



Peace education: An ageless course

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As the education commissioner for the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) for almost three years, I have come to realize the importance and need for peace education. I admit in the early days in this role, I believed sharing ideas and values with others would create a Culture of Peace. And to some extent, it did, but the expression was not experiential. I believed if I maintained an attitude of non-aggression and generosity I was practicing a Culture of Peace.

With some contemplation, I discovered the role of peace education is to embrace the ACPC values of compassion, accountability, inclusion and respect — and to acquire knowledge and develop attitudes, skills and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself and others, as well as with the natural world.

How is this possible with the distractions and tensions that we constantly face?

ACPC has provided multiple community trainings on topics including implicit bias, compassionate listening and compassionate speaking. In addition, a Tuesday Talking Circle and a Wednesday community meeting are offered to explore the meaning of a Culture of Peace. Through these weekly explorations, participants discover opportunities to practice a Culture of Peace from the direction of skilled facilitators.

Through ACPC's connection with the Ashland School District, we reached out to elementary schools to coordinate our annual celebration of the International Day of Peace on Sept. 21 in 2016 and 2017. In our first celebration, fourth- and fifth-grade students from Willow Wind were invited to participate in a peace celebration that included yoga, storytelling and an appreciation circle. The students were bused to Wesley Hall where the three activities were simultaneously offered, each lasting 30 minutes.

The students rotated among the activities. Students from Ashland High School instructed the younger students in yoga. A storyteller engaged the students through Native American tales and their teacher guided them in an appreciation circle.

Our 2017 celebration included fifth-grade students from Bellview School who came to the Ashland Grange to learn to fold peace cranes. Instruction was offered by two women from the community. While one group of students folded peace cranes, the other group learned international peace dances, offered by a man from the community. The children expressed much joy through participating in these activities.

Plans for the 2018 celebration are underway with emphasis on the dedication of the World Peace Flame in Ashland.

Recently I observed a group of 5 through 9-year-olds at a magnet school in Gold Hill. In addition to the academic subjects, they had a class in Education in Human Values. The values presented are: truth, nonviolence, love, right action, and peace. My impression was that these children were learning how to be conscious of others and how to help others through their awareness of these human values. They were practicing a Culture of Peace.

As part of our work, ACPC sees building Peace Clubs in the middle and high schools as an endeavor for the 2018-19 academic year. Peacebuilding offers students the opportunity to make a difference in simple and practical ways (e.g., tutor or mentor younger children — or challenge your own perceptions!).

Talk to someone with a different point of view. Peacebuilding will inform and affect their values. Secondary school students may design their own project, done either collaboratively or individually. They may explore conflict resolution, restorative justice, or other issues important to them. Outcomes of these issues will provide community service to Ashland.

Living in Ashland, a community where there is awareness of the importance of peace education, makes it possible for ACPC to sponsor workshops, community forums and the International Day of Peace celebrations. Through the broad range of peace activity, one of any age or stage in life can experience peace education.

— Retired educator Patricia Sempowich taught in high school and higher education, writes poetry and has been involved with the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission from its inception. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter.