

The Dynamic Dance of Nonviolence in Education: Embracing Tensions and Embodiment in Critical Times

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Abstract

The lack of attention to nonviolence in education is highly problematic, and this article elaborates nonviolence as a new direction in a time of crisis. First, nonviolence is conceptualized as holding tensions to contest violence and cultivate nonviolent relations in the everyday praxis of education in both inner work and outer work in engaging social differences. Second, an aesthetics-based approach at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal levels is introduced to address violence and nonviolence in curriculum. Third, we conceptualize how embodied living and mindfulness are crucial components in understanding and practicing nonviolence. This article brings philosophical understanding, artistic attunement, and a meditative stance together to demonstrate what possibilities can be opened by embracing nonviolence in curriculum studies. Throughout the article, we argue that nonviolence not only opposes violence but is also a positive, integrative force that we should become attuned to in order to transform curriculum and education. In addition, we discuss three theoretical and practical implications of our work, as well as four domains for further research.

Article History

Received 20.09.2023

Accepted 10.11.2023



Keywords

Nonviolence education, curriculum studies, aesthetics, embodiment, mindfulness

Introduction

As Molly Quinn (2021) in a recent article points out, the issue of peace has been more indirectly than directly engaged in the field of curriculum studies, particularly in the United States. She notices “the absence of any sustained directed attention therein as a field to the question of peace” (p. 4). It is more so for the conception of nonviolence (with exceptions, see Brocho & Dodson, 2020; Wang, 2014, 2023), which has not taken root in the field and thus lacks adequate growth. An interesting question is, “Why not?” When discussing community-based nonviolence education for racial justice, Arthur Romano (2022) argues that since school education has been entrenched in standardization, accountability, and commercialization that further marginalize racially disadvantaged students, community education becomes an important alternative site for cultivating nonviolent relationships. Decades of school “reform” in the name of educating all children in the United States have reinforced various forms of violence in formal educational institutions. The structure and system of formal education is often oppositional to the principles of nonviolence.

Quinn (2021) also suggests that “pursuing justice—masculine, active, efficacious—alone may be more palatable (even if insufficient), given the affiliation of peace with the feminine, or with receptivity,” especially when peace is misconceived (p. 10). While the field of curriculum studies explicitly advocates for justice, voices of peace and nonviolence are seldom articulated, even though many teachers, the majority of whom are women, have persistently enacted compassionate relationships with their students. As Romano (2022) points out, “Americans are deeply influenced by stories that emphasize that ‘real men’ don’t show weakness (understood as vulnerability, admitting fault, and so on) or emotion (other than anger). Masculine power is often presented as an ability to dominate others” (p. 24). Fernandez (2003) also argues for a nonviolent and positive approach to feminism that does not reproduce the mechanism of patriarchal violence in another form. The gendered nature of nonviolence as a different mode of

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relationality that challenges masculine power of domination is made clear here.

While violence in its various forms has been criticized with depth in curriculum studies, formulating and practicing nonviolence education have seldom been theorized. However, as Michael Nagler (2004) points out, only critiquing violence without offering positive alternatives can reinforce the message of violence. We take up this task of exploring nonviolence in education, as it is especially important for our time with its strong sense of crisis in both the human and planetary world, intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic. Precisely in this difficult moment has the pursuit of *nonviolence* become urgent, as both grass-roots efforts in education and through pedagogical authority to shift relational dynamics. Nonviolence is a less-traveled pathway in curriculum studies, but it directs our attention to new possibilities that do not lead to another form of violence.

Nonviolence as Dwelling in Tensions to Release Integrative Energy

In peace education, nonviolence is often perceived as a method or an instrumental means to achieve a certain end. Instead, we conceptualize nonviolence not as (merely) instrumental but as existential through the unity of means and ends, and approach it as a way of living that has existed throughout human history. Education is positioned as a process of cultivating capacities for holding tensions between compassion and aggression to create more pathways for forming nonviolent relationships. Rather than being reified as an ideal, nonviolence is not about eliminating violence once for all, or destroying systems and structures once for all, but about dwelling in tensions to get in touch with and release a generative life force for both individuals and communities. As an everyday praxis that unites critical thought and action, nonviolence is dynamic, attuned, and creative, not following any predetermined procedure.

In such a conception, nonviolence education is a daily praxis of finding creative responses to difficult situations, one which involves an ongoing movement of unlearning the mechanism of domination within the self while relating compassionately to others and to the world. Both the inner work and the outer work of nonviolent attunement in and out of the classroom are filled with struggles, experiential explorations, and difficulty. Dwelling in tensions, we can hold ourselves open to possibilities that can generate integrative energy, transcend divisions, and build connections across differences from the local to the global community. Dwelling in tensions also means that sometimes aggression may tip the scale, but an awareness of such imbalance with the intentionality of holding a nonviolent position can activate the dynamics of working through difficulty to move towards re-establishing open-minded relations.

As Romano (2022) points out, focusing only on dramatic moments of nonviolence experience often obscures the daily labor of meeting challenges here and now to sustain nonviolent resistance and address racism and other forms of violence. It is in the ongoing process of sustaining nonviolence as daily awareness, intentionality, and action that education plays an important role. If “Dr. King’s transformation in his understanding of nonviolence was filled with doubt and experimentation” (p. 34), then curriculum dynamics of nonviolence are also open to experimentation, questioning, curves of trials, and improvisations. Infusing nonviolence into curriculum as lived, working with tensions to create sustainable pathways is a dynamic of dance in everyday practice.

Nonviolence as Doubled Simultaneous Gestures

Nonviolence is often mis/perceived as passive, which is a patriarchal reading that does not value the receptivity that makes life possible, since heteronormativity depends on normalizing aggression as the default individual and relational mode. In its historical, political, and existential dimensions, nonviolence has an uncompromising gesture of saying “no” to all forms of violence (individual or structural; physical, intellectual, or emotional). The political meaning of nonviolence under Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s leadership for nonviolent social change, as well as contemporary protests such as the Women’s March in 2017, and Black Lives Matter protests, underscore the forceful impact of collective nonviolent action. Along with “no,” nonviolence also has a “yes” gesture to compassion for *all*, including those opponents who participate in systems of injustice and violence. The intentionality of nonviolence is not to defeat

opponents but to awaken their moral conscience in order to persuade them to change. Nonviolence is both courageous and loving, as compassion is inclusive, and *all* forms of violence are resisted.

