes increasingly evident that Gandhi is often very subtle, flexible, and complex. For Gandhi, nonviolence is more than the absence of overt violence; peace is more than the absence of overt war; and most human beings who affirm their commitment to peace and nonviolence are in fact very violent.

As we shall see below, such misleading simplicity is exposed when one recognizes Gandhi's focus on the multidimensional nature of violence and the violence of the status quo. This is central to Gandhi's analysis of peace education. Most interpreters of violence focus on overt manifestations, such as killing, injuring, rape, and human-rights violations, and, if they include education at all, they focus on overt violent conflict in schools. In contrast, Gandhi focuses on economic, psychological, cultural, ethical, and other multidimensional characteristics of "normal" educational violence and on how status quo, business-as-usual education, even when free from

overt violent conflict, is indeed very violent and must be challenged by peace education.

### *Gandhi as Catalyst for Rethinking Views of Violence*

Although Gandhi provides valuable formulations of peace education, he is even more valuable in serving as a catalyst challenging us to rethink our views of violence and nonviolence. Such a rethinking, broadening, and deepening of our assumptions, concepts, and perspectival orientation can have a profound effect on how we approach peace education.

Gandhi, of course, is very concerned with violence in the more usual sense of overt physical violence. He devotes considerable attention to identifying such violence, trying diverse approaches to conflict resolution, and providing nonviolent alternatives. This is evident in his many writings and struggles directed at war, overt terrorism, outbreaks of class and caste violence, and Hindu-Muslim communal violence.<sup>6</sup> However, for Gandhi, such serious overt violence constitutes only a small part of the violence that must be addressed by peace education.

Gandhi's approach to education emphasizes both the multidimensional nature of violence and the structural violence of the status quo. Educational violence cannot be separated from linguistic, economic, psychological, cultural, political, religious, and other forms of violence. These many dimensions of violence interact, mutually reinforce each other, and provide the subject matter and challenge for peace education. For example, language, inside or outside the classroom, can serve as a violent weapon used to control, manipulate, humiliate, intimidate, terrorize, oppress, exploit, and dominate other human beings. "Peaceful" situations, free from overt violent conflict, may be defined by deep psychological violence. If I am filled with ego-driven hatred, manifested as self-hatred and hatred for others, I am a very violent person. This will be manifested in how I relate to myself and to others, even if I repress or control my desire to strike out violently at the targets of my hatred. In his analysis of "normal" British colonial education in India, Gandhi frequently analyzes how the structures, values, and goals of such educational models inflicted great psychological and cultural violence on colonized Indians.

Unlike most philosophers and others who adopt ethical and spiritual approaches, Gandhi places a primary emphasis on basic material needs and the "normal" state of economic violence. Repeatedly, he uses "violence" as synonymous with exploitation. He is attentive to unequal, asymmetrical, violent power relations in which some, who possess wealth, capital, and other material resources, are able to exploit and dominate those lacking such economic power. Gandhi identifies with the plight of starving and impoverished human beings and with the plight of peasants, workers, and others who are disempowered and dominated. He emphasizes that such economic violence is not the result of supernatural design or an immutable law of nature. It involves human-caused oppression, exploitation, domination, injustice, and suffering, and, hence, we as human beings are responsible. If I

could change conditions and alleviate suffering, but I choose either to profit from such structural violence or not to get involved, I perpetuate, am complicit in, and am responsible for the economic violence of the status quo. Obviously, incorporating such concerns of economic violence broadens and radically changes the nature of peace education.

In pointing to Gandhi's radical challenges and to his value as a catalyst, we may touch briefly on a few aspects of educational violence in typical modern university settings. While focusing on universities, we must keep in mind that Gandhi submits that peace education must emphasize the formative training and socialization of young children. Most people do not think of universities and classroom teaching as violent, but Gandhi argues that "normal" university education is very violent, in terms of both multidimensional violence and the violence of the status quo.

From Gandhi's perspective, the "peaceful," seemingly nonviolent classroom can be a very violent place, even when there are no actual outbursts of violence. A professor may use the grade as a weapon to threaten, intimidate, terrorize, and control students, including those who raise legitimate concerns questioning the analysis of the teacher who has institutional power over their futures. A teacher may use language, or even facial expressions and other body-language communication, in a violent way as when ignoring, humiliating, or ridiculing students who ask questions. Most often, these students will become silenced and will not subject themselves to the dangers of any further such terrifying humiliation.

In more general terms, Gandhi would emphasize that universities educate students and do research in violent ways. Modern universities have increasingly become commodified and corporatized. Education is a good investment. Commodified students, as a means to some corporate end, are our most important "product." Through education we increase their market-driven exchange value. Central Gandhian ethical, cultural, spiritual, social, and humanistic priorities regarding peace and nonviolence are usually ignored, occasionally attacked as unrealistic, and sometimes acknowledged but then unfunded and marginalized.

