Media Education Is an Integral Part of the Development of Critical Thinking

Interview with Alexander Fedorov,
President of the Russian Association for Film & Media Education

Photo from the author's archive

Two years have passed since our editors Natalia Kaloshina and Alison Preece last interviewed Professor ***Alexander Fedorov****, President of the Russian Association for Film and Media Education (http://www.edu.of.ru/mediaeducation), Editor-in-chief of the journal* Mediaobrazovanie *(Media Education, http://www.ifap.ru/projects/mediamag.htm), consultant to the Interregional affiliate of UNESCO's "Information for All" Program (http://www.ifap.ru), and Pro-Rector for Science of Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute. What is going on in media education today?*

N.K. *Our first question, naturally, is what has changed in the world of media education since our previous interview?*
A.F. In the past two years, interest in media education has grown considerably throughout the world. Media education has been widely discussed under the auspices of UNESCO (the UNESCO Media Education Conference in Paris, France, June 2007) and the Council of Europe (a European workshop on media literacy in Graz, Austria, December, 2007); and for the first time in history, at the level of the United Nations (the media literacy section at the World Forum "Alliance of Civilizations" in Madrid, Spain, January 2008). The Madrid Forum led to the creation of the Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse (http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org), a UN-sponsored multi-language Web portal on media literacy education, which began operating in the first quarter of 2008. This site provides free access to an extensive collection of papers by media educators and media researchers in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, German, Russian, and other languages of the world. I was able to attend all these international forums …
N.K. *And not only to attend, but also to be among the presenters?*

A.F. Quite right… and this experience convinced me that support for media education and media literacy in the world is steadily growing. Media education is undergoing intensive development in Canada, Australia, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Scandinavia. The Mediterranean countries are implementing an educational program called Mentor, which emphasizes the issues and challenges of media literacy: New handbooks and curricula have been created, and scientific conferences have been organized. And alongside these traditionally active players in the field of media education, new ones are appearing. I would note in particular the initiatives by Hungarian and Ukrainian educators and researchers. In Hungary (http://www.c3.hu/%7Emediaokt/angol.htm) media education is being actively introduced in secondary and high schools, based on recently developed curricula. In addition to new courses on media culture, elements of media education are being integrated into the traditional school subjects. Similar attempts are being made in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina and Chile). In New Zealand, media culture has become a legitimate school subject, on a par with language or history. In Ukraine (Lviv), the newly established Center of Media Ecology organizes conferences and publishes a journal. In Russia, too, new media education associations and centers, as well as new websites (for example, http://www.mediagram.ru, http://edu.of.medialibrary), have appeared in the last two years, and seminars and workshops are held on a regular basis. In 2007 and 2008, the first classes of Russian specialists in Media Education graduated from the Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute. By the way, the Rector of the Institute, Professor Vitaly Popov, recently signed a contract with the UN program "Alliance of Civilizations" to participate in creating the Russian section of the online Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse. All over the world—not only in Russia—more and more researchers are engaging with the problems of media education, and the number of monographs, textbooks, and articles published on the subject is growing every year.
A.P. *Did these international forums discuss the further development of media education?*
A.F. Of course; actually, these issues were the focus of attention at these forums. For example, the Paris UNESCO Media Education Conference in June 2007 adopted the *Paris Agenda* (http://www.ifap.ru/pr/2007/070625ba.pdf), including recommendations for media education in four main areas:

1. Development of comprehensive media education programs at all education levels:
   - to adopt a broad definition of media education
   - to establish links among issues of media education, cultural diversity, and respect for human rights
   - to define basic skills and evaluation systems
2. Teacher training and increased awareness of issues of media literacy at all levels:
   - to integrate media education into teacher training
   - to develop effective teaching methods
   - to mobilize all the stakeholders, in the education system and society as a whole (including the family, social institutions, and professional organizations)
   - to make media education an integral part of lifelong learning
3. Conduct and dissemination of research:
   - to develop media education and research in higher education
   - to create regional, national, and international networks for information exchange
4. International cooperation in actions:
   - to organize and to make visible international exchanges
   - to raise awareness among political decision-makers.