The simultaneity of “no” and “yes” is a tension that must be lived with, even as the conflicting directions are difficult to maintain at the same time. Living with this conflicting direction relates to one’s ability to contest the violence of systems and structures while transforming anger, fear, guilt, and vulnerability within the self into compassion for others, supported by a sense of interconnectedness and commitment to systemic change (Nagler, 2004; Romano, 2022). However, compassion as a mode of relationality for both the self and the other breaks the cycle of violence in the long term through dissolving rather than reproducing the mechanism of violence in domination (Fernandez, 2003). In forming nonviolent relationships with the self, the other, and the world, educators need to cultivate such a capacity for holding both directions, and then help students to do the same (Wang, 2023). With the clear indicator of resistance against racism, gendered violence, and economic exploitation, among other forms of social violence, nonviolence is also a positive force with “the ability to maintain compassion even in the face of violence” (Romano, 2022, p. 44) and the capacity to dissolve violence before it emerges.

As an educational concept, nonviolence is a long-term project that engages students’ whole beings and labors to cultivate nonviolent personhood in a loving community that welcomes the stranger. The simultaneity of yes and no gestures can be taught from early childhood education to college education, in different ways, and at both individual and institutional levels. Pedagogically, educators’ compassionate relationships with *all* students not only acknowledge students’ difficulties and teach them how to respond, rather than react, to a situation but also accompany them to explore freely even if they do not follow the teacher’s direction. Different from a political movement, pedagogical relationships of nonviolence are enacted from the teacher’s authority position, that is from the top down, and challenge the structural violence of educational institutions. Although educators cannot be free from institutional constraints, their enacting curriculum dynamics oriented by nonviolence can intentionally carve out spaces for transforming the nature of the educational process, content, purpose, and means.

Nonviolence in the Tensions of Integrating Body and Mind

In Buddhism, the dualism between the mind and the body is the source of violence and leads to the objectification of others and the world (Bai & Cohen, 2008). To heal such a split requires practicing nonduality to restore a sense of interconnectedness. Here the integration of body and mind is foundational for orienting personhood in the direction of nonviolence, connecting separate, unrecognized, or fragmented aspects into a harmonious whole. Also informed by embodied work in psychoanalysis, we believe that diving into and integrating the shadow—the parts of the self that we do not want others to know and do not want ourselves to know—is important. Carl Jung (1953) calls such integrative work “the transcendent function” in which consciousness is expanded by becoming aware of the unconscious and the subconscious. As a process of self-formation and re-formation, such integration is an ongoing process in which interconnectedness with others and with the cosmos is the underlying foundation for continual inner and creative work.

Transcending the dualism between the mind and the body, according to Buddhism and Daoism, requires practicing meditation, but there are multiple sites for enabling integration. Education plays a crucial role, through study and teaching, in cultivating nonviolent orientations through poetics, aesthetics, embodiment, meditations, and social imagination, as well as experiential and integrative understanding (Wang, 2023). Transcending dualism does require going beyond the intellect, which is the central site of formal education. Attending to intellectual advancement without cultivating sensory experiences and spiritual growth, as practiced in today’s school education worldwide in different forms, leads to a one-sided education that splits body, mind, and spirit. Structural violence has intensified in recent years, creating more trauma for teachers and students, and healing becomes important to restore the balance between the body and the mind.

It is well acknowledged that the arts, embodiment, and aesthetic activities allow students to get in touch

with the unrecognized, subtle, and subconscious aspects of their experiences and to achieve more complex points of view. Holding the tension of rejecting violent action while enacting compassion for others cannot be achieved if students do not experience working through both directions within their body. Creating an empty space, Hunter (2013), as a fourth-grade teacher, has found that the arts can open up new possibilities in the midst of chaos and uncertainty to let curriculum emerge from students' creativity as they immerse their whole beings into engagements. Curriculum dynamics through experiential understanding and creative formulations, informed by Carl Jung's synthetic method (Wang, 2019), or *currere*, to connect students' life histories and subject matter (Pinar, 1994, 2023), can be integrative at the site of personhood.

Building connections among the disconnected components of the self is a microcosm of making connections across differences in society, as the inner life and social life are intricately related and mutually influence each other. Pinar (2023) emphasizes teachers' "subjective presence in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum," which "enables ethical engagement with ourselves and those in our midst" (p. 3). While nonviolence is not Pinar's term, *currere* in teacher education can be used as a way of encouraging students to work through difficult emotions and form a nonviolent relationship with the self (Wang, 2019). Integrating the body and the mind is the inner nonviolence work at the site of education, one person at a time.

Many international, indigenous, and spiritual traditions acknowledge that inner work is the basis for outer work (Christopher-Smith, 2007; Te Maihāroa et al., 2019; Wang, 2023), but we want to acknowledge that the relationship between the two is not linear but complicated. Achieving inner peace does not necessarily lead to advancing peace in the world if individuals do not direct their energy towards transformation of the outside world. On the other hand, participating in social and cultural protests does not necessarily achieve the transformation of anger, fear, shame, guilt, and hatred in the inner world if activism in the world does not integrate the shadow in a Jungian sense (Cunningham, 2021; Wang, 2023). Bridging the inner and the outer work for nonviolence requires a tensioned balance.

Nonviolence as Dwelling in the Dynamics of Difference

In nonviolence studies and peace education literature, commonality is usually considered the bridge for bringing diverse people together and transcending historical obstacles. However, psychoanalytic and poststructural theories often value the role of difference (psychic and social), approaching it as irreducible in order to hold open new possibilities that transcend the colonial mentality (Butler, 2020; Derrida, 1991). Reducing the otherness of the other into sameness and thus erasing difference can be a form of violence. Repressing the socially unaccepted element within the psyche often shrinks one's ability to stay open to what is unknown in the self and to others. At the social level, seeking only commonality with others runs the risk of homogenizing those who are perceived as different and objectifying them.

