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## Pedagogy, Child Soldier Memoirs, and Moral Intelligence in a Post-Conflict Classroom

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### Introduction

This article offers one approach to teach about peace and moral intelligence using the memoirs of child soldiers, and *Geography for Life* Standards. Geography, among other things, provides a frame of reference for answering and asking questions, identifying and solving problems, and evaluating consequences of alternative actions. Additionally, geography provides an ecological perspective that integrates webs of relationships and interactions between and among living and non-living elements (Geographic Perspectives 2009). Innovative communal actions can be achieved after reading about the causes and occurrences of evil (Zimbardo 2007). Reflections on what happened in war can help us to develop positive attitudes toward peace.

The discussion in this paper revolves around teaching about peace using child soldier memoirs, moral intelligence, and *Geography for Life* Standards in a post-conflict African classroom. "Post-Conflict" classrooms at all levels of the educational spectrum are situated in countries evolving from periods of violent conflict that are in the process of beginning, or maintaining peace and stability. Material used in this article is relevant to the West African country of Sierra Leone but could be adapted to classrooms in other post-conflict states and can also be modified for use in western classrooms.

The area of Sierra Leone is 27,925 square miles or about the size of South Carolina. There is a 300-mile coastal belt of mangroves, with wooded, hilly country in the interior. Upland consists of plateau and mountains in the east. The total population is 5.6 million and the adult literacy rate is 31.4%. The country experienced a ten-year civil war that was one of the most devastating in Africa. Hordes of armed marauders known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) destroyed everything in their path and traumatized hundreds of thousands of unarmed men, women, and children. Government soldiers and their supporting militia groups also contributed to the carnage. Ishmael Beah's book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* is set in the context of this war and the harrowing atrocities committed by armed adults and children against the common populace. Occurrences of maiming, looting, raping, pillaging and killing were common. Child-soldiers became efficient killing machines after imbibing alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine mixed with gunpowder ("brown-brown"). The children watched Rambo movies before going out to execute the violent episodes they had seen.

The purpose of this chapter is to empower educators to be bold and creative in teaching about Sub-Saharan Africa. Teachers could sensitize their students through discussion (Brookfield, 2005) to the horrors of war and violence by using the stories of child soldiers to teach about peace. *Geography for Life* Standards enable teachers to anchor their lessons in a discipline that would among other things help their students to understand and solve community problems relating to air, water, or land- pollution. Educated citizens should be able to contribute to decisions such as the location of industries, schools, and residential areas. Knowledge of geography will equip them to do so (Geography For Life 1994, 41). How relevant is knowledge of geography in these classrooms?

**Geography for Life Standard 1** proposes a need to know how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire process, and report information. Teachers could guide children in grades 9-12 to use this standard to discuss and report geographic facts relevant to that country's long war. Location, topography, national resources, and economic activities in Sierra Leone are all relevant to discussing issues of war and peace.

**Geography for Life Standard 4** suggests that, "The geographically informed person knows and understands the physical and human characteristics of places". The ten-year war was mostly fought in the rainforest region of Sierra Leone. Students should be able to discuss topics associated with war as

depicted in child-soldier memoirs. Teachers should be able to make connections between topography, war, and survival in Sierra Leone.

**Geography for Life Standard 13** advises that the geographically informed person knows and understands how the forces of conflict and cooperation among people influence the division and control of earth's surface. Students should study the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence histories of the country. Sierra Leone suffered a brutal early colonial history, in which European "voyages of discovery" led to foreign attacks by European nations looking to profit from the transatlantic slave trade. Large numbers of indigenous people were transported in cargo ships and sold as slaves in the new world. British colonialism was repressive and violent. During the Hut Tax War of 1898, indigenous people revolted against taxation. The British scorched earth policy massacred thousands. Sierra Leone experienced violent internal conflict under civilian and military regimes in the post-colonial period resulting in the deaths of thousands of people. Standard 13 should enable teachers to lead students to discuss, deconstruct, report, and reflect on how and why conflict occurred in Sierra Leone when it did, and how the country and its people could guard against a repetition of past mistakes.