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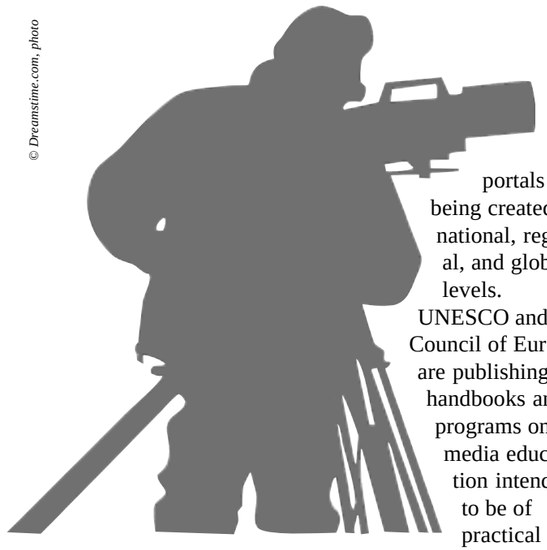
I think that these recommendations are relevant for any country in the world today—including Russia, of course.
N.K. *What practical results, if any, do you see from these forums?*
A.F. The fact that these discussions have taken place in the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and at the United Nations means that the relevance of media education in the modern world is recognized at the highest level. But more importantly, it means that these influential organizations and their partners are prepared to allocate funds for the development of media education projects. Further, it means that a long-term, coordinated, purposeful policy is taking shape in Europe and in other parts of the world, aimed at increasing media competence among both young people and adults. Media education Web



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portals are being created at national, regional, and global levels. UNESCO and the Council of Europe are publishing handbooks and programs on media education intended to be of practical value to teachers. All of this creates new opportunities for integration of media education into the learning process in schools and universities. For example, we've already begun organizing the Russian materials for the Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse, and starting in September 2008 we will be using these materials in our work with university students.

N.K. *Dr. Fedorov, two years ago you said: "I have no doubt that all universities... need media literacy courses, and media education must become part and parcel of the curriculum…" So, what about today, are things moving in this direction?*

A.F. It would be an exaggeration to say that during the last two years every school and university in the world has started offering courses on media education, media literacy, or media culture. However, I can certainly see some changes, and they are significant. For example, Faith Rogow, founder and President of the Alliance for a Media Literate America (http://www.amlainfo.org), reports that membership in this US organization of educators has grown fivefold over the last five years. Elements of media education have been incorporated in the U.S. high school educational standards, and, as I have already noted, media education has become a standard part of the school curriculum in Canada and Australia, and also in New Zealand and Hungary.

Coming back to Russia, apart from the numerous media-focused universities and departments (including those specializing in journalism, film, TV, video, and advertising), media literacy courses are now offered by at least 12 generalist universities (as compared to only four or five three years ago), in the cities of Biisk, Voronezh, Ekaterinburg, Irkutsk, Kurgan, Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, Tambov, Tver, Tomsk, and Chelyabinsk. As for Russian secondary and high schools, I think I can say with confidence that hundreds of teachers from various regions of the country now integrate media education into compulsory subjects or conduct elective courses related to media culture.

A.P. *But still, why* hundreds, *instead of* thousands *or* tens of thousands*? What are the obstacles to a much more wide-ranging introduction of media education across the learning spectrum?*

A.F. In my opinion, in most countries of the world these obstacles are basically as follows:

- there is still a lack of strategically trained media educators;
- there is a certain inertia on the part of the university administration (for example, in Russia universities are granted broad opportunities to introduce new courses within the "regional component" option, but university academic councils remain timid about including media education in their curricula—even though media literacy is obviously relevant for the students, especially for future teachers);
- the ministerial structures traditionally focus their attention on training courses in computer science and computerized teaching approaches, and give far less attention to relevant problems of media education;
- some educational leaders (as well as educators themselves) still tend to confuse *media education* (which is an integral part of the development of critical thinking, and critical perception of all kinds of media texts) with *educational technology* (technical teaching aids) in schools and universities;
- the results from the growing body of research into media education (see, for example, thesis abstracts at http://www.edu.of.ru/mediaeducation/default.asp?ob_no=2362) very often fail to reach their primary audience—the classroom teacher.

