Education and the Threat of Nuclear War

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The 1980s, hopefully, will be remembered as the decade during which citizens of the United States, Europe, and elsewhere in the world began to confront and reduce the threat of nuclear war. At the grassroots level, massive rallies and demonstrations testify to the fact that people are deeply disturbed by the risk of nuclear war and by the social, political, and psychological costs of the arms race. Politically, the November 1982 elections featured widespread support for a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze in referendums from coast to coast. Moreover, a multitude of church, labor, and professional groups are organizing, forming coalitions, holding conferences, and acknowledging their responsibility to work to reduce the threat of nuclear war. Older organizations, like the Council for a Livable World and the American Friends Service Committee, are being joined by a profusion of new ones like the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, the Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, and Ground Zero. Physicians for Social Responsibility, which had been largely dormant during the 1970s, has reemerged with encouraging vitality and influence. And, at top leadership levels, grave doubts about past and present nuclear weapons policies are being expressed by military and political experts—usually after their "retirement" from official positions and duties. In short, it appears that peoples' responses are at last becoming commensurate with the urgency and scale of the threat of nuclear war.

Both reflecting and contributing to this outpouring of concern about nuclear war have been numerous efforts by educators to provide citizens with opportunities to learn more about the threat and how to reduce it. Well-established programs of peace and disarmament education, such as those sponsored by the World Policy Institute (formerly the Institute for World Order) have been supplemented by nuclear war education projects started recently by such public-interest science organizations as the Federation of American Scientists and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Such new organizations as Educators for Social Responsibility, a national organization formed in 1981 to educate teachers of all grade levels, school administrators, and parents about the threat of nuclear war and strategies for reducing it, and Ground Zero—a non-partisan community education project started by former National Security Council staffer Roger Molander—have brought the issues of nuclear war into classrooms and communities throughout the nation. Several major conferences have brought together educators in order to discuss what and how to teach about nuclear war. In March 1982, Harmon Dunathon, Provost of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, organized a conference on "The Role of the Academy in Addressing the Issues of Nuclear War" that brought nearly 200 educators to Washington, D.C. to hear noted speakers and to participate in workshops. More recently, in January 1983, forty leaders in the field of nuclear education came to Emory University, where International Student Pugwash organized a symposium on "Instituting Nuclear Age Education: Towards a Cooperative Future.

Also, special issues of professional journals have focused on issues raised by the threat of nuclear war. For example, the Fall 1982 issue of the Teachers College Record was devoted to "Education for Peace and Disarmament: Toward a Living World," and the March 1983 issue of The Forum for Liberal Education focused on "Peace Education." Articles on the growth in nuclear war education programs have appeared in the New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, the Boston Globe, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and Newsweek. Finally, an undetermined but growing number of individual teachers initiated new units and courses on nuclear war in their schools and colleges.

Nuclear War Education For Children and Youth

The familiar cliche—that each generation of children inherits the accomplishments and mistakes of its parents and forebears—has a special relevance in the nuclear age. The children and youth of today have been born into a world that is more complex, more dangerous, and—paradoxically—more promising than at any other time in history.

Recent psychological studies have indicated that contemporary children
are quite aware of, and disturbed by, the threat of nuclear war. For example, the recently completed report of the American Psychiatric Association’s Task Force on the Psychosocial Aspects of Nuclear Developments found that many children and adolescents report negative feelings associated with nuclear technology, including fear, anger, hopelessness, cynicism, and a sense of having no future.  

Despite the fact that children are aware of nuclear issues, until quite recently schools have tended to ignore these issues altogether or else to treat them in a cursory or incomplete manner.

Fortunately, the deepening concern about the threat of nuclear war has stimulated efforts to involve children, parents and educators in learning about nuclear issues and acting to reduce the threat. 

At the forefront of educational activism is Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Currently, ESR has about 60 chapters formed or being formed, with more than 2500 members in 25 states and several countries.

Some of the projects undertaken by ESR include developing age-appropriate curriculum materials; working with schools to introduce new curricular materials on the nuclear arms race into classes; acting as a clearinghouse for educational resources for teachers and parents; promoting the development of local chapters and projects; and, publishing a useful national newsletter. ESR has recently produced the Day of Dialogue Planning and Curriculum Resource Guide: Dealing with Nuclear Issues in the Classroom. This 200-page guide, written through the combined efforts of more than 60 parents and teachers, has a wealth of information—including suggestions for age-appropriate teaching materials and ideas for classroom activities and study units for kindergarten through grade 12.

Among the most exciting of the recently formed organizations is the Student/Teacher Organization to Prevent Nuclear War (STOP). The following profile of STOP was provided by Warren Goldstein, STOP’s network coordinator:

STOP Nuclear War is a network of high school students and teachers who believe that their energy, vision, and hope are the missing ingredients needed to reverse the march toward oblivion, better known as the nuclear arms race. The STOP network began at Northfield (Massachusetts) Mount Herman School in the spring of 1981 when the school sponsored “Disarmament Week.” Out of the Disarmament Week came the idea of a national network of high school students and teachers. Seeking to help young people educate themselves, STOP supports the development of curricular materials about the arms race and nuclear war. STOP focuses primarily, however, on extracurricular activities: events, presentations, and projects in schools, churches, and communities. In the fall of 1981, the Northfield Chapter began producing the network’s newsletter, STOP News. Published six times during the academic year, the newsletter is a link between chapters, offering articles by and for high school students on everything from how to run a first meeting to reviews of resources for the high school level.