**Geography for Life Standard 17** states that "the geographically informed person knows and understands how to apply geography to interpret the past." The Sierra Leone war was for the most part a "Bush War." The rebel forces engaged in hit and run guerilla tactics in rural forest regions. The regular Sierra Leone army relied upon open warfare tactics such as air strikes, and massive bombing which brought about significant collateral damage. Students should be able to discuss such issues in multidisciplinary contexts.

**Geography for Life Standard 18** relates to the application of geography to interpret and plan the future. The mining and procurement of diamonds served as the financial fuel for the war in Sierra Leone. In addition to widespread suffering and misery among civilians, other major problems also existed. Child labor was used extensively in the open pits in which diamonds were mined. Environmental degradation and pollution manifested in areas where large scale mining occurred. Land refilling and land reclamation for agriculture in affected areas should be in the future agenda. The war created mental instability for many citizens now suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders. The financial costs will be high for a country where medical, mental and allied health services are minimal. The country could be better prepared to avert a future danger of war and massive destruction if educators teach about how the devastating human costs of the past could affect the future. The following paragraphs address the process of teaching about peace and implementing a peace education program.

Peace is more complex than merely an absence of war. It is easy to define peace as the absence of mistreatment, maltreatment, violence, or war (Parr 2004). Peace, more broadly, can be regarded as restraint from hurting anyone, physically, verbally, psychologically, or otherwise. Peace education is a holistic, participatory process that includes teaching for and about human rights, nonviolent responses to conflict, and social and economic justice. It also includes issues such as gender equity, environmental sustainability, international law, disarmament, traditional peace practices and human security. The methodology of peace education encourages reflection, critical thinking, cooperation, and responsible action, and is intended to prepare students for democratic participation in schools and society (Global Campaign for Peace 2007).

Friere (1977) surmised that teachers around the world focusing upon peace education were engaged in a reciprocal teaching and learning dialog with students, and that the process should facilitate a mutual growth of teacher and student. Peace education in post-conflict classrooms should help to develop basic values among the young. The global context is important because conflict and war in one part of the world affect people in other countries. Teachers should be acquainted with some of the various peace initiatives obtaining around the world, and the ostensibly positive developments in democracy, basic human rights, and social justice in different countries. Peace education could be anchored in the use of Standards and teachers of geography and related subjects should be familiar with some of the

peace education standards. The following paragraphs address the phenomenon of child soldiers and the potential value of their memoirs.

Child soldiers are youths under the age of 18 who directly or indirectly participate in a military or political armed conflict (Holpe 2003). Child soldiers wrestle with the moral dilemmas of good and evil, right and wrong, and human and inhuman acts. Some externalize their experiences through writing to help other children and fellow child soldiers redeem themselves of the guilt and shame of varying acts they might have committed during war. Children who did not experience war first hand could use the encounters and narrations in the memoirs to form conclusions about war and peace, and to become future advocates of peace and normalcy.

Singer (2006) defined a child soldier as “any person under 18 years of age who is engaged in deadly combat or combat support as part of an armed force or group.” Presently, there are about 300,000 child soldiers fighting in 50 conflicts around the world. A majority of these children are innately peaceful and gentle by nature. Estimates as to the number of child soldiers in Sierra Leone during the war are about 10,000. Many grew into adulthood without psychological, mental health, or traditional indigenous counseling. Ishmael Beah was one of the lucky ones who found new opportunities for rehabilitation, education, and externalizing his experiences as a child soldier. There is a potential in using these stories to teach about future peace in post-conflict classrooms. A majority of child soldiers were abducted, conscripted, and forced into war. If children can be taught to be cruel, they could also be taught to be non-violent and civil.

Memoirs are usually life stories written by eminent people. However, memoirs may be partial accounts of events written by almost anyone, or remembered accounts of lived experience told by a former participant or participants. Child soldier memoirs can be looked upon as a process of “externalization” (White and Epston 1990) which encourages persons to separate problems from themselves “to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive” (Ibid). Grade school teachers all over the world are responsible for teaching about peace (issues/studies) in their classrooms. One approach to solving this problem is to use excerpts from child soldier memoirs and content from “moral intelligence” curricula.

