Imagine a world with minimal violent conflict and an abundant well-being of people and ecosystems, an integrated Shangri-La of sorts where people, animals, plants, and planet co-exist in a delicate yet vibrant interplay of ecological interdependence. Day to day norms of harmony and connection circumscribe thought, decision, and action and interactions typically result in happiness and the multiplication of well-being and positive relationships. People are intimately connected to the earth’s rhythms and habitually make choices that are aligned with the long view in mind—the ability of the seventh generation of people to satisfy their basic sustenance and happiness needs. Imagine a world where physical and cultural boundaries were clear yet transparent, where biological and cultural diversity were revered as a strength and understood to be advantageous to the vitality and longevity of the whole of the planet. Imagine a world where the earth’s abundant resources were carefully stewarded in ways that reflected a deep knowing that violence against nature is understood as violence against the self. Imagine a world where fair and just partnerships permeated relationships between people, communities, societies, and nations. Imagine a world where adults made decisions based on a long view of how current choices impact future generations not born yet. Imagine if our power needs came from renewable energy sources. Imagine if we significantly decreased our perceived need for consumption of the earth’s finite resources; imagine if individuals and human communities practiced disciplined restraint out of care and reverence for the earth. Imagine a rich diversity of people and planet solving conflicts of need with mutually beneficial processes and mutually beneficial outcomes. Imagine if power in human relations and human–nature relations was wielded with courtesy, dignity, and respect for all living creatures. Imagine a world where sharing and caring are norms and where violence, domination, and exclusion were considered unimaginable. Reflecting on John Lennon’s hopes and dreams in his quintessential song Imagine (Solt, Egan, & Ono, 1988), how do we envision and live in a diverse world—as one?

What kind of education would create such a world? What knowledge, values, behaviors, types of awareness, and sensitivities would be necessary to cultivate the conditions of a vibrant, sustainable peace? What would educational processes look and feel like? Where would education take place? How would learners relate to one another? What would the education of future teachers, educational leaders, and university faculty look like in such a world? This chapter focuses on the confluence of aims of fellow travellers—holistic education, sustainability education, and peace education; it also encourages more dialogue and cross-pollination among these important educational sub-fields.
Confluence of Aims: Holistic, Sustainability, and Peace Education

Holistic education addresses fragmentation and disconnection of modern, technologically mediated human life (Miller, 2007). Sustainability education addresses the threat to the planetary life support system for the human species (Nolet & Wheeler, 2010). Peace education addresses various forms of violence and provides solutions to alleviate those forms of violence (Harris & Morrison, 2003). Examining the aims of these subfields in education will shed light on their confluence and also reveal divergent approaches to ensuring quality of life for the human species during our tenure on earth and also for planetary well-being for the long haul.

Realities of climate disruption, mass migration, violent extremism, militarized aggression, and dominator leadership styles quickly sour an idyllic portrait of sustainable peace as a viable possibility for the future of humanity on planet earth. Yet hope remains for those who believe in the power of education to transform our world. Holistic education, sustainability education, and peace education seem to derive their strength and inspiration from a common source—the aim to create a connected, peaceful world where all—plants, animals, people—can live and prosper with relative health and well-being. These educational subfields have different branches, given that they address various challenges that we encounter as a human species, yet they grow from a common tree.

Holistic Education Aims

What are the aims of education, or, to say it differently, what are the aspirational purposes of education? An aim is “a purpose or intention; a desired outcome” (see Oxford English Living Dictionaries, n.d.). For example, holistic education is rooted in balance, inclusion, connection, and dynamism and has a spiritual quality that enhances integrated learning of the head, hand, and heart (Miller, 2010). The aims of holistic education are integration and connection—connection with self, other, community, the natural world, and the transrational. Ron Miller (2000) elaborates:

Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning.

(Miller, 2000, para 2)

Holistic education, then, aims to cultivate this reverence for life and it aims to kindle the flames of the love of learning. It attempts to heal fragmented, decontextualized, robotic forms of human learning that have threatened impassioned inquiry in our pursuits to make sense and meaning of an amazingly complex, simple, and elegant existence. Holistic education cultivates wisdom and equanimity—greatness of mind and kindness of heart.