Of course, I'm not referring here to the many universities and departments involved in educating media professionals (such as journalists, film directors, producers, or advertising managers). These naturally offer a whole spectrum of courses related to media. What I am concerned about first and foremost is the media literacy education of future teachers. For them, media literacy is of utmost importance, because today's students spend a lot of their time in a virtual, media world. However, many school teachers still tend to ignore this fact.

A.P. *So, to make media literacy a standard component of every student's education, we need…?*

A.F. … to combine the efforts of international and governmental organizations, on the one hand, with the local efforts in particular regions and educational institutions, on the other. I think this is the best way to achieve the goal.

N.K. *Could you touch on the most popular (interesting, effective) classroom activities used to promote media literacy at various academic levels?*

A.F. Yes, and these are quite diverse. Particularly popular throughout the world are methods that encourage students to create their own media texts (newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, clips, films, websites, etc.). A wealth of such projects have been generated in France, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, and other countries.

Also widespread are methods developed by the British media educator Len Masterman, which are aimed at developing critical analysis of all types of media texts. In Russia, however, aesthetic analysis of media texts continues to be more popular, following the traditions of the founders of media education in Russia, Oleg Baranov, Stal Penzin, and Yury Usov.

N.K. *Am I correct in my understanding that critical analysis aims to interpret and evaluate the contents of media texts, whereas the aesthetic approach builds an understanding of how the media text was crafted and how that technique affects the viewer?*

A.F. Quite right. The aesthetic analysis of media texts of any genre is closely connected to the aesthetic or artistic theory of media education, which is essentially based on a culturological theory of media education. The main aim is to understand the artistic laws and language of media texts, to develop aesthetic perception and taste, and to be able to conduct a competent critical aesthetic analysis. Accordingly, in the classroom the focus is on analyzing the language of the media and on critical analysis of the author's artistic conception.

To revisit educational approaches: In recent years creative projects and portfolios have become popular in media education, and their effectiveness has been confirmed repeatedly by both practical experience and research.

Considering that many Internet providers now offer, at no charge, various tools for creating online projects, I would

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recommend that school and university teachers use these opportunities to design challenging and creative assignments for their students. For example, school students could form an online club for discussing TV shows or series, or organize an amateur photography contest and invite participants to discuss the entries.

N.K. *In your article a year ago (*Thinking Classroom, 8*(3), 13-19) you told our readers about some creative assignments you had used with students specializing in media education. What other assignments could you recommend that may be effectively used with high school students?*

A.F. There are lots of them—you can find descriptions in my monographs and handbooks, many of which are freely available on the Web site of the Russian Association for Film and Media Education (http://www.edu.of.ru/mediaeducation/default.asp?ob_no=19993). Some of them have been translated into English (http://www.edu.of.ru/attach/17/16308.doc).

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My own classroom experience has demonstrated the power of media-focused role-playing games ("I'm a producer," "I'm a scriptwriter," "I'm a film director," "I'm an actor," "I'm a journalist," etc). Through these activities, students familiarize themselves with, and gain direct experience of, the creative media professions and learn how to create original media texts. This experience helps them better analyze and appreciate professionally created works.

In addition, creative assignments develop students' imagination, associative thinking, and non-verbal perception. For example, students might:

- create advertising posters for their own media texts (or alternatively, for professionally made media texts) using various artistic media;
- create drawings and collages related to works of Russian or foreign media culture, such as movies or TV shows;
- draw "comics" based on particular media texts and designed for a specific age group. For example, school students could create comics for their peers, or for preschoolers.

After such creative assignments are completed, the next step is to organize a contest or exhibition of the posters, collages, drawings, or comics: The class discusses the artworks' strengths and weaknesses; the artists have an opportunity to defend their works in public, to respond to their teacher's and peers' questions, etc. This helps develop their perceptive and communicative skills, their critical thinking, and their media competence.