However, we do not advocate for radicalizing the differences of the other, either, which can make it difficult to connect self and others. Historically, positioning the other as radically different, such as Native American people, can also be used as a justification for mistreating them, or even genocide (Sabzalian, 2019). We need to find ways of engaging in difference, neither erasing it nor elevating it, but rather for mutual flourishing in a community of nonviolence. To exceed normalization and go beyond fragmentation, difference can be destabilized into a process of differentiation (Hershock, 2012), moving in fluid, multiple, complex, and self-contradictory directions. To value difference is to enrich individual and communal life through making efforts to build connections, but it does not reify difference. Differentiation is mobile and does not objectify.

Janet Miller (2010) discusses "communities without consensus," in which individual and collective identities are always open to change and "re-form daily and differently in response to difference and to the unknown" (p. 96). Such a sense of responsibility to the other goes beyond pre-established top-down norms, collective conformity, and self-serving closure. A nonviolent relationship with differences holds tensions and does not let things fall apart. It is in a creative tensionality of difference that both the self and the other explore new pathways that can be sustainable. A community is not marked by commonality but by both recognition of difference and embodied bridge-building within, between, and among differences.

The dynamics of difference also play out at the international level, where the division of “us” versus “them” often overshadows a nondual sense of interdependence among nations (Wang, 2014). Self-serving nationalism has been intensified precisely when global collaboration is needed more than ever. James Burns (in press) points out how militarism, ethnonationalism, authoritarian populism, and neoliberal globalization have contributed to violence in the international setting. It is important to point out that nonviolent relationality in international relations is not only about preventing war, but also about the everyday experiencing of both antagonism and the possibility of learning from others. A “Nation without Nationalism” is Kristeva’s (1993) concept, compatible with a nondual notion of the nation, in which the differences of nations are recognized for mutual enrichment, not for closing close off borders.

In a time of crisis, blaming distant others becomes a convenient means of avoiding addressing what is happening within the borders, or of intentionally misleading the public. By contrast, the internationalization of curriculum studies (Pinar, 2014) intends to nurture new possibilities through learning from others in an “inter” space where interactions and creative engagement in differences, rather than dualistic splits, can hold tensions to open up multiple dimensions of nonviolent relationality within and between the local, the national, and the global. It is the everyday resistance to domination in various forms and the everyday integrative creativity of transforming relationships at the site of curriculum and pedagogy that allow us to imagine the joy and hope of living nonviolent lives together. We perceive nonviolence as the best part of the world heritage throughout history, and thus as having the best potential for healing antagonistic divides among nations and in the global world.

Blunting the Sharp Edges: Aesthetics, Curriculum, and Nonviolence

To prepare the way for the Great Integrity –
 Close the rationalizing routes!
 Shut the gloomy gates!
 Blunt the sharp edges!
 Release those who are tethered!
 Soften the blinding lights!
 Unite the world (Lao Tzu, Verse 56, p. 245)

Curriculum can be a tool of violence. There are plenty of sharp edges, blinding lights, gloomy gates, tethered people, and rationalizing routes. If we are to live together in harmony, curriculum can also encourage us to soften the sharpness and dim the glaring lights. It can free us of our tethers and release our imaginative potential. It can birth nonviolence.

According to PEN America (2023), a literary group originally formed in 1922 increasingly concerned with freedom of speech, there is a “legislative war on education in America” (PEN America, 2023, Ed Gag Orders, para. 1). Their research shows that between January 2021 and July 3, 2023, more than 300 pieces of legislation—“educational gag orders”—have been proposed to “restrict teaching, training, and learning in K–12 schools and higher education” and to halt “discussions of race, gender, sexuality, and US history” (para.1). These legal actions demean minority students and punish teachers who work under threat of censure, dismissal, fines, threats, and lawsuits for veering away from mandated curriculum. Almost all of these gag orders have been proposed by Republican congress members, though not all Republicans support this legislation. Further, the United States is not alone in using its legal and educational systems to exert dominance over its citizens, its immigrants, and people in other countries. There are too many examples to count.

One weapon used in this war on education is the standardization of curriculum. Standardization, supported by high stakes testing, is used to stamp out differences. By definition, “To *standardize* things means to change them so that they all have the same features” (Collins, 2023, emphasis in original). Enforcing “sameness” through curriculum requires students to suppress their individual lived experiences,

their imagination, intuition, sense of self and place, their artistry, spirituality, and bodies under the guise of helping them be successful in school and in life. In clearest terms, any system, organization, curriculum, etc. that asks students to suppress parts of themselves as a condition of learning is a form of violence.

Equally troubling is the valorization of violence and the reality that some students, teachers, and members of the public at large bring guns and other weapons onto school grounds. It is too easy to respond with violence, both in schools and outside of schools, against perceived enemies. This violence may also be directed inward and expressed through self-destructive behavior. It is easy to see that violence follows those who feel physically, mentally, and spiritually disconnected from those around them. Thus, nonviolence education is urgently needed and has broader social and global implications. Educators can and do play an important role in fostering nonviolence through curriculum. Nurturing nonviolence, interconnectedness, and spirituality can “blunt the sharp edges” and help heal the fractures of mind, body, and soul(s).

Infusing curriculum with aesthetics offers a means to inspire nonviolence by engaging our inner, outer, and spirit worlds through meaningful, creative, and contemplative acts. Aesthetics is typically concerned with notions of beauty, ugliness, contemplation, and embodied senses, among others. Aesthetic engagement with the arts (e.g., paintings, poetry, music, etc.) and with nature, “nurtures a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness” (Greene, 2001, p. 6-7). They also “touch the depth of soul, evoke imagination, and engage emotions and serene thought” (Levine et al., 2004, p. 136-137). Within curriculum, each of these aspects enlarge learning beyond mind-centered approaches by reintegrating body, mind, and soul, and fostering nonviolent relationships with self, other, nature, and cosmos. In the classroom, this may generally involve helping students appreciate the awe-inspiring beauty and primacy of nature, to write reflective poetry that expresses their inner thoughts and lived experiences, to value quietude, and to explore the interrelatedness of all things, among others. While these educational practices are nonviolent, it is important to be aware that arts and aesthetics have also been used to glorify, sentimentalize, and romanticize violence (Berleant, 2019). For aesthetics to realize its nonviolent potential, it must be mindfully employed.

