

Pace e Bene Australia co-sponsors Peace Education Symposium

Richmond, Victoria: August 14-16, 2019

This gathering of passionate peace educators in Richmond produced a lively convergence of dynamic energy and enthusiasm, with an abundance of skills, knowledge and collective wisdom. Peace was free-flowing.

Co-sponsored by Pace e Bene Australia, Edmund Rice Education Australia, the Anglican Schools Commission (WA), Catholic Education South Australia, and joined by the Anglican Schools Office of Aotearoa, New Zealand, the Symposium attracted more than 40 participants over the three days. Together we explored the fundamentals of peace and nonviolence education and ways to embed these principles into curriculum and teaching practices.

Day One was a stand-alone Professional Learning Day for educators. The group focused on:

the meaning and interpretation of violence, nonviolence and peace; the dominant Western cultural conditioning that supports and justifies violence; the counter-cultural, nonviolent teachings and witness of Jesus; the skill-sets required to sustain a commitment to nonviolence; the access to, and significance of, inner-peace for sustaining the journey of peace-building; how all of these link to the development and delivery of curriculum.

Day Two contained a series of presentations and storytelling that delved deeper into the content areas introduced in Day One. These featured further explanation and illustration of:

the concepts and theories of Rene Girard; restorative practices in New Zealand and South Australia; the neurobiology of peace and the toxicity of unresolved conflict; personal and community stories of 'the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence' in local communities, such as HOPE Co-op, Melbourne and Norlane Community Centre, Geelong.

Day Three began with an additional selection of stories from teachers and educational system consultants who have been trialling the introductory units in peace and nonviolence education in Western Australia and South Australia. Experiences ranged from:

triallying the unit as a 10-week program; weaving key understandings into new state-wide RE Guidelines; integrating core aspects of the program into other parts of the curriculum; providing themes and activities for retreats and other student formation programs.

- The group concluded its time together with an *Open Space* meeting during which 7 topics were raised and 5 Action Plans created. **Topics raised** from the participants included:

what are 'essential learnings' about nonviolence in the Christian tradition; implications for teacher formation; how do we translate the theory to be more accessible to educators; what kind of whole-school culture will best support education for peace and nonviolence - how do we grow that; where is the space for anger; generating creative responses to what we are learning.

- **Action plans** emerging from the conversations were:

preparing new accessible theology resources; creating an online pool of current resources for students and staff formation i.e. worksheets/handouts, power-points; exploring how to introduce this to Anglican schools and parishes in Southern Queensland and beyond; creating digital resources for teachers on Mt 5: 38-41 (using National Catholic Education Commission teacher digital resource on Scripture passages, utilizing three worlds of the text); keeping the momentum of the movement going.

Participant Feedback

Among the feedback comments from participants, there were numerous appreciations which included: *the sponsors' innovative environmental impact plan for the conference; the warmth and generosity of hospitality; the variety of learning processes and activities; the connections to the nonviolent Jesus; the links between inner peace, contemplative prayer and outer actions; a cohesive connection between 'head, heart and hands' in peace education; being part of a bigger global vision; a collective sense of hope.*

There were also many insightful and helpful suggestions about how to make future gatherings *even better!*

Teachers and chaplains came from Catholic and Anglican schools in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Education consultants attended from The Presentation Sisters, Good Samaritan Education, Kildare Ministries, the Franciscan Friars, Missionary Society of St Columban, Religious Society of Friends, St Francis Theological College (Queensland), Edmund Rice Education Australia, Catholic Education South Australia and the Anglican Schools Commission Western Australia, Queensland and New Zealand/Aotearoa

Where to next?

If you would like to discover more about the details of the Symposium and help with expanding our dream to:

'promote and provide gospel-based peace and nonviolence resources to all Christian educational systems and secondary schools in Australia and New Zealand by 2021'

then contact Pace e Bene members, Brendan McKeague or Michael Wood.

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