A.P. *There are many different kinds of media technologies and media texts. And the same certainly must hold true for the possibilities of using them in learning. What do you think about the potential educational value of graphic novels and comics in general?*

A.F. In Russia, in apparent contrast to the Western world, comic books have no particular popularity among teachers or students. Russian teenagers are much more interested the Internet, cell phones, TV shows, and movies. So classroom activities based on comics are much less popular in Russia… However, activities that involve creating comics are especially engaging for students who have special artistic abilities. In fact, many teachers have observed that students who are not adept at expressing their ideas verbally often surpass their peers in nonverbal expression of the same ideas or feelings—in drawings, posters, or comics…

A.P. *And what potential do you see for using the tools and opportunities proliferating on the Internet—blogs, YouTube, social networks like Facebook or MySpace—in the classroom?*

A.F. The broad capabilities of Internet software applications offer interesting prospects for practical media education. Students should be encouraged to create their own blogs, to discuss their special interests on one of the social sites, and/or to share their video creations on YouTube. However, it's important that our assignments develop students' critical thinking capacities and encourage them to create media texts with humanistic content; and require that they analyze, rather than simply "consume," particular media texts. For example, they might create a blog for discussion of the content and quality of today's youth-orientated commercial publications. Students could be assigned to interview their teachers about media (il)literacy, and then (with contributors' permission) post their interviews online. Teachers could help students plan the format of the blog, and prepare questions for the interviews. Students' creative work produced in role playing games such as "I'm a cinematographer" or "I'm a director" could be posted on YouTube.

A.P. *Are these just would-be plans, or are teachers already offering such activities to their students?*

A.F. They are. For example, since 1996 such projects have been implemented in Russia under the guidance and methodology of Yelena Yastrebtseva, my colleague from the Russian Academy of Education (http://www.ioso.ru/scmedia/what.htm). Another example: In 2005–2006, the

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Center for Media Education in Tolyatti organized a competition for educational Internet projects (http://www.mec.tgl.ru/index.php?module=subjects&func=listpages&subid=57).

Extensive research has confirmed that such assignments contribute to the development of students' perceptive, creative, and analytical abilities, and improve their knowledge of media and media education. As a bonus, the learning process itself becomes more varied, interesting, and creative.

True, some teachers believe that because many teenagers already spend most of their leisure time on the Internet, it isn't necessary to devote precious classroom time to that sphere, and that in fact, the school should try to protect students from the virtual world. However, I don't consider this to be a constructive approach. In any case, we won't be able to protect the students from new information technologies. And in my view, the real challenge for a thoughtful and creative teacher is how best to take advantage of the new media for educational purposes.

At the same time, we must recognize that unguarded use of Internet resources involves serious risks. Teenagers who are technologically savvy but otherwise unsophisticated are apt to fill their blogs, sites, or YouTube accounts with highly negative content: obscenity, pornographic photo/video images, texts promoting violence, drugs, or racism. One needn't be an expert in media culture to see that

Photo from the author's archive

today such youthful "creativity" is, unfortunately, a widespread phenomenon.

A.P. *So, acknowledging the downside of the newest media technologies: Do you think it's time to teach our students the basics of Internet safety?*

A.F. As we know, one of the main objectives of media education today is to foster critical thinking that can be applied to any text in the mass media. If students are able to analyze and evaluate texts critically, they will be far less likely to "take the bait" of criminals, predators, or unscrupulous characters trolling the Internet. Of course the problems of safety on the Internet and mobile phone networks should be given high priority in media educational classrooms: Blind trust in any virtual conversation partners can be really dangerous...

It is difficult to address these problems unless students are familiar with the psychosocial mechanisms of the media. When students have learned to identify specific techniques used in media manipulation, they take a more critical view of information received via any channel, including the Internet. Achieving this goal may include:

- exposing and demonstrating the psychosocial machinery of media manipulation;
- demonstrating and analyzing typical media manipulation methods and techniques;
- "sifting" the information presented in media texts (careful categorizing of the true and false materials in the press, TV, radio, etc., differentiating the "spin" and "buzz words" by juxtaposing the information with actual facts);
- questioning the aura of convention, ingenuousness, or authority surrounding a given message;
- critical analysis of the objectives, interests, and motives of the source of the information.