Along these lines, the following sections explore three types of aesthetic, nonviolent relationships and related practices that can inform curriculum. These include fostering the nonviolent *intrapersonal* relationship with the self through inner work, nonviolent *interpersonal* relationships with others through outer work, and the nonviolent *transpersonal* relationship with the cosmos through spiritual work. Certainly, there would be no definite lines of demarcation amongst these relationships in that, for example, the spiritual is both personal and communal. In other words, this is not to fragment what is holistic. This three-part categorization is used to consider potential strands of aesthetic nonviolence while recognizing these are part of an interconnected whole. It is also worthwhile to note that this work applies equally to students, teachers, and administrators.

Developing Nonviolent Intrapersonal Relationships through Inner Work

In the face of this urgent need for nonviolence curriculum, many teachers have difficulty in seeing nonviolence as an active approach for diminishing violence. In the book, *Carry Tiger to Mountain: The Tao of Activism and Leadership* (2006), the author uses Taoist concepts to fight environmental injustice in spiritual and nonviolent ways. Those concepts include retreating as a way of advancing, shifting negative energy without attempting to destroy it (which would be impossible), mindfully acting at the opportune moment rather than indiscriminately, and not fully signaling one’s intentions or making oneself the center. After reading it in a graduate curriculum course, a handful of teachers in the class argued that taking a nonviolent Taoist approach would not be “doing enough” to fight for social justice. They also said that it was important to them to be “seen” by others as actively engaged in social justice work. This suggests that they felt nonviolence was too passive, too subtle, and amounted to doing nothing. Lanzoni (n.d.) argues though, that showing restraint in the response to violence “does not mean we fail to act in light of human suffering and despair,” rather, “without an expansive contemplation...we might not discover effective

interventions” (para. 13). Far from being a passive approach, nonviolence work involves actively working to resist the urge to commit violence in return. To paraphrase the peace activist Ela Gandhi, the granddaughter of Mohandas Gandhi, those who think nonviolence work is easy have not tried doing it.

In negating the importance of nonviolence work and its ability to proactively dissolve violence before it takes root, teachers may choose not to engage students in nonviolent practices. This work is necessary, especially during a time when local, national, and global cultures seem insurmountably divided. Further, teachers can do real harm to students when they consciously and subconsciously divide them into “good” students who share their socio-political perspectives, and “bad” students who do not. In this way, the good/bad dualism is reinforced. Students also understand at an early age to which category they have been placed in, and they treat each other accordingly. Teachers must resist the urge to punish or silence differences no matter how painful. While infusing aesthetics curriculum is not a complete answer, it soothes both teachers’ and students’ wounds through contemplation, self-awareness, expression, and interconnection so that nonviolence may grow and thrive.

Developing an aesthetic nonviolent relationship with the self calls for looking deeply into one’s own soul to locate and express the sources of pain that can lead to violence toward others and oneself. One way to develop this self-awareness is through “expressive art therapy” in which “expressive arts experiences—visual art, music, dance, and drama—allow people to explore unknown facets of themselves, communicate nonverbally, and achieve insight” (Malchiodi, 2003, p. 107). These experiences with the arts are multimodal, holistic, metaphorical, evocative of inner struggles, restorative, and are ultimately healing (Kaimal, 2023; Nash, 2022). These aesthetic practices kindle nonviolence by channeling destructive impulses into works of art so that, “rather than punch another human being...someone with aggressive tendencies could work with materials such as clay and wood that can absorb their energy and transform it into a creative product” (Kaimal, 2023, para. 10). Although not everyone is an expressive arts therapist, the therapeutic modalities used in Expressive Arts Therapy can promote inner healing and nonviolence through practices involving expression, imagination, active participation, and mind-body connection (Nash, 2022). These nonviolent aesthetic practices can reimagine curriculum and guide curriculum development.

Communing with nature is also an aesthetic experience that stimulates health, well-being, and nonviolence. Being in nature holistically activates all the senses and is the “purest pathway to inner peace” (Richard-Hamilton, 2021). Numerous benefits have also been linked to being in nature. These include personal and social benefits (decreased loneliness and social isolation, greater sense of community, increased empathy and cooperation, reduced aggression, crime, and violence); physical and physiological benefits (reduced blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, production of stress hormones, better breathing and vision, improved immune health, and greater motivation to exercise); cognitive and mental benefits (better mood, improved attention, reduced risk of psychiatric disorders, greater mental energy, and decreased depression, anger, and fear), among others (Delagran, 2023; Swaim, 2022; Weir, 2022). Weir (2020) adds that lingering in the natural environment stimulates a sense of awe, wonder, and vastness and it is through these awe-inspiring experiences, one begins to show “less concern for self, increased generosity, and more cooperation” (para. 20). In this way, inviting nature into curriculum develops an aesthetic sense of wonder that offers nonviolent personal and communal healing.

Developing Nonviolent Interpersonal Relationships through Outer Work

Building nonviolent relationships with others through aesthetics offers the possibility for social connection. Violence involves dehumanizing others so that it becomes possible to injure them without compunction (McGregor, 2013). One way to rehumanize others so that nonviolence becomes possible is through arts and aesthetics.