Gandhi views many courses, departments, and colleges as violent even if this is taken as the status quo in no need of justification. Economic and business courses assume a framework and orientation in which students are educated to calculate how to maximize their narrow, ego-defined self-interests and how to defeat opponents and win economically in a world of adversarial, win-lose relations. For Gandhi, we are "educating" our students to such dominant economic models, models in which economic success is synonymous with maximizing economic exploitation, and exploitation is always violent.

Similarly, Gandhi's peace education would analyze most political science or government courses as inherently violent since they claim to be value-free but actually assume, as an immutable given, a status quo framework in which we live in a violent world of antagonistic adversarial relations. The goal is to win by amassing greater power and dominating those challenging one's power interests. Similarly, public relations and communications courses usually adopt a violent framework in which the goal is to use language, images, and media to manipulate and control

others, to get one's way, and to maximize one's narrow interests in winning in a world of violent relations. In terms of his own professional background, Gandhi was a barrister, and he makes the same kinds of criticisms of the violent adversarial legal system in which the goal is not cooperation, reconciliation, and peaceful relations, but exacerbating and exploiting multidimensional violence and winning at any cost by defeating the other.

To provide one other, disciplinary illustration, Gandhi's peace education points to the normal violence of the status quo reflected in most disciplines of the sciences, engineering, and technology. Scholars uncritically adopt models of instrumental rationality in which they provide the means allowing for the ends of control, domination, and exploitation of other human beings and of nature. Gandhi is not focusing on individual professors or students who are rewarded for acquiring and applying such scientific and technological means. His more fundamental and radical critique is of the unacknowledged structural violence that defines such disciplines and has devastating violent economic, military, political, and environmental effects on most of humanity and on nature.

One of the most valuable contributions of Gandhi's approach to violence is to broaden our focus so that we are able to situate our peace-education concerns in terms of the larger dominant, multidimensional structures of the violence of the status quo. For example, we uncritically accept the existence of a permanent war economy as just the way things are. We do not critique how the permanent war economy was created, is maintained, and flourishes best under conditions of insecurity, terror, violence, and war. We do not critique how it removes resources that could be provided to meet vital human needs and to provide alternative nonviolent ways of relating. Instead we accept a view of jobs and economic security dependent on a permanent war economy of insecurity, and we train students to become functionaries and contributors to a more effective war economy based on the perpetuation and domination of structural violence.

Similarly, Gandhian peace education raises an awareness of how universities have increasingly become integral parts of what President Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex and what Senator J. William Fulbright reformulated as the military-industrial-academic complex.<sup>7</sup> Universities increasingly approach transnational corporations, the military, the government, and other funding sources and promote themselves as valuable places to invest. Universities, as institutions of educational violence, provide the means, in terms of applied research and the education of students, to further the ends of the structural violence of the military-industrial complex based on the hierarchical, multidimensional, and violent relations of control, exploitation, and domination.

### *Peace Education as a Long-Term Preventative Approach*

In this section, we focus on the greatest strength of Gandhi's peace education: preventative measures for the gradual long-term changes necessary for identifying and transforming the root causes and causal determinants that keep us trapped in escalat-

ing cycles of violence. However, it is important to emphasize that Gandhian peace education also has profound short-term benefits.

Gandhi's peace-education approach offers possibilities for conflict resolution when contradictions become exacerbated and individuals, groups, or nations are on the brink of overt violence. Gandhi's own life is replete with illustrations of how he was able to intervene through listening, sympathizing, engaging in dialogue, fasting, being willing to suffer, and other forms of nonviolent intervention and resistance in order to defuse very tense, violent situations. Peace education can teach us how to empathize with what the other is feeling, change our language, and practice nonviolent interventions that can break escalating causal cycles of violence that are about to explode.

If someone intent on inflicting violence confronts me, Gandhian peace education offers many responses that may prove effective in preventing violence. If I manage to limit my ego, achieve a larger perspective, and empathize with the other's feelings, this may allow for dialogue and for creating nonthreatening relations with the other. In addition, Gandhi repeatedly emphasizes that intellectual approaches with rational analysis often have no transformative effect on the other, but approaches of the heart, involving deep personal emotions and feelings, often have profound relational and transformative effects. If I refuse to strike back and am willing to embrace sacrifice and suffering, this can disrupt the expectations of the violent other, lead to a decentering and reorienting of an extremely violent situation, and touch the other's heart. Throughout his writings on *satyagraha* and other methods for resisting and transforming violence, Gandhi proposes numerous ways for relating to short-term violence and moving toward a conflict resolution grounded in truth and nonviolence.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that there are situations, when we are on the brink of exploding violence, in which Gandhian peace education has limited or no effectiveness. One thinks, for example, of the rapist engaged in an act of rape, the pilot about to drop napalm on Vietnamese villagers, the suicide bomber about to inflict violence on innocent civilians, or the insane person about to shoot anyone in sight. In these extreme cases, considered in the next section, even Gandhi concedes that it may be necessary to use violent force to stop the greater violence.