In all these approaches, of course, we need to keep in mind the differences between informational and artistic texts. Different criteria will apply.

One of the most difficult questions regarding negative influences of the media is the issue of violence. Certainly in real life few teenagers set out to imitate the behavior of violent movie or videogame characters. But some of them become desensitized to media violence, which leads to indifference and an inability to experience normal human compassion. This finding has been confirmed repeatedly by U.S. researchers.

Therefore, an effective classroom assignment might be to critically dissect the true identity of the so-called "action hero"—and challenge the morality of a "hero" who murders dozens of people in cold blood. To this end we sometimes employ an activity called "criminal investigation": Students investigate crimes depicted in a violent media text. Their task is to reveal illegal, cruel, or abusive actions committed by the characters. Then, having collected cogent evidence, the learners build up an indictment against the "agents" (i.e. the authors) who exploit violence—or encourage violence—for commercial purposes.

N.K. *What would you like to wish the readers of* Thinking Classroom*?*

A.F. That they should embrace the ideas of media literacy education, and continue always to raise their own media competence. Here I'd like to cite the words of the well-known Canadian educator, philosopher, and scholar, Marshall McLuhan: "You must be literate in umpteen media to be really *literate* nowadays."

N.K., A.P. *Thank you so much for answering our questions. We wish you continued success in all your endeavors!*

Goharik Markosyan and Julieta Chaloyan

Engaging Children and Teenagers in Peace Culture Education and Peacebuilding

Photos from the authors' archives

Goharik Markosyan *is President of the NGO "Women for Development" in Gyumri, Armenia.*

Julieta Chaloyan *is a senior staff member of the NGO "Women for Development" in Gyumri, Armenia.*

For the past five years, the NGO *Women for Development*, established in 1997 in Gyumri, Armenia, has been implementing a project called *Peace and Conflict Resolution Education in the Schools of Gyumri*, which is aimed at promoting peace culture and conflict resolution skills. As part of the project, 10 Peace Education Centers (PECs), involving about 250 students, are now operating in the schools of the Shirak district. As a member of the International Peace Education and Conflict Resolution Network established in 2005 in New York, *Women for Development* cooperates with many non-profit and governmental organizations implementing similar projects, both in Armenia and abroad. In this article we share our experiences in teaching Peace Culture and peacebuilding.

Why teach Peace?

Today the need for peace is as crucial as it ever has been; threats to peace and security including wars, armed conflicts, and terrorism, seem to proliferate unchecked. However, peace and stability depend not only on the absence of war, but also on our ability to build relations with others. If we wish to have peace, then we need to explain to people what peace is, and what stands in the way of achieving it: what we need to change in ourselves, in our culture, and in our society to be able to live in peace.

Peace education leads people to take an active part in creating a more humane, equitable, free, and prosperous world, a world without wars and violence.

With hard work, people of any age can make positive changes in their consciousness, feelings, and ideas, but the younger the person, the easier the process. That's why our centers work with children and teenagers.

The key principles of peace education are non-violence and social justice. Students acquire skills and knowledge needed for peacebuilding, and develop their own viewpoints on issues of peace and justice. It is important that they also learn to prevent conflict and acts of violence, and to resolve conflicts peacefully. Consequently, the skills and knowledge acquired in PECs promote changes in behavior that decrease personal and interpersonal conflicts, and lead to the creation of stronger class and school communities.

How Peace Education Centers work

Peace and Conflict Resolution Education is set up as a two-year course of study. Initially, in 2002, the Centers accepted students from all grade levels. Subsequently, however, we had to change our approach, because it was

CONFLICT RESOLUTION PRINCIPLES:

Principle 1. *Think before reacting*
Before you accuse a person of something, ask yourself some questions to clarify the situation. For example, what might have caused your friend to be rude to you, or to arrive late? You may see some valid reasons for your friend's actions.