Wisdom-based learning, rooted in systems thinking, seems imperative to move toward a sustainable future. Miller (2007) maintains “holistic education attempts to bring education into alignment with the fundamentals of nature. Nature at its core is interrelated and dynamic. We can see this dynamism and connectedness in the atom, organic systems, the biosphere, and the universe itself” (p. 3). Clearly, holistic education approaches were heavily influenced by systems thinking (Capra, 1996, as cited in Miller, 2007), rooted in new approaches in organistic biology, gestalt psychology, and ecology that examine networks, nodes, “. . . connectedness, relationships, [and] context” (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 37). Holistic curriculum focuses on connections and relationship (Miller 2008). Miller (2010) further elaborates that students need “. . . to see their relationships to earth and its processes by reading Indigenous literature and by having direct earth experiences at school – such as gardening projects” (p. 266).
Holistic education draws on the power of direct connection and relationship. The simplicity and complexity of interdependence are radical and necessary concepts and embodied practices to teach in a compartmentalized world. Getting one’s hands dirty is sometimes required. Holistic education can be considered an antidote to disconnection from place, fragmentation, violence, and unsustainability. An earth connections curriculum would focus on how our fate and the fate of planet are intimately tied, and how the self is intertwined with ecosystems and place.

My own work toward a critical peace education for sustainability draws from holistic education and the work of John P. Miller in efforts to design practical and deep learning experiences rooted in earth connections (Brantmeier, 2013). This work focuses on de-constructing domination in relationships—relationships people have with one another and relationships people have with planet earth. At its core, this critical peace education for sustainability approach aligns solidly with the aims of holistic education and has considerable confluence with sustainability education.

**Sustainability Education Aims**

Sustainability education aims to create positive outcomes through life-enhancing processes—process and outcome are critical. Sustainability education is education “about” sustainability. How can we do things differently as a species to promote current and future prosperity for people and the planet? Learning directly about unsustainable energy practices (think finite fossil fuels such as coal and gas) and renewable energy practices (think hydro, solar, and wind energy) could be the foci of sustainability education (Boyle, 2012; Shere, 2013). Current iterations of education for sustainable development focus on education about, and concern for, whether people of the future are able to meet their basic sustenance needs. Are we considering, with our present choices and actions, the health and well-being of people seven generations into the future and their ability to meet their material needs and to be happy? Education for sustainability focuses on the three E’s: environment, the economy, and equity. According to the National Action Plan for Educating for Sustainability (2014), the outcomes are healthy ecosystems, vibrant economies, and equitable social systems.

When people (social equity), planet (healthy ecosystems), and profit (viable economies) are part of the process and content of transformative learning, ideal futures can be achieved—so the assumption goes. It is important to note that “deep sustainability” places priority on ecosystems first, then society, and last, economy (Ikerd, Gamble, & Cox, 2014). Deep sustainability is linked to “deep ecology,” which is an approach that advocates a “widening of the self” in a radical, inclusive shift of human perception and behavior in collaboration with the natural world. Deep ecology assumes that ecosystems and the biological organisms within have an inherent right to live and prosper (Naess, 1995).

Focusing on the educational process is important. Education for sustainability focuses on educational process and the outcomes from those processes (Nolet & Wheeler, 2010). The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education conveys: “Education for sustainability is defined as transformative learning processes that equips students, teachers, and school systems with new knowledge and responsible citizenship while restoring health and living systems upon which our lives depend” (see The Cloud Institute of Sustainability Education, n.d.). Education for Sustainable Development, a macro United Nations initiative aimed at promoting conscious, intentional development processes, “...empowers people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future” (see Education for Sustainable Development, n.d.). The purpose of sustainability education is a process of transformational change focused on knowledge and civic engagement in individuals and systems with an end goal in mind—healthy, living ecosystems. The important point to remember is that the process of education is just as important as the outcomes in this approach. Sustainable, transformative learning processes can result in sustainable outcomes—so the logic goes. Referred to by some as the “triple bottom line” of people, planet, and profit, the outcomes of education for sustainability would be vibrant economies, healthy environments, and equitable societies (Nolet & Wheeler, 2010).
Not dissimilar from the aims of holistic education, education for sustainability focuses on interdependence and real world challenges. Words that demonstrate the confluence are emphasized in the quote below:

Education for Sustainability (EfS) is an approach to teaching and learning that addresses interconnectedness. It focuses particularly on the interdependence of ecological, social, and economic systems. . . . EfS implies learning that is focused on authentic problems, personal behaviors, and decision-making in complex, ill-structured problem spaces.

(Nolet & Wheeler, 2010, p. 1, my italics)

Systems thinking, interdependence, and focusing on solutions to “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973) become the heart of purposeful, relevant, and meaningful learning in education for sustainability. Movement toward connections, solutions to complex problems, and integrated learning experiences are part of the approach and aims.