Child soldier memoirs enable us to benefit from the experiences of everyday children and to understand the moral turpitude they experienced in war both as victims and as victimizers. These unwilling participants battling between their moral consciences and the human desire for survival in an environment controlled by sadistic, and unconscionable adults need sympathy and understanding. Young children who read these memoirs under adult supervision should be guided to cultivate more positive dispositions toward present and future peace from individual and national perspectives.

Intelligence is not a single inherited trait. Gardner (1983) identified seven intelligences, namely, Linguistic (“word smart”), Logical-Mathematical (“number/reasoning smart”) Musical (“music smart”), Bodily-Kinesthetic (“body smart”), Spatial (“picture smart”), Interpersonal (“people smart”), and Intrapersonal (“self smart”) (Gardner 1983). He did not include moral intelligence (“ethics smart”). There are many studies on moral values, moral character, and moral development relating to children. However, studies on moral intelligence in our morally ambiguous world are not many (Benninga 1975). According to Coles (1997) children think about moral issues, and have ethical, religious and spiritual questions. Adults such as parents and schoolteachers should help give shape to the values expressed in children’s behavior, and conduct, and also help children to uphold certain sets of beliefs in their daily lives.

Coles (1997) also reminded adults about a “mutuality of moral guidance” in moral intelligence. There are overtones of this sentiment in Freire’s “reciprocal teaching process” mentioned earlier. Borba (2001) advanced the position that moral intelligence consisted of universal virtues of “goodness”, seven of which enabled a student to act properly and resist dangers that could damage his or her character. The seven essential virtues that Borba advanced were empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness,

tolerance, and fairness. This learning involved communication, feedback, and socialization ad infinitum. Moral intelligence is about finding a right approach to doing the right thing and could also entail caring for a variety of things such as human and natural life, or social and economic well being, for respecting property, and for having open and honest communication and respecting basic human rights. A gap exists in the literature combining moral intelligence and experiences of children affected by war.

### **Suggested Lesson Plan**

Teachers could use the following excerpt to begin their lesson.

Excerpt: "The sudden outburst of gunfire had caused people to run for their lives in different directions. Mothers wept as they ran toward schools, rivers, and water taps to look for their children. Children ran home to look for parents who were wandering the streets in search of them . . ." (Beah 2007, 9).

Title of Activity: "Lessons Learned from Child Soldier Memoirs."

Introduction: The purpose of this lesson is to teach middle and high school students about issues of war and peace by using excerpts from (Beah 2007) and the elements of Moral Intelligence (Borba 2001). In addition, teachers will refer specifically to Geography for Life Standards 1, 4, 13, 17, and 18. Teachers may also refer to anti-violence standards from the Anti-Violence Partnership of the University of Vermont: <http://www.uvm.edu/~socwork/antiviolence/?Page=projects.html>

The teacher will use child-soldier memoirs to teach about war and peace, moral intelligence, and geography for life in this multidisciplinary activity.

Student Levels: This lesson is appropriate for middle and high school students.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- a) Locate specific areas on a map of Sierra Leone where fighting took place and discuss their relevance to the war. (Geography for Life Standard 1.)
- b) Identify the vegetation of areas where fighting took place on a map of Sierra Leone and the relevance of vegetation/landscapes to the war. (Geography for Life Standard 4.)
- c) Reflect on, and discuss feelings of empathy for victims of the war. (Geography for Life Standard 13.)
- d) Collaborate on small group reports or posters of lessons learned about war. (Geography for Life Standard 17.)
- e) Collaborate on a large group paper or collage on lessons learned about war. (Geography for Life Standard 18.)
- f) Share or disseminate small and large group projects with their community. (Geography for Life Standards 1,4,13,17, and 18.)

Procedures: Read *A Long Way Gone* (2008). Pass out handouts of one excerpt at a time from the book and read the material in class together with students. Write discussion prompts or phrases on the blackboard such as "war locations," "area vegetation," "empathy," "outbursts of gunfire," "mothers weeping," "children running home," "parents searching for their children."