Principle 2. *Try to understand your opponent*
Try to take a positive attitude toward your opponent. Make eye contact, be aware of facial expressions, try to imagine how you would feel in your opponent's position. Remember that to *understand* your opponent's viewpoint does not necessarily mean to *agree* with it. You don't necessarily have to abandon your own position, but you should always look at the problem from other perspectives.

Principle 3. *Listen carefully*
Let your opponent speak his mind. For one thing, this will help you understand your opponent better; and for another, it will defuse the situation and make it easier to resolve the conflict. While you are listening, don't jump in to defend yourself or give advice (e.g. "True, but that wasn't my fault!" or "You should have thought of that before!").

Principle 4. *Ask questions*
Certain types of questions promote dialogue: e.g. "What did you mean when you said...?" or "What do you think about that?" There are other types of questions, on the contrary, that discourage dialogue and thus hinder conflict resolution, such as *yes/no* questions, or questions that contain their own answer, e.g.: "Don't you think it would be better if…?"

Principle 5. *Try to find the best solution*
The best solution to a conflict is the one in which nobody feels slighted or has to sacrifice something of vital importance. You must believe that a win-win solution is always possible.

the "adult" world, and then discuss the conflict to determine the best solution. One of our example situations is as follows:

Two organizations, one North American and the other Armenian, are organizing a joint seminar in the U.S. The roster of Armenian participants is almost full: There is only one vacancy left, but there are two candidates. The two are equal in terms of professional standing and experience. How can the director resolve this dilemma to the satisfaction of both parties?

To begin to analyze the conflict, students act out the situation. The student playing the role of the director talks to both candidates to better understand their motivations. The director discovers that one of the candidates plans to use the opportunity to see a brother he hasn't seen for several years. The other regards participation in the seminar as recognition for the quality of his work.

The scene is followed by a discussion. Students propose a variety of solutions to the problem, one of which is the following: The applicant who wants to see his brother should get to attend the seminar, while the other applicant should receive a promotion, in acknowledgement of the caliber of his work. Both sides are satisfied with this decision. The students are convinced that conflict analysis is vital for reaching a win–win solution.

Conflict Mapping

Another way to analyze a conflict is through Conflict Mapping. Students enjoy this activity, as graphic representation helps them better understand the relations among the parties involved in the conflict.

Before mapping a conflict, we ask students to answer the following questions:

- Who are the primary parties in the conflict?
- Are there other people or groups who are in some way related to the conflict?
- What are the relations among the parties, and how can they be represented on a map? Are these family relations? Close relations? Broken relations?
- What fundamental unresolved problems between the parties must be included on the map?
- What is your (or your organization's) position in the situation? What relationships or connections do you have with the parties that might serve as a starting point for resolving the conflict?

Before constructing a map, we need to agree on a set of symbols to be used. We use the following:

- *Circles* to represent participants of the conflict. The size of the circle depends on the participant's role in the conflict
- *Lines* for connections, including close connections
- *Parallel lines* for an alliance
- *Crossed out parallel lines* for unstable or broken connections
- *Arrows* indicate the direction of influence
- *Zigzag lines* for disagreement or conflict
- *Squares and rectangles* for questions, topics, or objects (but not people)

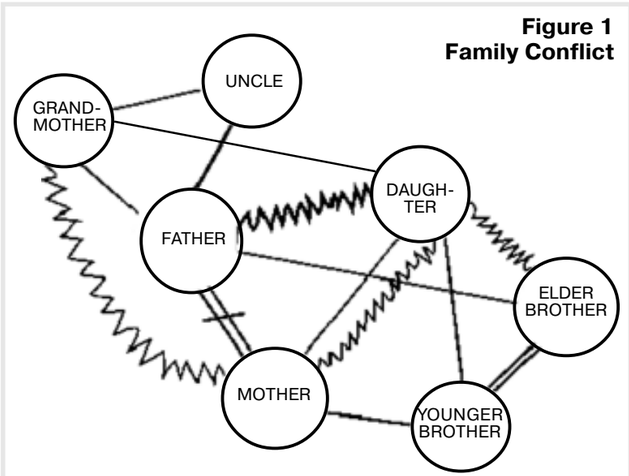


Figure 1
Family Conflict

The map in Figure 1 depicts a family conflict between father and daughter. The problem is whether the daughter should marry according to her parents' wishes. Note the lines that indicate a close relationship between grandmother and granddaughter, and a rift between father and mother. Despite their close mutual connections, the brothers take different sides in the conflict. Our example represents a family conflict, but a similar map can be used to describe any kind of conflict, on a local, national, or even international level.

