

## *Liberating Children in Liberia* *BioCognitive Peace Education for a New Generation*

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Marvin Davis with Peace School students.

People have talked at length about peace education, and peace education programs have been taught for many years, but still, conflict continues. So why aren't the traditional methods for resolving conflict working? And why has a completely different approach to peace education worked with children of war in Liberia, with full expectations for its success with all African children?

We call this innovative process "BioCognitive Peace Education." It originated with the Atrium Society Youth Peace Literacy programs based on the emerging field in peace education called BioCognetics – The Scientific Study of Human Conflict created by Conditioning Thinking (<http://www.atriumsoc.org/biocognitive-education.php>) which draws on the

initial insights of Quantum Physicist Dr. David Bohm. The Atrium Society ([www.atriumsociety.org](http://www.atriumsociety.org)) offers free peace educating programs that address the roots of human conflict in the conditioned way we think. In Liberia, where I have been teaching these programs for five years to over three thousand young people from different communities, the feedback and the turnaround have been extremely gratifying. Let me tell you why it works.

BioCognitive Peace Education views the resolution of conflict from three levels, while conventional approaches customarily address only the second two levels, once conflict is actually escalating. Thus, the typical peace educator will begin in a remedial, reactive way at the secondary level of "Conflict Resolution,"

either through therapeutic or moralistic means, as in the case of individual conflict, or through diplomatic or political intervention, as in the case of social conflict. Also typically, resolution is addressed at the tertiary level of managing conflict through judicial or military intervention.

These remedial, reactive approaches do not address conflict at the primary prevention level—understanding and avoiding the fundamental psychological factors that create conflict in the way we have been conditioned think and act. This is the critical difference between conventional peace education and BioCognitive Peace Education – understanding conditioned thinking. Thus conventional peace education is essentially ineffective because it does not address conditioned

thinking as the root cause of conflict. To be successful, peace education has to address the nature and structure of human conflict first and foremost at this underlying causal level.

To enable everyone to relate to it, peace education must be taught in a practical and relevant context; only then will young people understand and apply it in their daily lives. Discussing how bullying creates conflict, whether on the school playground or in international war, creates a meaningful context. It needs to be grounded in the students' real, daily experiences. Using concrete situations, they can grow to understand what bullying means, its effects personally and its impacts globally.

Educating our children to understand the causes of violence remains an underlying prerequisite for rebuilding our country. BioCognitive Peace Education is the most critical response in the reconstruction of our nation. The BioCognitive Peace Education programs have effectively demonstrated here in Liberia with the children of war that no matter how conditioned they have been to violent behavior, they can be liberated from that habitual mindset. And if they can be set free from their war-like attitude, and these children of Liberia are perhaps the most severe cases one can imagine, so can all children who face daily conflict – whether they're bullied on the playground or bullied on the battlefield.

Having grown up in war, our young people have been unsuspectingly habituated to devastating violence and are primed for combat. If this is unleashed, as it easily could be, it will be catastrophic. Not understanding this basically destructive nature of conditioned thinking, we have again and again been compelled to go to war.

For a durable and sustainable rebuilding of Liberia, it is therefore imperative that any plan incorporates BioCognitive Peace Education as an integral part of our national educational program. To succeed, we must first learn to see the origin of conflict within ourselves and hence society. After recognizing the existence of

our own conditioning, we can proceed to a general understanding of psychological conditioning – what it is, how it forms our attitudes, how it encourages negative behavior and how it fundamentally creates conflicts in living. Learning the skills of BioCognitive Peace Education is enabling our young people, and will continue to enable them, to prevent the perpetuation of societal violence because they now have a clear understanding of how conditioned thinking creates conflict and therefore prevents peace.

I held an interview with some of our recent graduates from the peace school, to see how the curriculum on prejudice affected their outlook now.

Among several questions, I asked how their time at the peace school had helped them. Cindy replied: "The peace school has helped me in many ways. For example, I used to act according to how people wanted me to be. If people wanted me to fight back, I just did it to please them. Now I have a very strong mind.", Shad said, "The peace school has helped me to learn not to have bad feelings about others without knowing them. We sometimes hate because we feel others are different from us."

I also asked whether they see another war in the making. John Pius answered, "I will not fight. I know why people fight; I know what stops people from having peace...I will never fight and I will help to stop people from fighting."

When asked how they used to respond to conflict before coming to the peace school, Julia replied, "For me, I believe that one thing that can cause war is carrying false information from one person to another. And many people don't try to find out the truth. They accept anything people tell them. I don't want to be someone like that again. I want to be like Sherlock Holmes, our detective in peace school."

For the full interview and dialogues throughout twenty lessons on our peace education here in Liberia, I refer readers to the book *Brave New Child – Liberating the Children of Liberia and the World*.

**Marvin Garbeh Davis** is the author of *Brave New Child, Liberating the Children of Liberia and the World*. Prior to his peace work in Liberia, Mr. Davis was a refugee in Gambia for seven years, where he studied online and began teaching BioCognitive Peace Education. A human rights journalist, editor and teacher, Mr. Davis also established The Common Ground Society in Buchanan Town, Grand Bassa County, where he founded their first BioCognitive Peace Education school in 2005. They are now located in Congo Town, a suburb of Monrovia, where over 3,000 Liberian youths have graduated from their BioCognitive Peace Education program.

**Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle** worked with The Common Ground Society as a coordinator/ advisor and with Marvin Garbeh Davis as the editor/publisher of *Brave New Child – Liberating the Children of Liberia and the World*. Director of the Atrium Society, co-director of the Atrium School which explores psychological conditioning, he is also founder and director of the Martial Arts for Peace Association. Master of Psychology and Doctor of Health and Human Services, he has written 54 award-winning, peace education books and curricula, including *Why Is Everybody Always Picking on Us? Understanding the Roots of Prejudice, the basis for BioCognitive Peace Education*.

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