

*Hands United for Peace:*

**Tapping the creativity of grade 4-5 students  
in community-based education**

**by Jeffry Piker (PeaceQuest-Kingston)**

To the reader:

This report describes an unusual and creative peace education project for grade 4-5 students. The initiative was planned and delivered in Kingston during 2015-6, by a partnership consisting of a faith community (Chalmers United Church), a public school (Sydenham Public School of the Limestone District School Board) and a volunteer-based peace group (PeaceQuest-Kingston).

The description introduces the three partner groups, the gr. 4-5 class and the six project leaders. It provides useful information about the project's model: planning, teaching/learning methods, partnership operations, learning outcomes, challenges, funding sources, etc. It includes several photos of the project in action. The teaching/learning model is applied here within a gr. 4-5 context – it can be used with learners at any stage-of-life and in an array of partnership contexts.



There is also another document about HUFPP – an evaluation of the project: details and analysis about how well the project's six goals were achieved and with what effects. The Evaluation can be found at the PeaceQuest-Kingston website: [www.peacequest.ca](http://www.peacequest.ca). This description is also there. We will greatly appreciate your feedback about either document.



## *Hands United for Peace:*

### **Tapping the creativity of grade 4-5 students in community-based education**

#### **Students' comments about the project**

A few days after *Hands United for Peace* ended with a public performance of their work, students in the grade 4-5 class which had been at the centre of the project were asked what they had learned from their three months of active participation. Here are some of their comments, in their own words:

"There are many different things you can do to bring peace, like raising banners and singing songs."  
"The smallest idea can change the world". "We should celebrate that we're different." "Different ways to tell a message." "You must have trust." "Peace can be made in small ways, not just stopping something -- and that's world wide." "Elders are leaders and not always older than you."

(Their collective feedback will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.)



*At one of five project workshops, students rehearse a song for the performance, under Margaret Moncrieff's direction. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

#### **Overview of the project**

Planning *Hands United for Peace* took many months. It started in the spring of 2015. David Melhorn-Boe (Minister of Music at Chalmers United Church in Kingston) shared with his colleague, Margaret Moncrieff (Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministries at the church), his earlier dream of a tree of peace and his notion of its educational possibilities for neighbourhood outreach to Sydenham Public School, across the street from the church. Near the end of that school year, they contacted Sandra Swan, vice-principal at the school, who reacted to the concept with enthusiasm. They also discussed the idea with church member, Michael Cooke, who was active in PeaceQuest-Kingston, a volunteer-

based local group. He was enthusiastic about a possible role in the project for his organization. Thus was born a three-way partnership of a faith community, a public school and a local peacework group. Working together would help translate David's germ of an idea into a full-scale project for community-based education, lasting from the following February through the end of April.

Sandra suggested to David and Margaret that Sarah McCourt's grade 4-5 class would be an excellent focus for project activity at the school -- the students' age (9 - 11 years) was appropriate to the education objectives, and the teacher was already experienced with and strongly committed to community outreach and critical thinking about social issues at the core of her own teaching methods.

Teaching and learning in the project would be based on **five creative activities** woven together into an educational tapestry.

- A **banner** would be hung on the church tower, in the school and elsewhere around the community. Designed by a local artist, painting would be done by the students and some youth from the church.
- In Sarah's class, students would read and reflect on a **story** about peace-making and the interdependence of all elements in nature.
- Under David's direction in five 90-minute workshops, students would create a **soundscape** for the story, to deepen the expression of its meaning. Students would produce vocal, hand and finger sounds to establish atmosphere and convey feelings as the story was being read aloud at the public performance.
- Under Margaret's direction (in those same five workshops), students would learn to sing some **songs** about peace.
- The culmination of the project would be a **public performance** in the church sanctuary by the students -- of the soundscape as the story was being read, and of the songs (joined by some members of the church's choir).



*The banner in process of being painted by the students and some church youth. (Photo by Jackie, parent-volunteer in Sarah's class.)*

The students were always the main focus of teaching/learning in project planning. It was also anticipated that educational outcomes would be felt within the school, the faith community and the peace group, and would extend beyond them into the neighbourhood and out into the wider community. The preparation of this descriptive report was specified in the project proposal -- for possible uses by all three partners, in particular by PeaceQuest-Kingston to inform other people and groups about ideas they might want to adapt and apply within the contexts of their own communities.