For Conflict Mapping we divide students into small groups and provide each with a description of the conflict. Each group is assigned a particular perspective from which to analyze and map the conflict. Predictably, the resulting maps turn out to be very different. Each group then presents its map to the others, and argues the case for its own solution to the conflict.

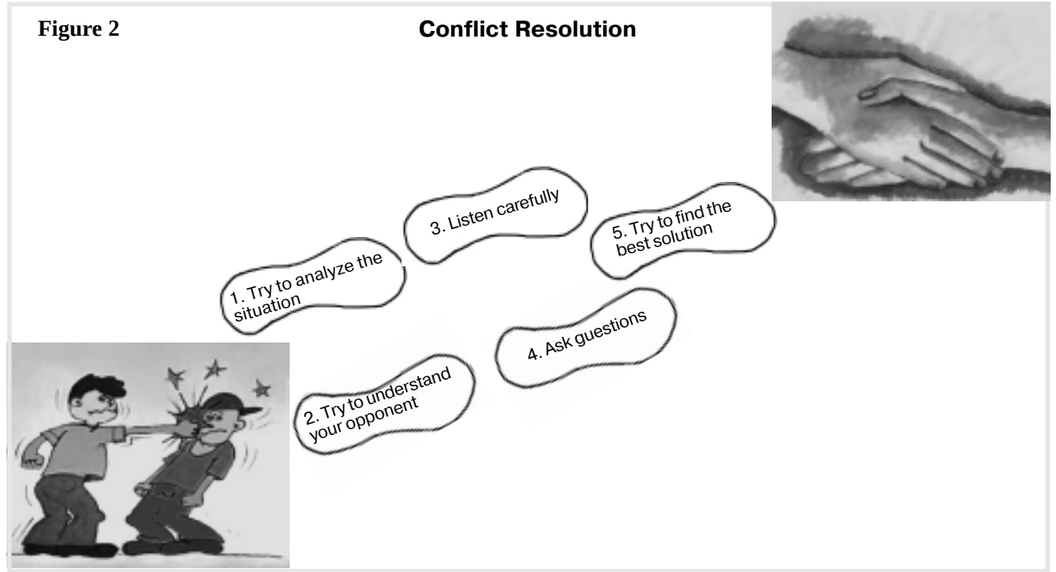
Peer-to-peer lesson

Our PEC students are just a small part of the population of their respective schools. To engage other students in the project, we organize peer-to-peer demonstration lessons: Students attending the Peace Education Centers share their knowledge and experience with others. The peer-to-peer lessons are planned after students have completed the PEC course, and have mastered its content and skills. Of course one lesson is not enough to share everything they have learned in the Center over the two-year program.. Therefore these peer-to-peer lessons focus on a single topic: *Principles of Conflict Resolution.* Working in groups of four (in our experience, this is the optimal group size), the student "teachers" spend about a month planning and preparing their lessons, under the guidance of PEC teachers. The teachers help them select examples of conflicts and prepare performances and posters, and advise them on how to structure the lesson to make it interesting and comprehensible to everyone in the class.

Lesson structure

At the beginning of the lesson, the peer teachers talk about the Peace Education Center program. They explain that, unlike school, the PEC doesn't give homework assignments or grades, and best of all, that students in the Center can express their minds freely, without fear of making a mistake. They also explain how the PEC program has helped them to live in peace and resolve conflicts to the satisfaction of all sides. They invite input from the class in formulating a definition of *conflict*. Then they discuss rules of conduct that can help prevent conflict, and talk about how to resolve an existing conflict peacefully. No doubt these rules and principles (summarized on pp. 22 and 24) are familiar to many readers.