Critical Approaches in Sustainability Education

In addition to defining education for sustainability with positive, generative definitions and approaches, critical approaches to sustainability and environmental education deconstruct the dynamics of power, oppression, and privilege by focusing on ecological and social justice. For example, Bowers (2001) urges for an ecological justice approach that aims to: understand domination and oppression, alleviate environmental racism, revitalize traditional ecological practices, and live sustainably with nature. This critical approach deconstructs dominant and subordinate relationships to expose injustice in all of its forms, including “cultural and structural violence”—though critical sustainability and environmental scholars typically do not draw on the these theoretical constructs from more rigorous forms of peace theory and peace education approaches (Galtung, 1969, 1988).

Critical scholars deconstruct existing realities for the purpose of transformative change, yet the difficult work of putting the pieces of critique back together and finding solutions remains a challenge. A new vision for the future is required, drawing on time-honored wisdom traditions and practices of the past. McNenny and Osborn (2015) provide a sustainable futures approach that deconstructs unsustainable practices and instills hope and gratitude:

Replacing the dreams of endless affluence filled with non-stop consumption will be challenging. Imagining a sustainable future calls for a vision of ourselves in relationship to each other and the world in new ways—restrained in our consumption, respectful in our use of resources, taking on the role of steward but also of worshipper of the world’s great gifts to us.

(pp. 20–21)

In ideal form, education for sustainability would aim to question, transform, and actualize a positive future where both humans and natural world can “live and let live” through a “widening of the self” (Naess, 1995, p. 226).

Peace Education Aims

Peace education can be understood as education for the elimination of direct and indirect forms of violence (Harris & Morrison, 2003). The distinction between positive peace and negative peace are well known and used in the field of peace education and peace studies (Galtung, 1969). Negative peace is the absence of direct forms of violence such as war, racially motivated hate crime, or domestic violence. Positive peace is a condition where attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors are actively cultivated to
Sustainable Peace for the Planet

Sustain peace and prevent violence from occurring or re-occurring. Brantmeier and Lin (2008) maintain “Education for peace can generate new knowledge paradigms, connective relationships, institutional processes, and social structures” (p. xiv). This systems approach acknowledges that sustainable peace starts in the hearts and minds, permeates relationships, influences policy and procedures of institutions, and is woven in the fabric of social structures and how power operates within those structures. In a systems approach to sustainable peace, inner peace is paramount and the starting ground.

Clearly, cultivating inner peace is not enough; engaged action toward change is necessary. Brantmeier and Bajaj (2013) maintain:

Peace education is generally defined as educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that can provide learners—in any setting—with the skills and values to work towards comprehensive peace (Reardon, 1988). The areas of human rights education, development education, environmental education, disarmament education, and conflict resolution education are often included in a broader understanding of the multifaceted approaches to peace education.

(p. 139)

An inclusive aim of peace education focuses on universal human rights and values (Brantmeier & Bajaj, 2013). So, peace education simultaneously focuses on human rights generally, and the various forms of violence within particular, historicized contexts. Critical approaches in peace education assume that without systemic analysis of power, oppression, and privilege at the local level, efforts toward actualizing sustainable peace are shallow in their transformative potential. Situating peace education efforts in the context of alleviating structural and cultural violence of a particular place, community, or society deepens theory and practice.

Johan Galtung (1969), a pioneer in the field of peace studies, explores the nuances of structural violence, “The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances . . . Above all, the power to decide over the distribution of resources is unevenly distributed” (p. 171). Chance, access, opportunity, and power are limited to some and readily available to others in conditions where structural and cultural violence permeate daily collective life. Galtung (1990) elaborates on how group norms can sustain conditions of violence, “Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong” (p. 291). Cultural violence, put simply, is violence that is in the water or air of cultural groups; in time, this sort of violence becomes unquestioned, accepted, and saturates everyday experience and perception. For example, it is Okay to detain illegal immigrants in jails. It is Okay that people of color and people from low socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately incarcerated and more often live in close proximity to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated toxic waste dumps. It is Okay to unnecessarily pollute the air or water for profit. Clearly, cultural violence is a tricky bit and requires questioning common group norms, cultural assumptions, and practices as well as deconstructing the legitimizing myths (Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratto, 1992) that justify inequality and social dominance.

Various theoretical strands and approaches in the field of peace education align well with the connective and integrative aims and practices of holistic education. For example, critical peace education aims to deconstruct power and find peaceable solutions within local contexts (Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011). Bajaj (2015) elaborates:

Critical peace educators emphasize that anchoring the learning process in local meanings and realities offers the best way of enabling student agency, democratic participation, and social action as a necessary outcome of the peace education endeavor. Further, critical peace educators hold that teachers must engage in critical self-reflection about their positionality and role in the educational process.