The much greater strength of Gandhi's peace-education approach to violence is in terms of preventative socialization, relations, and interventions so that we do not reach the unavoidable stage of explosive overt violence and war. For Gandhi, at least ninety percent of violence is humanly caused, contingent, and hence preventable. The greatest challenge for peace education is to identify root causes and basic causal determinants of violence and to propose alternative nonviolent determinants. This allows us to break escalating causal cycles of violence and avoid violent effects.

Key to this preventative approach is Gandhi's famous analysis of means and ends. Gandhi rejects utilitarianism and many other contemporary positions, including various models of education, which assume or maintain that economic, political, and other ends justify the means.<sup>8</sup> Peace education must emphasize both means and

ends and their integral, mutually reinforcing relations. Although Gandhi describes himself as a pragmatic idealist who is concerned with ethical and spiritual results, he places even more emphasis on means. This is because we often have much greater control over our means. Noble ends may be unattainable either because of unintended consequences or because they express ideals beyond our power of realization.

Although we may be tempted to use violent means for short-term benefits, Gandhi repeatedly emphasizes that we cannot use violence to overcome violence and achieve nonviolence. If we educate students to use violent and impure means, these will shape violent and impure ends regardless of our moralistic, self-justifying slogans and ideology.

In language similar to formulations of the law of *karma*, Gandhi repeatedly warns us that economic, psychological, and other forms of violence lead to more violence, and we become entrapped in endless vicious cycles of escalating violence. For Gandhi, as for the Buddha, most violence has a moral character and involves intention and choice. It is this moral character of volitional *karmic* intention and choice that binds us to the vicious cycles of violence and suffering. The only way to move toward more nonviolent ends is to introduce nonviolent causal factors through the adoption of nonviolent means. Such nonviolent factors will begin to weaken the causal factors that produce violent chain reactions. They will undermine the mutually reinforcing causal relations that keep us trapped in destructive cycles of violence. This is the rationale and major task for peace education.

In many respects, Gandhi's means-ends preventative analysis is similar to the Buddha's formulation of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (Skt. *pratītya-samutpāda*; Pāli *paṭicca-samuppāda*—see Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957, pp. 278–280). Through his formulation of the twelve links or factors, the Buddha analyzes how we become imprisoned in this cyclical world of existence (*saṃsāra*), the world of suffering (*duhkha*). *Saṃsāra* is the world of dynamic, impermanent, interdependent relativity. There is not one, independent, absolute cause to our entrapment in this world of suffering. Each relative and contingent factor is conditioned as well as conditioning, caused by antecedent causal conditions, and is itself a causal factor shaping future conditions. The Buddhist path involves identifying these causal factors and gradually weakening the causal links that keep us trapped in cycles of ignorance and suffering by introducing more ethical and spiritual causal factors.

Gandhi's preventative peace-education approach shares much with this particular Buddhist orientation. Violence, terror, exploitation, and war are not independent, eternal, absolute, or inevitable. They exist within a violent phenomenal world of impermanent, interdependent relativity. Historical, psychological, economic, social, religious, and other forms of violence are caused and conditioned, and they themselves become causes and condition other violent consequences that then become new violent causal factors. The path and goal for peace education involves focusing on the means that allow you to decondition such violent causal factors and conditions and to introduce nonviolent causes and conditions; this will lead to more nonviolent results that will then become new causal factors. The means-ends relation

involves mutual interaction, since the adoption of nonviolent ideals as ends will also have a causal influence on the shaping of appropriate means.

In this way, peace education aims at transforming the causally connected, means-ends, interdependent whole, of which you are an integral part, from one constituted through ignorance, violence, and suffering to a more moral and spiritual relational whole. This very process of means-ends causal transformation, by which one transforms relations with others in order to serve their needs, is the very process by which one transforms one's own self toward greater freedom and self-realization.

The need for peace education to focus on the larger picture in order to formulate preventative approaches should be evident from previous formulations of Gandhi's deeper and broader analysis of violence, including educational violence, and his analysis of means-ends relations for getting at the root causes and conditions underlying multidimensional violence. As Gandhi repeatedly warns us, if we do not understand and respond to the larger framework of complex multidimensional, inter-related structures and relations of violence, if we do not address the root causes, conditions, and dynamics of violence, then our short-term responses will not be sufficient for dealing with the escalating violence that creates such widespread suffering and threatens human survival.