Both popular and academic literature suggests that aesthetic engagement with the arts stimulates nonviolence through its capacity to build empathy (Curry 2021; Development Services, 2016; Griggs & Hook, 2022; Morizio et al., 2021; Seed, 2017). Lanzoni (n.d.) notes, for example, that the word “empathy” is a translation of the German word “Einführung” which entails “projecting one’s feelings and movements

into forms of art and nature” (Empathy). It is based on the human ability to form “kinesthetic images” which “combined visual, feeling and movement elements” so that one sees themselves as “fused” with the beauty of the natural environment and the artworks that surround them. From this perspective, empathy is holistic, aesthetic, and multisensory. Yet the Greek author, teacher, and lexicographer Matina Psychogeos (2018) suggests that “empathy” derives from the original Greek word “Εμπάθεια/Empatheia” which translates to “having ill feelings, unhealthy passion, animosity towards others” and is “the opposite of sympathy and synonym to strong antipathy!!!” Breithaupt (2019) adds that in large part empathy serves the needs of the empathizer. In his book, *The Dark Sides of Empathy*, he explores troubling forms of empathy, including false empathy (offering “false praise” in a “patronizing” way to those in pain), filtered empathy (wherein empathy is misdirected to the “helper” who is seen as a “hero”), empathetic sadism (taking “pleasure” in someone’s else suffering—sometimes violently causing that suffering—as a way of connecting with them), manipulative empathy (wanting to be recognized for one’s empathy), and vampiristic empathy (wherein the helper “appropriates” the suffering of others in order to supplant it with their own “objectives, goals, or desires”). Taken together, these differing views reveal that the concept of empathy is imbued with notions of aesthetics, nonviolence, and violence. Further, indiscriminately promoting empathy building without this deeper understanding can be harmful.

Keeping this in mind, aesthetic practices can create pathways to greater interpersonal understanding. One of these practices is through story-telling. All arts (e.g., fine art, poetry, dance, music, etc.) involve storytelling and it is through sharing stories that we may develop compassion for each other (CAM, 2023).

One place where storytelling promotes rehumanizing others is the museum. Gocigdem (2017) makes the case that,

At any given time and place, there are multiple ways of looking at and seeing a particular object, issue, or problem, as well as many ways that beings coexist and make sense of the universe. Museums that encourage us to understand, emotionally engage with, and contemplate this profound truth help us to become more responsive to the needs of those around us and of our environment. They help us gain a perspective-altering lens that awakens our sense of connectedness, respect, compassion, presence, and purpose (closing para.).

Gocigdem adds that museums are safe and informal learning spaces which bring together arts, technology, sciences, and literature to show how all living things are interconnected, to inspire awe, to present the stories of different people from different places with different experiences, to provide sensory-rich experiences, and to encourage contemplation.

Utilizing artistic and aesthetic practices to draw out students’ personal experiences resists the imposition of standardizing forces which work to censor students’ differences. Inviting story-telling and other arts into the classroom with the same sense of interactivity and interconnectedness allows students to explore the world from a variety of subject positions including those of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Care must be taken so that students do not project themselves into others’ identities in the act of realizing the relationship between self and others. Such exploration can be freeing for students whose sense of self has been stripped from them by educational systems. It can also be anxiety-provoking for students who are unused to sharing different aspects of themselves as an educational imperative. Setting a nonviolent tone for sharing stories in the classroom is especially important. Often humor and play reduces anxiety. Sometimes group activities such as yoga, Tai chi, and dance can also reduce tension while nonviolently harmonizing the energies in the classroom.

Developing Nonviolent Transpersonal Relationships through Spiritual Work

Making a link between the aesthetic and the spiritual, Culliford (2017) reflects on his encounters with various forms of art as “transformative” spiritual experiences, in the sense that he “was not entirely the same person afterwards” and felt “better connected, through the art and the artist, to the entirety of humanity and the cosmic whole” (para. 5). In terms of curriculum, aesthetics as spiritual work offers possibilities for developing insight through an interrelationship with something larger than the self, the “more-than-human world.” Evelyn Underhill, writing in 1920, explored the topic of spirituality in schools.

She noted that children come to “us” imbued with “physical, mental, and spiritual possibilities” yet “we do not in practice really regard spirit as the chief element of our being; the chief object of our educational care” (p. 87-88). One could argue that this is still the case today.

For Irwin (2006), in order to show true educational care for students, educators must begin by showing care for themselves. In her article, *Walking to Create an Aesthetic and Spiritual Currere*, Irwin (2006), writes of a “walking currere” as an act of educators’ self-creation and self-care. In the article, Irwin describes a walk across her university campus, paying special attention to her surroundings, the people she encountered (and those that encountered her), the bodily sensations provoked by the setting, and the maple trees she spontaneously photographs. Reflecting on the experience, Irwin finds that the rhythmic flow of the walk, the engagement with nature, and the artwork she generates is form of self-creation that is “aesthetic, spiritual, imaginative, narrative, and nonlinear by being open to unexpected directions and unpredictable turns within transformative spaces of possibilities” (p. 78). Her work suggests that developing teachers’ aesthetic and spiritual awareness is an act of caring self-attunement which, in turn, paves the way for nonviolent pedagogy.

Similarly, Bailey and Kingston (2020) poetically describe their sacred “pilgrimages” to a memorial built on the site of a horrific act of violence. Moving through the memorial, they reflect on the design of the space, the objects left in remembrance, and the multisensory aspects of their sojourns which led to a sense of spirituality, wholeness, and healing. For them, the pilgrimage inspires a “stretching toward” defined as a “continuous process of careful attending,” as well as “wandering, surrendering, realizing mortality and vulnerability, peace consciousness and feeling interconnected” (p. 285). In an example of the pilgrimage/walking *currere*, one of the authors was part of a group of teachers who took a class of eight graders to a memorial on another site of violence. The students silently wandered around the memorial park, wrote down their impressions, thoughts, and emotions. They also made drawings and took photos of the things that spoke to them. This added aesthetic, moral, and spiritual layers to our overarching lesson which aided in students’ own self-creation. In this way, curriculum was broadened.

Overall, nonviolence begets nonviolence. It can be nurtured, shared, and practiced through aesthetics and arts-oriented curriculum. Aesthetic curriculum can promote inner work in relationship with the self, outer work in relationship with others, and spiritual work in relationship with the cosmos. Nonviolent aesthetic curriculum is rooted in imagination, interconnectedness, transformation, and spirituality. All people have innated creative abilities and the capacity for nonviolence that curriculum can help to release and reclaim. Given the wide range of educational contexts related to differences in places, teachers, students, cultures, etc., there is no one way to create a curriculum of nonviolence that incorporates aesthetic and arts-based practices. Teachers must find their own paths to engendering nonviolence through the arts. This may seem an abdication, a sidestep. There are plenty of glib art project lists available online. Yet taking an aesthetic nonviolent stance at heart is about building relationships with each other and the environment and letting beauty, spirituality, and contemplation shape our very being in the world. This you cannot find online.