## Project goals

- Create an open partnership among Chalmers United Church, Limestone District School Board (specifically, Sydenham Public School) and PeaceQuest-Kingston.
- Raise awareness among participating students, teachers, parents and community members about peace and peace-building as core values for Canadians.
- Help participating students develop a deeper understanding of citizenship and ways they can express their vision and aspiration for the future of the country and the world.
- Encourage participating students to use their creative talents as a powerful tool for stimulating reflection, dialogue and engagement in community life.
- Build concrete relationships between the school and community groups such as PeaceQuest-Kingston and Chalmers United Church, as well as other community partners.
- Develop a project description that PeaceQuest-Kingston can share and promote with other communities regionally and nationally through its website and its affiliate groups across the country.

*(The list is copied, with minor wording changes for this document, from the project's proposal, which was approved by the Limestone District School Board and submitted to funding sources.)*

## Project participants

The roles of six individuals and one group (the grade 4-5 class) were essential to everything that happened during planning and implementation of *Hands United for Peace*. Each is associated with one of the three project partners.

- *Chalmers United Church*

From the church's website: [chalmersunitedchurch.org](http://chalmersunitedchurch.org)

"We're a congregation of The United Church of Canada – about 350 family groups of different shapes and sizes – with a worshipping history in Kingston, Ontario since 1847. Numerous volunteers provide leadership along with our devoted ministerial and music staff....Chalmers is on the thoughtful, liberal edge of the United Church. We honour the Judeo-Christian traditions, interpret the Bible using the best scholarship and insights we can, and try to offer weekly worship that brings some meaning to the world in which we live."

*The church is seen here just after the banner-raising, in a photo Sarah took from her 2nd-floor classroom in the school across the street.*



David Melhorn-Boe, Minister of Music at Chalmers, was (along with Margaret) a leader in every aspect of the project: planning from the start; identification of learning objectives; fund-raising; ongoing communication with Sandra and Sarah at the school; preparation and hanging of the banner; developing, teaching and directing the soundscape; informing the community about the public performance and then hosting the event; providing piano accompaniment for the songs...and much more.



*David provides assistance to students gathered on Chalmers' front steps, as they speak some words about peace to the people gathered for the public raising of the banner on a chilly, windy April afternoon. (Photo by snapd Kingston.)*

Margaret Moncrieff is Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministries at Chalmers, and is also choir director at Mulberry Waldorf School and of Young Choristers Limestone (with Limestone District School Board). She shared David's leadership of the project, focusing especially on ways to integrate student creativity into the teaching/learning process. She selected the songs the students would sing (composing two herself); instructed them about ways to prepare for singing (breathing exercises, vocal warm-up, posture, etc.); directed rehearsals by the student choir; and encouraged students who seemed 'shy' about singing.



*Everything the students needed to learn about the soundscape they would perform at the public event and the three songs they would sing there was accomplished in five 90-minute workshops (plus the 'dress rehearsal' on the afternoon of the performance). Here Margaret talks with them about joys and challenges of singing, and about how, through song, to express to an audience their ideas and feelings about peace. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

- *Sydenham Public School (in association with the Limestone District School Board)*

From the school's website: [sydenhamps.limestone.on.ca](http://sydenhamps.limestone.on.ca)

"Nestled close to Kingston's downtown, Queen's University and beautiful Lake Ontario, Sydenham Public School is one of Ontario's oldest continuing schools. Opened in 1853 (as the then Kingston County Grammar School), our school is an intimate and vibrant community of students, staff, families, and an active and supportive Parent Council. We host students from kindergarten (full-day) to grade eight, including a core French program which begins in grade 1."



Sydenham Public School. (Photo from school's website.)

Sandra Swan is vice-principal of the school. When David and Margaret approached the school about *Hands United for Peace*, principal Jennifer Lawless (who also has administrative responsibility at another, larger school) delegated Sandra as main school contact and coordinator of its involvement. Sandra facilitated approval of the project's proposal by the Limestone District School Board. She readily suggested that Sarah's grade 4-5 class would provide an excellent focus for the school's participation.

