

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Decolonial Micro-Revolution: A Brief Note on Peace Education in Trinidad and the United States

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ABSTRACT

This special journal issue represents some wonderful work that was presented at the 29th International Peace Research Association conference that was held in May 2023 in Trinidad & Tobago. I was a co-chair, along with Matt Meyers, of the planning committee, and it was my honor to bring this conference to the Caribbean region for the first time. In this brief essay, I offer snippets from my remarks at a plenary session; I discuss my personal journey to peace education, and I tease an introduction to the concept of decolonial micro-revolutions, which recognizes the restructuring power of the quotidian (but often overlooked and devalued) efforts by individuals toward social change.

As we convened the Peace Education Plenary sessions at the 2023 IPRA Conference in Trinidad and Tobago, we were well aware that this was the 50th anniversary of the founding of IPRA's Peace Education Commission. A panel of us discussed challenges and visions for our own work and the field. These are some notes from my remarks at that plenary:

One early challenge that I faced was that I wanted to be a psychologist when I first left Trinidad at the age of 18. In college, psychology was my major, and when I got to my senior year (I do not quite remember how it came up during one class discussion), but I was sharing my personal vision for when I would be a therapist one day with my psychology professor, and I said, “Yeah, I’ll be on the couch with my patient, and we’ll be crying and hugging....” And she said “NO! No, you can’t do that! You’ll be burnt out in a month!!” This was a formative inflection point because I was not interested in training myself in this field to be dispassionate.

Years later, I learnt that there is a multiplicity of strands in psychology, beyond rigid, hegemonic Western forms. However, it was a good crisis, because around that time I was reading a lot about Gandhi, Mandela, and the like, and one day I searched online (in the days before Google) for the words “peace” and “education,” and found the peace education program at Teachers

College, Columbia University. My life shifted toward peace education, a field that means varied things to different people. Despite the polysemous nomenclature, it is a broad tent that encapsulates a lot of different kinds of work; for me, I am not as much focused on the names so long as our work is positively affecting people’s lives.

In my own work, I am focusing on decolonial interventions in the field. I find that “decoloniality” has become an empty buzzword across many disciplines in the academy; people write about the Global South and have never been outside of their own geographic or personal comfort zones, with hollow answers when you ask them why they do what they do. In my research, teaching, and activism, I have been focusing on what I call decolonial micro-revolutions. I find it useful for example in contexts where I encounter students in the classroom, who are so overwhelmed by the weight of the world, they feel that their efforts will be inconsequential. Within the grand cosmos, we are all indeed minuscule, but our decolonial micro-revolutions are not inconsequential. We each have so much potentiality to make change.

I have been also theorizing around decolonial peace and justice education as a means to really challenge the larger field of peace education. I am working on a Fulbright and Spencer Foundation funded research project in Ghana, Brazil, Jamaica,

and the United States. This builds on my decade long work in communities in Trinidad, with parents, teachers, and students. I am doing the best I can to shift some of the resources around me in the United States, in the spirit of transnational reparations, to facilitate some of this community work. I do this work because I do believe that we have to build capacities, to show youth myriad possibilities, to challenge the world around us, and to foster deeper relationalities that reflect our worlds—all the way from the systemic to the inter/and intrapersonal. When we scale the work like this, then we see that there is room for each of us to start building the just worlds of tomorrow, today! It is indeed a prefigurative praxis [1, 2]: an imperative to model radical creativity!

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

1. C. Noto, H. Huskić, and H. M. A. Williams, “Introduction: Modeling Prefigurative Praxes: Disruption for Social Change,” in *Disrupting Hierarchy: Students and Teachers Collaborating for Social Change*, eds. H. M. A. Williams, H. Huskić, and C. Noto (New York: Teachers College Press, 2024), 1–9.
2. H. M. A. Williams, “Afterword: Revolutionary Nonviolences as Prefigurative Maroonage,” in *Insurrectionary Uprisings: A Reader in Revolutionary Nonviolence & Decolonization*, eds. M. Meyer and W. Marshall (Cantley, Canada: Daraja Press, 2022), 383–386.