This is why Gandhi devotes so much time and effort to a radically different model of peace education with emphasis on character building and moral and spiritual development. This is why peace education must focus on psychological awareness and an analysis of how we constitute and must decondition ego-driven selfishness and greed and defense mechanisms responding to fear and insecurity, hatred, aggression, and other violent intentions and inner states of consciousness. This is why peace education must focus on the political, cultural, social, economic, linguistic, religious, and other aspects of overall socialization that contribute to, tolerate, and justify violence, oppression, exploitation, and war.

From this peace-education perspective, most of our "successful" students and professors, even those equipped with doctorates and credited with numerous publications, as well as those in positions of wealth and power, are morally and spiritually undeveloped. In a deeper, Gandhian sense, they are uneducated human beings. Lacking deep moral character and not motivated to live according to the ideals of truth and nonviolence, we use unethical and violent means to achieve ego-driven ends. We detach theoretical knowledge from moral and spiritual practice, and we justify, profit from, or simply adjust to the violence of the status quo. We are ignorant or unconcerned about real freedom and self-development. Instead, egoistic desires, attachments, selfishness, and aggressive and violent relations dominate us, with little development of care, love, compassion, selfless service, and other forms of peace and nonviolence. From the perspective of Gandhi's peace education, such human beings are products of multidimensional educational violence and are really educational failures. One hesitates even to call them Gandhian "failed experiments in truth," since the status quo educational system precludes or deemphasizes any sense of Gandhi's ideal of Truth, which shapes his view of the human potential for the moral and spiritual development of truly educated human beings.

## *The Absolute and the Relative in Peace Education*

Gandhi's often-overlooked analysis of the dynamic relations between the absolute and the relative is essential for providing a more nuanced, complex, and adequate approach to peace education. The key absolute-relative distinction and analysis challenges contemporary antithetical responses in education and other philosophical matters that emphasize either the unlimited relativism of values or a narrow and intolerant absolutism. Such antithetical responses are at the heart of heated contemporary debates in American approaches to education, especially as formulated by conservatives with considerable political power. Aggressively on the attack, conservatives charge that recent approaches to education have been promiscuous and falsely tolerant of what is ignorant, immoral, and evil. Such approaches have failed to educate our students about the permanent values of the traditional Western canon and the absolute truths of the American and Christian experience. They have failed to uphold such truths by resisting challenges and attacks by those committed to anti-Western approaches that are dangerous, immoral, irrational, and a threat to true education and modern civilization. Others, usually liberal educators, respond that such a claim to exclusive, absolute truth is narrow, intolerant, ideologically driven, and a threat to any adequate model of modern education. Gandhi, in contrast, submits that such common dichotomous formulations of absolute or relative truth are inadequate, and that a more adequate dialectical analysis of the relative and the absolute has much to offer peace education.

Gandhi sometimes conveys the impression of a simple, rigidly uncompromising absolutist with respect to education, violence, nonviolence, war, peace, vows, principles and rules, and other ethical and spiritual concepts and values. But a comprehensive examination of his writings reveals a more subtle, nuanced, and flexible Gandhi who addresses the complexity of violence, struggles with linguistic, psychological, and other forms of violence, and recognizes the difficulty of resolving violent conflicts and contradictions in human relations.

This recognition of complexity in real situations of conflict must not minimize Gandhi's commitment to such absolutes as nonviolence, love, and truth. It is in terms of such absolute ideals that Gandhi resists the fashionable modern educational approaches of unlimited facile relativism or complete subjectivism. Gandhi, for example, would never agree that an educational approach tolerating or promoting terror and terrorism, whether expressed through individual suicide bombers or corporate and military policies and actions, is wrong in terms of his own peace education but that it may be justified by some other educational perspective.

Elsewhere I have written at length about Gandhi's formulations of the absolute, especially his two major absolutes of *satya* (Truth—often equated with God and the spiritual Self) and *ahimsā* (Nonviolence, benevolent harmlessness—often equated with Love).<sup>9</sup> Expressed very briefly, Gandhi has a view of ultimate reality formulated in terms of *satya* or Absolute Truth. Such truth, often stated in terms similar to key passages in the Upanishads, is experienced as a spiritual "Power" or force that is infinite, unconditioned, and beyond language and rational conceptualization. It

manifests itself in terms of permanence underlying change, unity underlying diversity, and the most profound ethical and spiritual realization of the indivisible oneness and interconnectedness of all of reality. This is sometimes expressed as the identity or unity of Truth, God, and Self. Peace education must analyze how we are socialized and educated in ways that prevent us from realizing the reality or truth of the unity and interrelatedness of life.