Infusing curriculum with nonviolence and aesthetics may go against the grain amidst ever-increasing calls for standardizing and weaponizing curriculum. This calls for creating aesthetic openings in curriculum even when students, teachers, and administrators may not initially recognize its potential to enable nonviolence to permeate school systems and society. In opening up these aesthetic spaces of nonviolence practice, we begin to close the gloomy gates.

Embodiment and Education: An Ongoing Challenge

Attuning to and growing nonviolence within the self can be enriched through cultivating embodied living, and practices and principles of mindfulness can support inner nonviolence through reducing reactivity, disrupting harmful patterns, and cultivating compassion among other things. Individuals can begin sensing the interconnectedness of their minds and bodies through meditations as the foundation for outer nonviolence work (Nagler, 2004). Blumenfeld-Jones (2012) astutely remarks that “our society [/societies] is[are] a non-embodied...caught up in our minds” (p. 25). In turn, our collective non-embodied living is

mirrored to us in educational settings, practices, habits, and customs which are all too often narrowly focused solely on intellectual growth. Bridging the gap between the mind and body in nonviolence education not only fosters intellectual inquiry but also honors the roles of the body and spirit in existence which are aspects of holistic education. By embracing embodiment and mindfulness within nonviolence, we can reunite the mind and body, leading to a more compassionate understanding of human experiences and nurturing a more comprehensive approach to teaching and learning.

Non-embodied living is rooted in a division between the mind and the body, which is firmly ingrained in educational contexts and thriving in learners' and educators' experiences. Blumenfeld-Jones (2012) pointedly notes this when he wrote that in many school settings,

a person's body is made to be absent as the activity focuses nearly entirely on the mind. Children [adolescents and adults] stay in chairs or sit on floors or at group table and write, talk, think, mark, color, talk some more. The body movement in the room is of practical value (get from here to here). For many classrooms the idea of children moving and thinking through their bodies is not part of the pedagogy. (p. 25)

Daily experiences in classrooms and in schools are grounded in a mechanical, technical ethos strengthened during the Industrial Revolution and amplified by the unquenchable desires within neoliberalism as suggested by scholars like Macdonald (1995), Pinar (2012), Kliebard (2004), and Apple (2006). These historical and present forces condition those of us in education and reinforce a mind-body split that frequently devalues the body's needs and knowing in favor of the relentless demands of intellectual growth, efficiency and productivity through actions and activities, and ceaseless progress. Questions, uncertainty, challenges, and creativity are seen as inconvenient obstacles to efficiency, streamlined processes, and standardization. Mind-body activities that promote nonviolence such as contemplation, stillness, wonder, rest, silence, play, and creativity are often considered unproductive, unless they are measurable, serve instrumentalism, and further the intellect.

Unlike eastern thought traditions such as Daoism that are rooted in a relational and nondual approaches, many thoughts and actions related to education are deeply influenced by dualisms (i.e., either/or) that linger in western thought, which arose through antiquity, Platonic Christianity, rationalism and empiricism in the European Enlightenment, and the current trend of scientism (Ryan, 2011). Understanding the interconnected, holistic nature of human existence with each other, the natural world, and cosmos has been torn apart. The idea of a spirit got appropriated by religious institutions and authorities; the sciences claimed the material world and physical body, and the mind was taken by philosophy and psychology. Such fragmentation contributes to violence and othering, positioning certain individuals or groups as fundamentally alien to control them.

The mind-body schism, which curriculum scholars have highlighted for some time now (e.g., Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012; Dewey, 2005/1934; O'Loughlin, 2006; Springgay & Freedman 2007), contributes to how education can become a tool for the objectification of humans, which also contributes to the violent underbelly of education at present. A historical example can be seen in the government's use of boarding schools to separate Native children from their families and communities. Under the guise of "progress" and "Americanizing," schooling was weaponized to suppress cultural knowledge and identity with horrific consequences (Adams, 1995; Child, 2000). Such a mentality is extended into contemporary indigenous education (Sabzalian, 2019).

Present-day illustrations of objectification occur when bodies are perceived as problematic things, problematic to examine and problematic in creating behaviors that need of control and management. The phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States refers to a pattern of practices in educational institutions that push marginalized students out of schools and into criminal justice systems through factors like over-policing schools and harsh disciplinary policies and practices (Morris, 2016). In Florida at the Tallahassee Classical School sixth-grade students were taught about Michelangelo's sculpture of David, a sculpture considered a masterpiece created in the Renaissance out of a single block of marble. Some parents became outraged that the artwork was taught, in part because of fear and anger that a nude male figure was shown to their children, and the fallout was the firing of the school's principal (Kim, 2023).

The firm grip of the mind-body divide within educational contexts can also be observed through the language used to describe ordinary, everyday experiences, where neglect of the body often becomes apparent. Remarks uttered by teachers come up often like: "I don't go to the restroom all day." "I've developed a teacher bladder." "I don't take my lunches because I don't have time." "I usually stay after school for a couple hours to keep working." "I keep snacks at my desk so I can shove something in my mouth quickly and keep working." On the surface, such statements may seem like casual commentary, yet they are worth pause and deeper consideration. What is unsettling about them is they underscore a prevailing disconnect, even disregard, for the body in school settings. Listening to the body's basic physiological needs for sustenance and relief get subjugated to the ceaseless demands of teaching and the relentless push for more productivity in schools.

Violence, Suffering, and Compassion

The divide between mind and corporeal existence is fertile ground for violence to grow and in turn causing our collective desensitization to our own suffering and the suffering of others. Suffering is an inevitable consequence of the schism, and if we recognize violence as a symptom of the non-embodied living, we must also examine how suffering is part of the violence and how we can unintentionally diminish our own lived experiences and those of others. A mark of existence in Buddhism is that suffering or unsatisfactoriness is a truth of being for all sentient beings (The Dhammapada, 2007; Thubten, 2019). Living in the world we all experience forms of suffering throughout our lives. The Tibetan Buddhist, Anam Thubten (2019) captures this phenomenon quite well and points to widespread unawareness around suffering saying, "Most people don't want to hear anything about suffering, even though there is an ocean of suffering in our world" (p. 2). The suffering in our world tends to lose relevance to our daily lives if we are personally faring well.