Figure 2 **Conflict Resolution**



In preparing the lessons, members of the groups agree in advance who will present which particular rules and principles. They prepare posters to illustrate their explanations. For example, five footprints might be used to demonstrate five principles of conflict resolution (Figure 2), or an expressive comic could present recommendations for behavior in conflict situations (Figure 3). Real-life examples are used to illustrate all the rules and principles, and students in the class are encouraged to provide additional examples. Class members also participate in short skits representing conflicts they encounter in everyday life or at school. The participants portray the origin and development of the conflict, and then offer various solutions. To determine the best solution, they use the rules and principles they have just learned, with the posters displayed in the room serving as reminders. A variation on this activity is to have the actors presenting the conflict intentionally violate all the principles and rules discussed. The other students must then determine which principles and rules were violated, and explain what led to the escalation of the conflict.

In these peer-to-peer lessons, both the peer teachers and their students are active participants in the process. For the first few minutes the young teachers are usually shy, but they soon forget their stage fright and conduct their lesson with confidence, actively involving their schoolmates in the process. Students talk about their arguments with friends, parents, and teachers, and discuss how to resolve these conflicts. At the end of the lesson, the students receive a questionnaire for their parents (designed to find out what parents think of conflict resolution education), and handouts summarizing the rules and principles of conflict resolution. Parents' responses to the questionnaires are carefully analyzed, and the data will be applied in our future work.

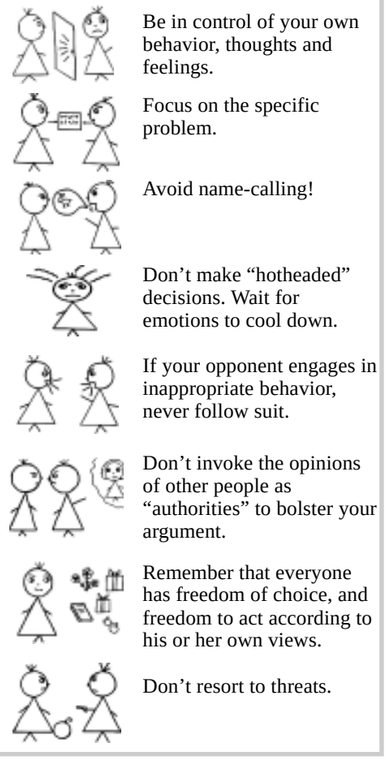
Photos from the authors' archives

After a peer-to-peer presentation, peer teachers, PEC teachers, and observers (other students from the Peace Education Center who were present at the lesson) analyze the lesson. The atmosphere of constructive criticism and self-reflection makes for unbiased judgment, and helps the young teachers improve their skills with each subsequent lesson. Peer-to-peer lessons are conducted for almost all the classes in the schools where PECs are active, and within a month most of the students have been introduced to the ideas of Peace Culture. Sometimes we conduct such lessons in other schools as well.

These lessons help our participants and their audiences realize that respect and collaboration can easily be achieved in any school community if one approaches one's classmates as friends, rather than enemies.

Response of participants

Figure 3. How to behave to avoid escalation of conflict



Photos from the authors' archives

About 95% of students who attend peer-to-peer lessons consider them useful and important. In response to our questions, many note that they were able to express their thoughts freely in these lessons without fear that they would be misunderstood or criticized for a "wrong" opinion. The respondents like having the lessons conducted by peers—they are convinced that their peers understand them better than any adult could. Children often relate more easily to other children, and both tutors and tutees benefit from the interaction: The former improve their knowledge and skills and gain confidence, and the latter become familiar with the ideas of peace and peacebuilding. Students share the handouts from the lesson with their friends and relatives, thus engaging them in peace education as well.

According to the peer teachers themselves, their teaching experience helps them to manage conflicts that may occur between teachers and students. They are proud of their new role, their self-esteem increases, and as an added benefit, they really begin to value the work of teachers.

How the participants benefit from the project

From time to time we organize meetings, workshops, or round table sessions with parents of PEC students. The parents tell us how their children's behavior has changed: Many notice that their children have become more respectful, friendly, and tolerant. Similar ideas are expressed on our questionnaire