Gandhi is most famous for formulations and experiments in truth focusing on the other major absolute of *ahimsā* or Nonviolence and Love. As I have frequently noted, nonviolence and violence, and love and hate, have very broad and deep meanings, as evident in their multidimensional forms and structures of the status quo. Peace education must analyze how we are socialized and educated in violent ways that prevent us from realizing and living consistent with the reality of nonviolence and love.

For Gandhi's peace education, *satya* and *ahimsā* must be brought into an integral, dialectical, and mutually interacting and reinforcing relation. Most often, Gandhi presents *satya* as the end and *ahimsā* the means. As previously seen, we cannot use violent means to achieve ethical and spiritual ends. In the means-ends analysis, immoral violent means lead to immoral violent ends. However, Gandhi is also making a major ontological claim that goes beyond this ethical analysis. Nonviolence is a powerful bonding and unifying force that brings us together in caring, loving, cooperative relations; this allows us to realize and act consistent with the interconnectedness and unity of all life. Violence, in contrast, maximizes ontological separateness and divisiveness and is based on the fundamental belief that the other—whether the individual, ethnic, religious, or national target of my hatred and violence—is essentially different from me or us. In other words, in Gandhi's peace education, violence and hatred are not only unethical but also inconsistent with the absolute truth of reality, whereas nonviolence and love are the ethical means for realizing the truth of reality.

Gandhi also states that the absolute ideals of *ahimsā* and *satya* are convertible or interchangeable as means and ends. As just seen, nonviolence is the means for realizing the truth. As we are educated to become more nonviolent, we become more truthful. However, truth is also a means for becoming more loving and nonviolent. As we become more educated and enlightened as to the true nature of reality, we resist living under false illusions of violence and hatred. Focusing on the truth and living more truthfully serve as a means for allowing us to become increasingly more nonviolent in our relations with others and with nature.

With this foundation of absolute truth, it is tempting to formulate Gandhi's peace education in oversimplified and false ways by ignoring or devaluing his repeated emphasis on the following essential methodological and ontological claim: all of us exist in this world as relative, finite beings of limited, embodied consciousness. Our peace-education knowledge is always conditioned, imperfect, and perspectival. As Gandhi repeatedly tells us (see, e.g., Gandhi 1993, pp. xi–xii, and 1981, p. 199), he at most has limited “glimpses” of absolute truth and nonviolence. The peace-education approach, the commitment to nonviolence, and the ethical and spiritual

paths of human development and self-realization all express the attempt to move from one relative truth to a greater relative truth closer to the absolute regulative ideal.

Here we can see the central place of empathy, care, mutuality, cooperation, and tolerance in Gandhi's peace-education approach. One of the most arrogant and dangerous moves—as seen in the ethnocentrism of modern, post-Enlightenment Western models of education and of recent fundamentalist, anti-Enlightenment models of education—is to make what is relative into an absolute. Recognizing the specificity and complexity of our contextualized situatedness, we recognize that peace education allows us to grasp relative, partial truths. Our approach should be tolerant and open to other points of view; others have different relative perspectives and different glimpses of truth that we do not have. With relatively limited knowledge, we often misjudge situations and even misjudge our motives, and that is why we must learn from our errors in the movement toward greater truth and nonviolence.

At the same time, we must not reduce Gandhi's peace education to some theological, descriptively phenomenological, or completely relativistic educational model. Such an approach emphasizes religious or value-free commitments to empathy, uncritical acceptance, and nonjudgmental tolerance of other points of view. But Gandhi is always concerned with moral and spiritual truth. His peace education emphasizes empathy, mutual understanding, cooperation, and tolerance, but it does not advocate uncritical absolute tolerance and passive acceptance of education based on multiple forms of violence and the violence of the status quo.

How does such a peace-education approach help us to analyze and deal with the most difficult cases previously noted? I refer to cases of violence in which Gandhi's long-term and even short-term preventative measures for nonviolent conflict resolution have no possibility of success. How does peace education guide us in dealing with the rapist, the suicide bomber, the insane person, or expressions of corporate and military violence at the explosive point of inflicting terror and extreme violence? How does peace education guide us in dealing with perpetrators of violence who reject Gandhi's inclusive, tolerant approach, claim that they possess the absolute truth, and inflict extreme violence on innocent human beings?

In contrast to a common stereotype, I do not think that Gandhi is rendered passive and reduced to inaction. He does not simply allow such violent acts to take place. In some extreme cases and for a variety of philosophical and contextual reasons, Gandhi uses the absolute-relative distinction to advocate that the enlightened proponent of nonviolence and truth should absorb violence and suffering. This is an active response, requiring the greatest courage along with ethical and spiritual development, and it keeps open the hope of raising awareness, introducing nonviolent causal determinants, and transforming future violent situations.

