

PEACE BUILDING WORKSHOPS

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"How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?"- Lester B. Pearson

INTRODUCTION

Peru is a country with great ethnic, cultural and economic diversity. This is an asset; however, in terms of interaction and communication, it continues to be a challenge and can cause conflict. Conflicts range from racial prejudice to gender discrimination to poverty. Young Peruvians grow up in this divided society. These conflicts are so deeply rooted thus difficult to see that Peruvians have little chance to overcome this mindset stemming from prejudice, suspicion and fear. This hinders the possibility to engage in dialogue with people from different backgrounds.

Peru recently regained a democratic government and respect for its democratic institutions. Healing wounds and building bridges between diverse communities is part of this process. For this democratic process to be successful committed individuals need a space to interact and work with others to bring about a better understanding of justice and democracy through dialogue and education. The **Peace Building Workshops** are in an exceptional position to create spaces and provide tools which will empower individuals to discuss and identify these conflicts in order to solve them.

PROPOSAL

Working collaboratively with the Peruvian Association of the United World Colleges (APCMU) and partner schools I propose to organize a series of **Peace Building Workshops** in twenty five schools throughout Peru. Our aim is to reduce conflicts and violence in schools and communities through a series of conflict resolution workshops for high school students and their teachers. These workshops will train and strengthen the conflict resolution abilities of these students. The workshops will promote a culture of peaceful relationships in participant schools by establishing Peace Clubs. For this purpose, we have completed, with a team of experts, the methodology for these workshops. This methodology was modeled after a highly successful project implemented in 2005 in Lima by one of APCMU's partner organizations.

I will monitor and document each stage and I will produce a video documentary of this process.

Project Stages

Stage I: Twenty five private and public schools have agreed to participate. A volunteer teacher from each institution will be trained for three days in sessions led by Joanna Carmen, a Conflict Resolution consultant from Lima. Material for the workshops, including textbooks addressing various issues and strategies to deal with Conflict Resolution will be developed by a team of specialists. Each teacher will receive 25 copies for their student groups.

Stage II: Returning to their schools, teachers will recruit twenty five juniors and seniors willing to attend Saturday workshop sessions. Working with their teacher these volunteers will receive training for three weeks in their schools. This will be part of the process for establishing their school Peace Club. During their third week of training they will produce posters, handouts, art pieces, activities and other educational tools that will help them to facilitate and conduct workshops with their peers.

Stage III: Peace Club members will now be ready to share their experiences and new skills with students at their schools. Each participating school averages four hundred students. For three weeks during advising time, Peace Club members will visit all classrooms and lead peer workshops.

Stage IV: All participant schools will hold a Peace Fair organized by their Peace Clubs. All students will exhibit art work, poster displays, theatre pieces, photo exhibits and any creative expression inspired by the **Peace Building Workshops**. An award will be offered to the school which best conveys the spirit of collective effort of Peace Building. The award, donated by the BBVA Banco Continental, consists of books, CD's and films that address the various dimensions and possibilities of Conflict Resolution. This award will be given to the school's library.

LASTING LEGACY

The materials produced by students and their teachers during this process will be the first step towards the continuity of building Peace Sites and institutionalizing the Peace Clubs at each participant school. During the last day of workshops for teachers, the APCMU will help teachers identify potential sources for advertisement and dissemination of this initiative. They are required to show the progress of their dissemination efforts as part of the Peace Fair.

As part of my Educational Studies program, civic engagement and social reform are key components. Professor Ruthanne Kurth-Schai, Chair of the Educational Studies Department, has agreed to be my mentor as I adapt the Peace Building Workshops practiced in Peru to be implemented in selected Minnesota public schools during Fall 2007. As the final project for the Education and Social Change class, my experiences in Peru and the United States will be shared with all Educational Studies minors and the product will be published in the Macalester Education Reform website. I also will share my findings in a presentation at Macalester College as well as the Resource Center of the Americas and any other interested and relevant community organizations. The documentary video I will produce, available in both English and Spanish, will be one of the concrete outcomes of this project. It can be used and reviewed anytime by interested individuals and related classes who are concerned with the same issues and committed to peace building. The contacts that will be made through these forums for discussion between committed individuals and organizations are also a key component of the legacies of this project.

The **Peace Building Workshops** will benefit students from various regions in Peru as well as students in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area. The insights and the experience from these workshops can provide Macalester students with the framework and motivation to get involved with their own communities. Engaging conflict constructively can lead to personal growth, better relationships, and the genuine resolution of conflicts.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION AND BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE

After my experience as a United World College student in Norway I continued my relationship with this organization by joining the APCMU in Lima. I spent seven months assisting the National Committee with its efforts to shift from selecting young UWC scholars to creating a network of former participants. The creation of a network of former participants is now a priority for the APCMU. Efforts are made to constantly create opportunities for these students to get together and remain active and connected in their own communities. We continue to seek alternatives for creating spaces for ongoing dialogue amongst these diverse groups of young people. In 2005 I led a Human Rights workshop in Lima organized by the APCMU. We began by reading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then explored the concept of Human Rights. We concluded by listing the different alternatives and offering concrete suggestions for how to deal with human rights violations. My motivation was to help other young people realize their own potential to make a difference, just as I had learned while I was a United World College student.

My experiences after graduating from Red Cross Nordic United World College helped me understand the need for education and policy reform in order to deal with some of the problems in my community. After designing a Peruvian alternative high school curriculum for an Educational Studies class project I understood not only the roots of the problem but moreover the relevance of these discrimination conflicts. This class, other coursework and extra curricular activities at Macalester have helped to inform this **Peace Building Workshops** project. Last year I was introduced to an initiative by the Bartos Institute Constructive Engagement at the UWC-USA. They have shown interest in supporting our initiative. This kind of collaboration reaffirms my commitment to use education as a tool for effective reform. Through diversity, positive democratic change can occur rather than conflict. If we are to achieve this we need to be able to openly discuss our differences and learn to use them to build peace. Whether in Peru, Minneapolis or Saint Paul the **Peace Building Workshops** will make this possible.