Thubten's observations poignantly highlight human's tendencies to stifle our awareness of both personal suffering and the suffering of others. This suppression is achieved by rationalizing the pain they undergo, and in some instances, justifying others' suffering. This is problematic because detachment and self-preservation can create barriers to compassion, further aggravating the cycle of violence and suffering. The concept of "all-pervasive unawareness" in Buddhism reflects a similar sentiment. It refers to a state where we close our hearts, so we do not have to feel our own suffering, and by extension, we do not have to feel the suffering of others either. Thubten (2019) further elucidates, "We won't evolve personally —and humanity as a whole won't evolve either— until we start cultivating love and compassion for ourselves and all others" (p. 3). Essentially, growing compassionate understandings around the pain and suffering in ourselves and in others can in turn help us begin addressing the root causes of violence and suffering in both. From his lifetime of practicing compassion and mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh (2017) wisely pointed to this when he said that "we can transform our anger and anxiety, and cultivate our energy of peace, understanding, and compassion as the basis for action" (p. 100-101).

Mindfulness Practices: Tuning into the Mind-Body

Mindfulness practices can be used as a method of relaxation amidst the challenges of life, but they are also done as part of a deeply transformative journey into the innermost workings of one's mind and body to embrace nonviolence. The interconnectedness of mind and body forms a unique landscape where each thought and feeling leaves an imprint. A common experience in the internal landscape is the dominance of the thinking-reactive mind—where we become captives of our thoughts and the narratives we all weave about ourselves, others, the world, and what we think reality is. One of the powers of mindfulness lies in becoming an observer of the thinking-reactive mind and our own ingrained conditioning. In the words of Thubeten (2019), there is a prevalent unawareness of the thinking-mind, which often serves as a significant source of violence and suffering. Mindfulness encourages purposeful introspection, which loosen the mind from rigid doctrines and harsh judgments, allowing us to attentively observe the contents of our being and the present circumstances. In other words, one assumes the role of an impartial spectator to one's own experiences.

One of the authors for this article is engaged in on-going qualitative research exploring the living nature of contemplative curriculum at a large university in the United States. Part of the data corpus includes undergraduate students' reflections of their experiences with such curriculum, and many have described experiences of becoming observers of their thinking-reactive minds.

I used to think and spend half of my day thinking about a past situation that happened or an inconvenience that I encountered, and I don't realize that I wasted today thinking about something in that past... Our mind is constantly thinking and analyzing things to the point where we don't even realize that we are doing that. I used to use my mind for worrying too much and for complaining inside my head and all the things that can drain your energy and I used to do it all the time nonstop. (Student, 2022)

I couldn't help but think of some of the patterns that my girlfriend and I have developed over 8 years together and how I could change some of my reactions over small things. ... I can remove some extra negativity from our household by not just thinking about the future or the past ... that act of recognition means you are not fully invested in the reaction, a part of you sees what you're doing so it is not all consuming so to speak. (Student, 2023)

Such examples provide a glimpse into a couple students' growing awareness of their thinking-reactive minds within their lives. Throughout the course the instructor weaves together open-ended reflection prompts, readings, lectures, and examples from his own life as well as others' examples in order to invite students to listen more deeply to what they are telling themselves within themselves about the self and others. This in turn taps them into what they think they know about the nature of reality. Deeply woven into his course is holding space for loving compassion to emerge creatively and organically within each student. How we speak to ourselves about ourselves and about others can often unknowingly perpetuate suffering and violence. Recognizing these patterns with compassion and understanding can initiate an inner self-transformation process, promoting peace both within ourselves and in our interactions with the world around us.

Mindfulness and its meaningfulness are experientially rooted as opposed to being intellectualized concepts or pontifications about what can be practiced. One aim of mindfulness is often to engage one's inner space with stillness and silence, because within them detachment is enabled from the constant stream of thoughts that often plague the thinking-reactive mind. Meditation (e.g., sitting, laying down, standing, walking, etc.) often utilized as a practice to encourage stillness. Mindfulness extends beyond stillness too and encompasses a profound awareness of our inner selves, accepting whatever arises in the present moment, as well as becoming attuned to others. Embracing mindfulness means being non-dogmatic and non-judgmental towards our subjective experiences and those of others. It involves not only recognizing our thoughts but also fostering somatic awareness, understanding how experiences manifest within our bodies.

The journey of mindfulness has no predetermined endpoint; it is a continuous process of deepening our connection with our inner selves and others. Other practices involving total attention include walking mindfully, staying attuned to the sensations of the moving body, engaging in sound or word meditations with mantras, practicing yoga, and tuning our attention to sensory experiences like seeing, hearing, breathing, touching, and tasting. By incorporating mindful practices, we can support our inner work, cultivating awareness of nonviolence, and become attuned to the tensions within our minds and bodies. As an educator, our self-awareness builds bridges to becoming attuned to students' thoughts, emotions, and inner complexity so that we can accompany them to work through difficulties in a pedagogy of nonviolence.

Disrupting Oppression through Mindfulness

Mindfulness is practiced by individuals, but it can also support interactions that cultivate compassionate relationships and deconstruct the social and cultural scripts that oppress the self and others. Inner awareness of both the internal state and the external situation is the foundation for responding, rather than reacting, to others, and thus invites others to make a matching response. Adopting a feminist perspective, Beth Berila (2016) integrates mindfulness into anti-oppression pedagogy to work with difficult emotions for both the instructor and students. Mindful practices "can transform dialogues about power, oppression,

and privilege from intense reactionary debates into more relational, empathic, and reflective experiences” (p. 15). Embodied learning and teaching have long been feminist practices, but working at the intersection between mindfulness and feminism has been more recent efforts.