More surprising, in terms of Gandhi's absolute commitment to *ahimsā*, is his view that in unavoidable extreme cases we may sometimes be required to use relative violence in the cause of nonviolence. We act, using violent means if necessary, to prevent extreme violence because that is ultimately the least violent and the most effective, contextualized, relative response possible.

We must not confuse this peace-education orientation with the usual dominant justifications of violent actions and policies as necessary for dealing with crime, terrorism, and other forms of violence. First, Gandhi would only advocate such violent means as a last resort, when preventative measures have failed and there are no remaining nonviolent alternatives. For Gandhi, ninety-nine percent of the time that we resort to violence, there are nonviolent options and means that we have overlooked or are unwilling to consider.

Second, even in extreme cases in which we have exhausted nonviolent options and are forced to use violence to avoid much greater violence, Gandhi's approach is radically different from the usual proponents of such violent means. Even when engaged in relative violence, we must always uphold the absolute truth, the ideal of absolute nonviolence. We must never glorify violence, even when it is necessary and we have no nonviolent relative options. When we use violence, what we do is tragic. It may be necessary, but it is not moral. That we live in a world of violence, terror, hatred, exploitation, and injustice is an indication of human failure. That we are forced to use violence is also an indication of human failure. We have failed to create preventative nonviolent structures, relations, and conditions and to take nonviolent actions by which we could have avoided the need for such violence. Rather than extol and celebrate such violence, we should be saddened, seek forgiveness, and work toward reconciliation.

Third, we approach the use of necessary violence with an attitude, intentions, and goals informed by a commitment to the absolute ideal of nonviolence. This means that we severely limit the need for violence, and we restrict to a minimum the intensity and extent of such relative violence. This means that even when we engage in such tragic relative violence, we are committed to doing everything possible to change conditions and human relations to avoid the repetition of such violence.

### *Self-Other Relations and Swaraj*

In a longer article, I could present other key aspects of Gandhi's view of peace education. For example, elsewhere I have formulated Gandhi's complex, challenging, and insightful analysis of the multiple nature of self, with the construction of multiple selves and the creative tension and potential for constituting and reconstituting dynamic self-other relations.<sup>10</sup> Gandhi presents a radical critique of the dominant, post-Cartesian view of self that is assumed in most of our modern educational approaches. In such a modern orientation, we assume and privilege the existence of our own, individual, separate self, and we become educated in ways that allow us to calculate how to maximize the fulfillment of our egoistic desires and ego-defined interests. In extreme contrast, Gandhi's peace education has the ideal of reducing such an ego-oriented self to zero and inverting the modern self-other relation in order to privilege the needs of the other. It is only by aiming for this asymmetrical egoless relation of privileging and responding to the needs of the other that our true, ethical, social, relational self and deeper spiritual self emerge. And only by aim-

ing for such ethical and spiritual self-other relations can we establish broad and deep relations of nonviolence, compassion, love, and peace grounded in the truth of the unity and interconnectedness of all of life.

Another undeveloped topic is Gandhi's key concept of *swaraj*, an understanding of which is essential for getting at the true purpose of peace education. Usually translated as "self-rule," *swaraj* is often used as an equivalent to "freedom" and "independence." It functions on all levels from individual self-rule or freedom to village and community *swaraj* to national *swaraj* and even to international or global *swaraj*. And these different levels of *swaraj* interact and are interconnected. The purpose of true education is to allow for the development and realization of *swaraj*. False education leads to human beings who are least free, trapped in their selfish egos, enslaved to false created needs and to materialistic commodification, and with little control over their lives and destinies. True peace education leads to human beings who become aware of their real ethical and spiritual needs and are most free when they develop a disciplined and compassionate nonviolent will. As we become more educated, we lessen our ego-desires and attachments; we simplify our needs so that we have greater freedom, self-determination, and control over our lives and destinies; and we place primary emphasis on serving the needs of others. We maximize *swaraj* through the realization of the unity and interconnectedness of all reality.

### *Difficulties and Challenges to Gandhian Peace Education*

Although I have offered many insights into Gandhi's peace education and pointed to its strengths, we must not minimize the difficulties and challenges facing such an educational approach. How does a Gandhian educational approach deal with anti-Gandhian views of truth, violence, and education? How does a moral and spiritual Gandhian approach deal with anti-Gandhian approaches that embrace radically different views of the moral and religious nature of education? How does a Gandhian educational approach deal with those who view education as providing the means for analyzing, resisting, and defeating dangerous, antagonistic, irreconcilable alternatives and who do not favor Gandhian nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation through education? How does a contextualized Gandhian approach maintain a peace-education perspective that is dynamic, open-ended in its experiments in truth, transformative, and relevant to our contemporary concerns?