The central office is the hub of a rapidly expanding network. From an initial handful of members and chapters, STOP has grown to over 40 chapters and 200 members scattered across 31 states. In July 1982, the Representative Assembly of the National Education Association voted to endorse STOP, encouraging NEA members and affiliates “to take action to create local units of STOP Nuclear War in their communities.”

The Facing History and Ourselves Project in Brookline, Massachusetts, is a teacher training and curriculum dissemination project committed to bringing students access to information about events in history usually denied to them by their textbooks and teachers. This project has developed excellent high school curricular materials on genocide in the 20th century. Its current curriculum, “Decision Making in a Nuclear Age,” is a 12-week high school course that has been developed by teachers Roberta Snow and Elizabeth Lewis. The curriculum has been piloted in several schools in the Boston-Cambridge area and is being used less formally in 60 schools around the nation. Among the questions addressed in the curriculum are the following: What is the nuclear world? What are some perspectives for thinking about the nuclear world? What are frameworks for decisionmaking about nuclear weapons? What choices and responsibilities do individuals and groups have in making decisions about the future?

“Decision Making in a Nuclear Age” strives for a balanced, objective analysis of issues. As the project description states: “This is not a peace or disarmament curriculum which traditionally has used a biased approach to teach about pacifism, conflict resolution, or disarmament possibilities. ‘Decision Making in a Nuclear Age’ addresses the many perspectives of these complex issues related to international affairs and nuclear weapons technology and helps teachers to deal with these sensitive issues in their classrooms in order to empower students to take responsibility for their future.”

The Peacemaking, Militarism, and Education Program, directed by Betty Reardon at Columbia University, offers services for the development of peace education programs at all levels of formal education. She has just published Militarization, Security, and Peace Education: A Guide for Concerned Citizens.
which should prove very useful for persons teaching in classrooms as well as those interested in starting study groups in their churches or community organizations.

The National Education Association, in cooperation with the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Massachusetts Teachers Association, has produced CHOICES: A Unit on Conflict and Nuclear War. This curriculum for junior high school students contains ten lessons on the effects of nuclear weapons, consequences of nuclear war, and approaches to conflict resolution.19

The Washington, D.C.-based Arms Control Association has compiled valuable information and resources for the high school level on the theme of “Conflict and Security in the Nuclear Age,” including material on audiovisual resources, recommended books for a high school library, and free and inexpensive publications from the US government.20

Nuclear War Education in Colleges and Universities

Until recently, colleges and universities tended to either ignore or else devote minimal resources to the problem of nuclear war. Indeed, as Yale psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton told an audience of college faculty and administrators gathered for a conference on “The Role of the University in Addressing the Issues of Nuclear War:”

I think we have to acknowledge the scandal that this central issue of our times has been fundamentally ignored in our universities. There has been a wave of concern about nuclear-weapons education, but it is very belated. Very little of the anti-nuclear discussion came from students or faculty members. It is high time that this is changing.21

This situation, fortunately, has begun to change as individual faculty members and administrators have developed new courses on nuclear war and other educational programs across the country. On November 11 of both 1981 and 1982, hundreds of campuses sponsored Convocations on the Threat of Nuclear War and on Solutions to the Nuclear Arms Race. These convocations were organized by the Union of Concerned Scientists in collaboration with other organizations concerned with nuclear war education.

Following are several brief profiles of organizations that have been promoting nuclear war education at colleges and universities.

World Policy Institute (formerly Institute for World Order). The World Policy Institute is among the most prolific, creative, and competent organizations concerned with nuclear war and related issues. Founded in 1961 on the world order values of peace, social justice, economic well-being, and ecological balance, the Institute engages in research, publication, and education. Its Transnational Academic Program prepares materials for classroom use and curriculum development, offers teaching fellowships, and generally assists college faculty to develop world order courses and programs. It publishes the invaluable resource Peace and World Order Studies: A Curriculum Guide, which contains essays, dozens of annotated course syllabi, and other resources on peace, war, and related issues. In cooperation with several other organizations, the World Policy Institute has sponsored the Project for Global Education, a national effort to promote the study of contemporary world problems—war, poverty, sociopolitical injustice, and ecological decay—at over 100 undergraduate institutions in the United States during the 1981-82 academic year.

Federation of American Scientists (FAS). FAS is a unique, non-profit organization, licensed to lobby in the public interest, and composed of 5000 natural and social scientists and engineers who are concerned with problems of science and society. FAS was organized in 1945 as the Federation of Atomic Scientists and has functioned as a conscience of the scientific community for more than a quarter century. In 1981, FAS instituted a Nuclear War Education Project with the following activities: monthly publication of COUNTDOWN, a newsletter of nuclear war education resources; compilation and distribution of packets containing syllabi from a variety of college-level courses on nuclear war; and consultation with individuals and organizations concerned with nuclear war education.

Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). UCS is an organization of scientists, engineers, and other professionals concerned about the impact of advanced technology on society. Recently, UCS has initiated a major expansion of its activities in the area of arms control and the threat of nuclear war. Its activities include sponsorship of nationwide Convocations and teach-ins on nuclear war, held on November 11, 1981 and 1982. UCS has produced an excellent half-hour documentary film on the need for a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons in Europe and an inexpensive paperback book, Beyond The Freeze: The Road to Nuclear Sanity, which examines causes and possible solutions to the threat of nuclear war.

United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War (UCAM).22 UCAM was established in 1981 as a nationwide association of college and university chapters composed of students, faculty, and campus community members dedicated to ending the threat of nuclear annihilation. Its major objectives are to facilitate cooperation, communications, and exchange of ideas between chapters and like-minded organizations and to
facilitate on- and off-campus education activities by chapters. UCAM's activities have included co-sponsorship of national education programs; canvassing incumbent and aspiring Congressional candidates on voting records and positions with respect to nuclear weapons; collection and distribution of syllabi of courses on the arms race; publication of a newsletter. UCAM is seeking funds to develop regional summer institutes to prepare educators to offer courses on nuclear war and related issues.

The Role of Education in Preventing Nuclear War

Education is the foundation for all efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear war. While this overview indicates that there are many creative efforts underway to make our educational institutions responsive to the threat of nuclear war, it must be recognized that the nuclear war education movement has just gotten started at a point where the momentum toward nuclear war has already grown to ominous proportions. It is imperative that the nuclear war education movement expand to more individuals and more schools, that new approaches to teaching and learning about nuclear issues to be explored, and that students and teachers be supported in their efforts to seek solutions to the threat of nuclear war.

As the nuclear war education movement expands, numerous benefits will be generated:

• Demand and support for alternative national security policies that are less likely to lead to nuclear war than present ones will increase.
• The healthy functioning of our democratic political institutions—which depend upon a citizenry well-informed about crucial issues—will be enhanced.
• Creative analysis of possible solutions—the "new thinking" for which Albert Einstein pled—will be stimulated and nourished.
• The denial and psychic numbing that interfere with confrontation and action will be counteracted by a sense of shared concern and by awareness of possibilities for reform.

A planetary sense of shared fate will be engendered. Incentives for international cooperation to find non-violent means of resolving conflicts and eliminating the injustices and suffering that lead to war will emerge.

References

1. Council for a Livable World, 11 Beacon Street, Room 532, Boston, Massachusetts 02108; (617) 742-9395.
3. Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, 4144 Lindell Boulevard, 2nd Floor, St. Louis, Missouri 63108; (314) 533-1169.
4. Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control. PO Box 9171, Boston, Massachusetts 02114.
6. Physicians for Social Responsibility, 25 Main Street, PO Box 144, Watertown, Massachusetts 02172; (617) 924-3468.
9. Union of Concerned Scientists, 1384 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138; (617) 547-5552.
10. Educators for Social Responsibility, 639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139; (617) 492-1764.

The Proceedings of this excellent conference are available without charge from Jack Caldwell, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036. (Please include a mailing label.)

Information on this Symposium can be obtained from Fred Rose, International Student Pugwash, 305 Massachusetts Avenue, NE., Washington, D.C. 20002; (202) 544-1784.


**GLOSSARY**

The source used in translating words in the Hawaiian language is the *Hawaiian Dictionary* by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel Hoyt Elbert, Honolulu: The University Press of Hawai'i, 1973.

- **Hula.** The traditional dance form of the aboriginal people of the islands of Hawai'i.
- **Kahu.** Pastor of a church.
- **Kanaloa.** One of the four great gods of Hawai'i; god of the sea.
- **Kane.** The leading god among the four great gods of Hawai'i; a god of sunlight, fresh water, and forests to whom no human sacrifice was made.
- **Kanikau.** Dirge, lament, chant of mourning; to chant, wail.
- **Kapa ‘O Ka Malu.** Lit., the peaceful shelter.
- **Kawaiaha’o.** A church in Honolulu, built of coral limestone and often called the Westminster Abbey of the Pacific. Lit., the waters of Ha’o.
- **Kuka’Ilimoku.** The most famous of the war images owned by Kamehameha. These images were carried into battle and were believed to utter cries during fighting and when moved from one heiau (temple) to another.
- **Laka.** Goddess of the dance, the hula.
- **Lono.** One of the four great gods of Hawai'i and the last one to come from Kahiki (the foreign place); considered a god of clouds, winds, the sea, agriculture, and fertility.
- **Pele.** The volcano goddess born as a flame in the mouth of the earth-mother, Haumea. She appears, at different times, as fire, a wrinkled hag, a child, and a beautiful girl.