(p. 155)
Critical peace education for sustainability aims to deconstruct and reconstruct power dynamics in learning processes and aims to reconnect people with the natural ecosystems from which they derive strength and sustenance (Brantmeier, 2013). This approach focuses on the economic, environmental, and social systems within a UNESCO education for sustainable development framework that comprises the opportunities and barriers to generating a fluid, vibrant, and sustainable peace. Related, The Earth Charter (2001), a foundational framework for integrating peace, ecology, and social justice is a visionary beacon of light and hope. Peace education for/as sustainability situates the planet and human survival at the fore of educational aims.

Inspired by Miller (2010) and Gruenewald (2003), I have focused my educational theory and practice in critical peace education for sustainability on examining power and connections to ecological place. In a “critical pedagogy of place,” Gruenewald (2003) provides emancipatory solutions of reinhabitation and decolonization. Gruenewald elaborates:

A critical pedagogy of place aims to (a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonization).

(Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9)

How do we connect our students and each other with our local ecological communities and with global planetary communities? How do we decolonize our minds and relationships and develop inner and relational sustainable energy? We create transformative learning opportunities.

Over the past few years, I have been developing a theory of sustainable peace that flows from my earlier academic work (Brantmeier, 2007). It begins with the cultivation of inner sustainable energy. The assumption in this theory is that we need to cultivate inner sustainable energy for the long haul in work that involves understanding and challenging human suffering, ignorance, and general shortcomings. How do we stay positive amid the daunting problems of our time: hatred, ignorance, greed, militarized aggression, climate change and denial, racially motivated hate crime, sexual violence, standardized knowledge and testing regime dominance, and consolidated wealth and power—to name only a few. Cultivating sustainable inner energy to endure the slings and arrows of time and present human–planetary realities requires commitment and practice. Contemplative practices are one way to cultivate inner sustainable energy and peace both at home and at work (Miller, 2014). Positive inner sustainable energy creates the potential for positive interpersonal relations—the
next layer of the theory of sustainable peace for the planet. When interpersonal relationships are harmonious, we gather the courage and foundation to promote institutional change in the context of our professional roles and relationships. Those of us in positions of power can influence the policy and procedures that promote violence (direct or indirect), fragmentation, isolation, exploitation, or abuse. Inner peace and sustainable energy, relational peace, and institutional change can help create conditions of societal harmony. Societal harmony is a condition of equity and equality among various individuals and groups of people within a broader social system. Circumscribing the individual and potentials for peace are economic, political, socio-cultural, and environmental systems that influence all layers of the theory of sustainable energy. In this sense, there should be lines radiating outward from inner peace and inward toward inner peace that represent the mutual and bi-directional influence of the layers of this theory of sustainable peace; inner peace is connected to macro-economic structures, for example.

Reflections on Teacher Education and Educational Leadership Preparation

The work of teacher education and educational leadership preparation is premised on the multiplier effect, that is, if we positively influence teacherleaders and administrators in K-12 schools, that influence, in turn, creates nourishing environments for children to learn and to grow. We multiply positive influence and impact by caring for, and working alongside, those who are direct practitioners in schools. Even teachers need teachers and co-teachers and even leaders need co-leaders and critical friends to help guide their work in a process of lifelong learning and discovery. Yet so many negative systems influence the impact, the aims and higher purposes of holism, sustainability, and peace in teacher education and in higher education in general.

Macro-economic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural influences create significant pressure and demand on schooling systems and this often results in stress, conformity, and the potential for dismal and robotic learning. Rather than discovery, emergent, elicitive, or holistic approaches to learning, the demands of progressively higher tests scores in the positivist, utility-focused areas of math and reading narrow the focus of learning in public K-12 schools.

It is within the context of outcomes-based learning that higher purposes of learning, such as holism, sustainability, and peace, battle for space within the scope and sequence of an already congested curriculum. Yet try we must. Fragmentation, environmental destruction, and violence in many forms threaten future generations of the human species’ ability to meet basic sustenance needs, making the work toward holism, sustainability, and peace all the more important in our times.