I will provide two brief illustrations of such challenges and difficulties here. First, there are very good reasons why modern, Enlightenment thinkers felt the need to separate post-medieval, nontheological, rational, scientific, secular education from approaches grounded in religious and ethical assumptions, purposes, and agendas. It is true that modern educational approaches need to be contextualized, and they are not as value-free and universally or rationally objective as they often claim, but this does not minimize legitimate, modern, educational concerns. Many educators may be sympathetic to Gandhi's critiques of dominant modern approaches as per-

petuating multidimensional forms of violence and the violence of the status quo, and they may be sympathetic to his nonviolent, tolerant, inclusivistic approach. However, once one grants an ethical and spiritual rationale for education, one may weaken protections against dangerous attacks on modern education. One need only think of serious attacks on modern secular education by Christian, Muslim, and other fundamentalists with their own aggressive, militant, violent, intolerant, exclusivistic models for moral and religious education.

Second, how does peace education deal with the wide variety of non-Gandhian or anti-Gandhian educational approaches that reject Gandhi's ontological and ethical framework? On the one hand, we find religious and philosophical approaches that claim that they possess the truth and understand reality. They argue that other positions are false, illusory, evil, and lack reality. They do not accept Gandhi's grounding of peace education in an orientation of diverse legitimate, relative perspectives and paths to the truth. To use a common image, we are not all climbing a Gandhian mountain toward truth with our diverse legitimate paths, reflecting our ethical, cultural, and other contextual situatedness. Other paths lead us astray, and only our true path allows us to reach the summit of the mountain. Or, put differently, others are climbing different mountains, and only our mountain, with its one true path, allows us to realize ultimate reality. Education allows us to refute and defeat, not to reconcile with and tolerate, other relative approaches that are false, immoral, evil, and lacking in reality.

On the other hand, we find numerous approaches that reject all absolutes, including Gandhi's absolute ideals, as ethnocentric, hegemonic, and even a violent imposition restricting diversity and differences. They argue that Gandhi's tolerant ethical and spiritual approach is not sufficiently tolerant. Yes, there are many legitimate relative paths or educational approaches, but we must stop thinking of some ontological grounding in "the truth" and "reality." Put differently, Gandhi's ontological, ethical, and spiritual framework is based on specific Hindu and other inclusivistic orientations; such peace education is not really peaceful since it reformulates, distorts, and does violence to the non-Gandhian assumptions, concepts, goals, and approaches of diverse others.

Acknowledging that Gandhian peace education is not without its weaknesses or limitations, I conclude that it has great value in critiquing other models of education, in serving as a catalyst that allows us to rethink our normal assumptions and dominant concepts and positions, and in offering new, creative, positive alternatives. Such a peace-education approach must be selective, especially in revalorizing and reformulating basic Gandhian values in new, more relevant ways and in integrating Gandhian and other compatible insights and contributions. Such a peace-education approach must be flexible, dynamic, and open-ended as it develops in response to new textual and contextual variables. There is much of value in such an educational approach that focuses on our insecure world of multidimensional violence and the violence of the status quo and on the centrality of nonviolence, love, compassion, cooperation, mutuality, service, unity with a respect for diversity, and the sustainability of human beings and the planet earth.

## Notes

- 1 – The best source for Gandhi's writings is the one hundred volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Gandhi 1958–1994). These one hundred volumes are also included in M. K. Gandhi, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Gandhi 1999), a resource-loaded interactive multimedia CD. Other good sources for Gandhi's writings include Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Iyer 1986, 1987), and M. K. Gandhi: *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Gandhi 1997). The recent publication of Richard L. Johnson, ed., *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi* (Johnson 2006) contains an introduction, biographical chapters, writings by Gandhi, and chapters by twelve leading Gandhi scholars.
- 2 – I shall not provide extensive documentation from Gandhi's writings regarding his formulations and analysis of truth (*satya*), violence (*hiṃsā*), nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), means-ends relations, absolute-relative relations, and other major topics in this article. What is completely new in this study is my focus on peace education. For my documentation of major aspects of Gandhi's philosophy, see my "Philosophical Foundations of Gandhi's Legacy, Utopian Experiments, and Peace Struggles" (Allen 1994), reproduced in Naresh Dadhich, ed., *Non-Violence, Peace, and Politics: Understanding Gandhi* (Dadhich 2003), pp. 1–39; "Gandhian Perspectives on Self-Other Relations as Relevant to Human Values and Social Change Today," in Ishwar Modi, ed., *Human Values and Social Change* (Modi 2000), pp. 283–309; "Gandhi, Contemporary Political Thinking, and Self-Other Relations," in B. N. Ray, ed. *Contemporary Political Thinking* (Ray 2000), pp. 129–170, reproduced in Johnson 2006, pp. 303–329; and "Gandhi After 9/11: Terrorism, Violence, and the Other" (Allen 2006a, pp. 261–281).
- 3 – There is an extensive literature of writings by and about Gandhi focusing on his particular approach to education and his challenge to dominant educational models. Over the years, Navajivan Publishing House in Ahmedabad published Gandhi writings with titles such as *Constructive Programme*, *Basic Education*, and *True Education*. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* contains hundreds of pages of Gandhi's specific views on education. See M. P. Mathai, *Mahatma Gandhi's World-view* (Mathai 2000), especially the informative section titled "Educational Order" (pp. 214–225), for an extensive bibliography and numerous citations from Gandhi's writings and from the vast secondary literature on Gandhi's approach to education. See also "On Education," in Nirmal Kumar Bose, ed., *Selections from Gandhi* (Bose 1996), pp. 283–298.
- 4 – One of Gandhi's famous seven major social evils is "education without character." In various formulations, he presents the goal of education as character building, which focuses on the development of courage, strength, fearlessness,