Read Borba, Michelle. *A Step By Step Plan to Building Moral Intelligence* 2001, and prepare handouts or overhead transparencies on each of the seven universal virtues of "empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness" individually as lesson themes.

Organize class into small groups for discussion on individual topics, and facilitate discussion. Provide topics for discussion or creative activity. Each group will prepare an oral report or poster and presentation on their reactions to the excerpt. Connect the group activity to National Geography for Life Standard 1. For example, facilitate study of locations, and the vegetation of war fronts.

Peace perspective. Students will discuss the suddenness and brutality of violence and express empathy for victims in such circumstances. They may discuss issues of dispossession, helplessness, displacement, and mourning.

**Evaluation:** Provide continuous assessment and feedback to groups as they work on their reports, posters, or collages. Evaluate the individual and group reports by using the item list: content - 2 points, organization- 2 points, style and grammar 2 points, spelling and mechanics - 2 points, and presentation – 2 points. The overall evaluation may be reported as: Adequate – 4 points, Commendable - 7 points, and Exceptional – 10 points.

### **Materials**

1. Excerpts from Ishmael Bear's *A Long Way Gone* (2007).
2. Michele Borba's *A Step By Step Plan to Building Moral Intelligence* (2001)
3. National Council for Geographic Education's *Geography for Life Standards* 1994. Four Geography for Life Standards are identified as relevant. Standard 1 is applicable to the sample lesson.
4. Standards of the National Council for Peace and Antiviolence Education. Standards 1, 2, and 3 may be used if considered necessary by the teacher.
5. Maps, URL's and Websites

**Extensions:** Students may be required to prepare posters on each of the objectives in small group, and then a collage for large group activity. The collage may be displayed in a prominent place in the school later.

### **Additional Maps, URLs and Websites**

World Atlas. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (On its website, Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service)  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/atlas>

Geography and Map of Sierra Leone. (On its website, About.Com: Geography . . .)  
<http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcsierraleone.htm>

Sierra Leone World Atlas.com Sierra Leone (On its website, World Atlas.Com . . .)  
<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/sl.htm>

Human Rights Watch Focus on Sierra Leone. (On its website, Human Rights Watch . . .)  
<http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/country-focus/705->

Sierra Leone The Special Court for Sierra Leone. (On its website, The Special Court for Sierra Leone . . .)  
<http://www.sc-sl.org/>

Focus on Sierra Leone. (On its website, Focus on Sierra Leone . . .)

<http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/country-focus/705-sierra-leone>

Sierra Leone Diamonds and Human Security. (On its website, Sierra Leone Diamonds and . . .)  
<http://www.africaaction.org/docs00/sl0001.htm>

## Peace Education

United Nations Cyberspace Schoolbus. (On its website, United Nations Cyberspace . . .)

<http://www.africaaction.org/docs00/sl0001.htm>

African Centers for Peace Education Training (ACPET). (On its website, African Centers for Peace Education . . .) <http://www.peace.ca/africa.htm>

Peace Education Network. ( On its website, Peace Education Network . . .)

<http://www.peaceeducation.org.uk/>

## Child Soldiers

BBC News, "Child Soldiers to Swap guns for PCs," BBC News, May 25, 2002. (On its website BBC . . .) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1886248.stm>

Amnesty International - Child Soldiers 2008. (On its website, Amnesty International . . .)

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/children/soldiers>

Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict 2008. (On its website, Office of the Special Representative . . .)

<http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/English/ChildSoldiers.html>

## Moral Intelligence

Moral Intelligence Questions and Answers. (On its website, Moral Intelligence . . .)

[http://www.crossroad.to/Q&A/education/moral\\_intelligence.htm](http://www.crossroad.to/Q&A/education/moral_intelligence.htm)

Education World. Reading, Writing, and Moral Intelligence. (On its website, Education World . . .)

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_issues/chat/chat055.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_issues/chat/chat055.shtml)

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Geographic Perspectives. <http://www.ncge.org/publications/tutorial/standards/ee1/standard1.html>  
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*Geography For Life: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to do in Geography. National Geography Standards* (1994). Geography Education Standards Project

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