The presence of racism —and the dehumanizing affects and effects it sustains— continues to be a problematic reality in the structures of educational institutions the United States and for educators and learners within them, making it poignantly connected with making sense of nonviolence in curriculum. Racism is a complex psychological phenomenon made manifest in the material world and operates correlatively both externally in society and internally within individuals. Racism is also a collective social problem that certainly extends to educational contexts worldwide. Even though the overwhelming reality of the suffering and strife present in the world can seem overwhelming and even fatiguing, within the depths of mindfulness and nonviolence as everyday practices lie pathways for addressing the afflictions of injustices and insidious violent manifestations like racism and other forms of oppression.

Rhonda Magee (2019), who writes from a social sciences point of view as a law professor and practitioner of mindfulness-based stress reduction, and Ruth King (2018), who writes from her experiences and wisdom as a Buddhist, offer compelling perspectives on how mindfulness, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of mind and body, holds the potential to transform cycles of suffering and violence stemming from racism. Mindfulness can grow self-awareness, consequently enabling a heightened awareness of others, thus contributing to efforts of addressing racism and other forms of oppression. Moreover, practicing mindfulness from a young age also prevents the formation of social biases, challenges categorical thinking, and develops a sense of interdependence, which undercuts the root for growing political and social violence in the first place. Nonviolence education through mindfulness should permeate K-20 education to play its positive role.

Both Magee and King, as women of color, believe in the power of mindfulness for disrupting prevailing conflicts, divisiveness, and oppression through personal growth and social action that can unfold from a more compassionate state of consciousness. Mindfulness becomes powerful because it is a means to confront internal forces that hinder the expression of genuine love because it involves recognizing and scrutinizing conditioned beliefs and biases surrounding race can be a gateway to dismantling structures that uphold racial bias and injustice. Such conscious self-reflection lays the foundation for better interpersonal interactions and paves the way for compassion. Magee and King also underscore the importance of how one listens and responds during challenging racial conversations. Mindful listening has the potential to foster understanding and healing through suspending the ego defense mechanism and deeply listen to recognize and work through “the grief, anger, pain, confusion, horror, and denial that arise, along with the storylines we attach to” in order to truly hear what others speak to us (Berila, 2016, p. 110). Mindfulness practices can also nurture self-compassion and emotional well-being in the face of racial discrimination and other forms of oppression be they external or internal.

When navigating the terrain of nonviolence and mindfulness practices and principles, it becomes incumbent to understand how ideas and approaches are sculpted and disseminated. As Komjathy (2018) notes, we need to be cautious of “recurring tendencies, namely, reducing contemplative practice to techniques and extracting contemplative practices from their larger religious and soteriological systems” (p. 63). Mindful, contemplative work cannot simply be broken down into a series of steps or techniques to be done in a linear fashion to get a predetermine result. Such work needs to be appreciated as a continuous, holistic, “all-pervasive existential approach” (p. 63). It is imperative to recognize the rich historical, socio-cultural, and spiritual threads and contexts in which mindful and contemplative work have been and continue to be nurtured and practiced. Whether it is at the individual, existential level or at the level of interrupting institutional oppression, engaging in embodiment and mindfulness can be an organic part of nonviolence education.

Conclusion and Implications

In short, the lack of attention to nonviolence in education is highly problematic, and this article elaborates nonviolence as a new direction in a time of crisis. We re-articulate the notion of nonviolence in the context of curriculum studies and conceptualize nonviolence education as everyday practices that involve dwelling in tensions to connect inner work and outer work, to contest violence and promote interconnectedness through body/mind and self/other integration in aesthetic activities, curriculum embodiment, and mindful relationships. It is important that social differences are recognized, rather than erased, and ethical engagement with them aims at building connections through empathy and compassion. In nonviolence education, violence is questioned and deconstructed, suffering and loss are acknowledged for healing, and oppression is disrupted and uprooted from within. In addition, nonviolence curriculum is not only embodied but also spiritual in order to transcend a separate sense of the individual or the group. We, as educators, should be attuned to such an integrative energy.

There are several key theoretical and practical implications of our work. First, nonviolence is a null curriculum that is seldom discussed in curriculum theorizing and is not taught at schools. However, we must research and teach it, especially in critical times like today, in order to establish nonviolent relationships with the self, the other, and the world that challenge all forms of violence while embracing compassion, love, and hope. During times of crises, it is easy to become overwhelmed, demoralized, and hopeless. Students are especially vulnerable to the impact of war, police brutality, global climate crisis, and political dividedness that we are witnessing today. Nonviolence curriculum opens a window to hope by showing our actions (inner/outer/spiritual) have purpose and that compassion and healing are possible. Engaging in a dynamic dance of nonviolence in curriculum theory and practice has profound implications for transforming education and society.

Second, incorporating nonviolence into educational practices and theories has the potential to counteract the polarization and reductionism often inherent in simplified interpretations of identity politics. By promoting a more nuanced comprehension of both individual and collective personhoods, nonviolence education can challenge overly simplistic or binary views and contribute to the development of more compassionate and embodied worldviews. This approach can encourage students and teachers to move beyond divisive stereotypes and engage with the complex tapestry of human experience, fostering an educational environment that values deep understanding over superficial categorization.

Third, our work is interdisciplinary in combining philosophy, aesthetics, and embodiment, which not only fills a gap in the field, but it also opens new, integrated spaces for scholars and teachers from different disciplines and backgrounds to explore multiple conceptions of nonviolence and practice nonviolent relations in their pedagogies. It broadens the horizon of understanding nonviolence, offers multiple pathways to enacting nonviolent principles, and invites different entries into the landscape of nonviolence education.

Nonviolence in educational scholarship is a significantly under-theorized and under-investigated area, presenting a substantial opportunity for future theoretical and empirical research. One domain might be researching how educational policies support or constrain nonviolence education, identifying systemic enablers and barriers. Practitioner inquiry could enable educators to reflect on and develop their teaching practices in alignment with nonviolent principles, fostering a culture of peace from within the classroom. Cross-cultural research is also crucial to understanding diverse educational approaches to nonviolence and fostering international dialogues. Lastly, examining the impact of nonviolence education on students' inner worlds and social-emotional growth could inform practices that cultivate compassion, resilience, and responsibility. These research domains can not only enhance curriculum approaches and further theorizing but also to contribute to nurturing more peace and understanding.

Declarations

Acknowledgments: Not applicable.

Competing interests: The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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