virtue, and the ability to engage in selfless work directed at moral and spiritual aims.

- 5 – In terms of contemporary fragmentation and alienation and the nontraditional philosophical emphasis in recent Western philosophy on the body, feelings, and embodied consciousness, the following Gandhi formulation, published in *Harijan*, May 8, 1937, may be instructive:

I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be [a] poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another. (Gandhi 1958–1994, 65 :73)

- 6 – In this article, I shall not focus on the specific forms of violence classified as “terror” and “terrorism” that have been the focus of much contemporary concern and analysis, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. I have attempted to apply Gandhi’s approach to terror and terrorism in other publications; see “Gandhi After 9/11” (Allen 2004, pp. 261–281), and a revised version of this article as “Mahatma Gandhi after 9/11” (Allen 2006, pp. 19–39).
- 7 – See, for example, Senator J. William Fulbright’s comments in the *Congressional Record* of December 13, 1967, in which he charged that universities, corrupted by money and power, had “joined” the military-industrial complex and thus betrayed a public trust. In a speech at Dennison University in 1969, Fulbright developed this theme and concluded that many universities, especially the big and famous ones, had in effect become “card-carrying members of the military-industrial complex.” For more analysis and documentation, see Douglas Allen, “Scholars of Asia and the War” (Allen 1991, pp. 211–249).
- 8 – For examples of Gandhi’s rejection of utilitarianism and the principle of utility, see Gandhi 1958–1994, 32 : 71 and 32 : 401–402. With his emphasis on intentions and goodwill, it is tempting to classify Gandhi’s approach as Kantian or purely deontological, but this would be a mistake. In Gandhi’s approach to peace education, one must focus on both intentions and consequences. Sometimes Gandhi has the best of intentions, but he evaluates well-intended experiments in truth as moral and spiritual failures because of negative results.
- 9 – For example, see the sections “A Metaphysical and Theological Gandhi” (pp. 8–20) and “Scientific Utopian Experiments with Truth” (pp. 21–31) in “Philosophical Foundations of Gandhi’s Legacy, Utopian Experiments, and

Peace Struggles,” in Dadhich 2003, and the section “Gandhi’s Metaphysical and Spiritual Framework” (pp. 146–152) in “Gandhi, Contemporary Political Thinking, and Self-Other Relations,” in Ray 2000, reproduced in Johnson 2006, pp. 313–317. These publications contain extensive documentation of Gandhi’s views of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsā* (nonviolence), as well as citations from the secondary literature.

- 10 – I have written at length about Gandhi’s multiple views of self and self-other relations, and this analysis is essential to any Gandhian approach to peace education. In most of his writings on self, Gandhi endorses a dynamic, social, relational view of self in which there is no ethical and spiritual self without the other, and the other is an integral part of who I am as self. However, there are other writings in which Gandhi emphasizes “the inner voice” of an autonomous, nonsocial, individual self that is distinguished from and contrasted with any relational other. Finally, there are still other writings in which Gandhi accepts a deeper, ultimate, metaphysical, spiritual self (or Self), often identified with the Hindu nondualistic *Ātman* of the Upanishads, but a self that is also capable of other formulations in Gandhi’s inclusivistic approach. These self and self-other formulations are often complementary, but they also express ambiguities, tensions, contradictions, and unresolved philosophical problems and issues. See, for example, my sections “Self-Other Relations: A Radical Inversion” (pp. 152–157) and “Key Questions Regarding the Self and Self-Other Relations” (pp. 157–165) in “Gandhi, Contemporary Political Thinking, and Self-Other Relations,” in Ray 2000, reproduced in Johnson 2006, pp. 317–325.

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