In order to achieve the lofty United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Nolet (2015) advocates for learner-centered pedagogies in teacher education programs, not content or teacher centered approaches. Within an “Education for Sustainable Development” framework, Nolet advocates for the aims of “all children [having] access to high quality, relevant, and equitable educational opportunities” and of “all learners [having] opportunities to develop and act a sustainability worldview” (pp. 56–57). He maintains that education that supports the development of a sustainability worldview “. . . is a thoughtful and skillful way of being in the world that is positive, life affirming, future oriented, and solutions-focused” (Nolet, 2015, p. 47). He continues, “. . . a sustainability worldview is a holistic phenomenon that involves a combination of values, knowledge, dispositions, and agency” (p. 47). I contend that integrating a sustainability worldview should be a priority writ large in higher education. Efforts at incorporating a sustainability worldview in content and pedagogy through university faculty development have shown promise and positive outcomes, especially when transformative and engaged approaches are actualized (Hurney, Nash, Hartman, & Brantmeier, 2016).

Sustainability big ideas are identified and these big ideas align nicely with the aims and purposes of holistic education and critical approaches to peace education: “equity and justice; peace and
collaboration; universal responsibility; health and resiliency; respect for limits; connecting with nature; local and global; and interconnectedness” (Nolet, 2015, p. 49). The argument is made that teacher education programs should include these big ideas, and also in their courses and everyday practices in hopes that this knowledge and these values permeate global societies (Nolet, 2015). Lofty pursuits? Yes indeed. However, significant barriers exist.

In my own United States based work in Colleges of Education in Indiana, Missouri, Colorado, and Virginia over the past fifteen years, I have tried to actualize the aims of holism, sustainability, and peace in teacher education and educational leadership preparation. Over the years, I have additively included units of study on holistic education, sustainability education, and peace education in the context of teaching undergraduate and graduate level foundations courses. Deeper, more inclusive integration of holism and peace is more difficult. Yet, a significant number of my students have found meaning and direction from reading and applying core aims and approaches in articles or book chapters on holistic, sustainability, and peace education (Dalai Lama, 1999; Harris, 1999; Miller, 2010; Nolet, 2015; Reardon, 1988).

In talks on the topic of critical peace education for sustainability in the United States and the UK, I have argued for slowing down, humility, and aligning money with values. Slowing down is a revolutionary act. If we slow down, we can see the connections between and among seemingly fragmented needs, occurrences, and ways of being in the world. Consuming good, clean, fair food is one way (Slow Food, n.d.). Humility is a natural result of recognizing connections and the interdependence of all life. From this ontological position of interdependence, wonder, reverence for life, compassion, and nonviolence can be cultivated. Gandhi (1924) maintained, “The rock bottom foundation of the technique for achieving the power of nonviolence is belief in the essential oneness of all life” (p. 390). Nonviolence becomes the practice, process, and outcomes of learning if interdependence and connection are held in sacred trust. Finally, aligning our money with our values is necessary to curb unjust, unsustainable, and violent economic practices and systems and is an important everyday, revolutionary act. Klein (2014) maintains that the current economic model in place is at war with life, and, in particular, human life on planet earth. Mindful, everyday economic choices can help to alleviate destruction of the human species and the beautiful ecosystems on which our sustenance depends.

At times, holistic, sustainability, and peace education can seem counter-cultural in the United States and other countries elsewhere on the planet. Our everyday acts may seem insignificant amid larger political, economic, and socio-cultural forces that aim to create walls and amass fortresses of power and privilege in opposition to the majority of people and to the health of the planet. I grow depressed and weary some days—it’s true. Yet, by cultivating inner sustainable energy through contemplative practice and rippling that peace, connection, and care outward into relationships, professional roles, society, and the wider world, there is hope. When I hold the hand of our five-year-old by a pond, listen to the wind amid the pines, or watch a sunset over the Appalachian Mountains and deeply listen to their enduring wisdom, I find hope and energy to continue the struggle toward healing and connection, for the seventh generation, the yet-to-be-born children of the future. I find hope and inspiration in contemplating and then trying to live the definition of sustainable peace generated by undergraduate students in my Inclusive Leadership for Sustainable Peace course in the spring of 2017:

Sustainable peace is a state of global relationships where individuals, groups, and societies are enabled to be fully happy and well. A shared curiosity and understanding of diversity works to alleviate suffering by creating nonviolent and fair relations between and within communities of all sizes, the largest being the planetary community. Sustainable peace is both the process and the end goal.

(Brantmeier et al., 2017, para 4)
References


Edward J. Brantmeier


**Dedication**

I dedicate this chapter to Estes David Brantmeier—may you live sustainably and enjoy life, my dear son. May you always find hope, sustenance, and abiding love in the rising and setting sun.

In addition, I dedicate this chapter to the future of MountainTop Learning Center near Sugar Grove, West Virginia—a place to connect, learn, live sustainably, and enjoy life. We all must dream, and then build a foundation under those dreams.

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