Sarah McCourt is an experienced junior-elementary teacher at Sydenham Public School. When contacted by Sandra about her class' possible involvement in the project, she was enthusiastic in her response. Sarah's teaching strategies and ideas about education correspond well with the project's goals: contact with groups, initiatives and institutions in the community is valuable for student learning, especially when it is coupled with shared reflection about these outreach experiences; incorporating student creativity deepens the teaching/learning process; attention to social issues is a key part of effective education; mutual respect and trust need to be central to the process.



After the banner-raising, Cogeco-TV interviewed Sarah and student, Maeve, about the project. Both described its positive effects on students in the class. (Photo by Jolene Simko.)

Students in Sarah's grade 4-5 class brought an array of skills, insights, experiences, talents, concerns and ideas (including ideas about peace) to their participation in Hands United for Peace -- as would be the case in any junior-elementary class anywhere in Canada. Their attention to project activities seldom wavered. They didn't seem particularly fazed by the inter-generational context for their work -- three (perhaps four) generations were involved. True, most were nervous about the public presentation that awaited them at the finale -- yet that didn't seem to deflect their involvement and commitment, which were impressive.



*The student choir is joined by members of the Chalmers choir for one of the three songs they performed so well at the public presentation. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

- *PeaceQuest-Kingston*

From the group's website: [peacequest.ca](http://peacequest.ca)

"PeaceQuest-Kingston is a...non-profit, non-denominational and non-partisan organization based in Kingston, Ontario (which) supports and facilitates peace-building initiatives across Canada... PeaceQuest was started in 2013 on the heels of the Canadian government spending tens of millions to celebrate the War of 1812 as a glorious struggle. A group of people in Kingston...decided to offer a different story of Canada and war, as we mark the centenary of World War 1. PeaceQuest-Kingston seeks to commemorate World War 1 by organizing events that emphasize peace -- a value which we believe Canadians cherish."

Jeffry Piker is music coordinator of PeaceQuest-Kingston. His career combined social research, writing, education in a variety of contexts, community development and program evaluation. His role was to gather information about the project, and to use that information to describe its planning and operation, and also to evaluate what was accomplished. (The evaluation will be published as a separate document.)

Michael Cooke is an active member of PeaceQuest-Kingston and co-chair of its steering committee. He is also a member of Chalmers United Church. During his career, he's had substantial experience in peacework, community development and education of various kinds, including administrative positions. His role in the project focused on preparation of the proposal document, fund-raising and communication among the partner groups.



*Michael was one of the speakers who welcomed people to the banner-raising. (Photo by Jolene Simko.)*

## **The project's view of teaching and learning**

Peace education for junior-elementary students (or indeed at any level of schooling) is not a new concept. The teaching/learning in this project which differed from the educational formats of many other such initiatives was well expressed by one of its six goals: *Encourage participating students to use their creative talents as a powerful tool for stimulating reflection, dialogue and engagement in community life.*

Consider the three key components of the learning objective: students will *use their creative talents*; the process will stimulate *reflection and dialogue*; and there will be *engagement in community life*. This turned out to be a deceptively complicated and challenging educational strategy -- especially since the curricular focus was explicitly on the many-sided, sometimes vaguely-defined, often controversial idea of *peace*.

With this in mind, let's look briefly at what was taught -- and how it was done -- in each of the five major project ingredients of *Hands United for Peace*: the banner, the story, the soundscape for the story, the songs and the final public performance.

- Banner

In late February, students came to the church in three small groups to work on the banner. David briefly explained its design and gave instructions about the painting process, which took each group about twenty minutes to complete. Each student painted one hand.

Weather complications turned raising the banner into an 'adventure'. The first scheduled day (in late March) had bad enough weather to require postponement. It was raised and attached to the church

tower two weeks later, on a chilly and very windy April afternoon. The audience included Sarah's class, project planners, a few parents, other interested on-lookers and members of local media. Some students spoke to the crowd about meanings of 'peace'.

The weather got worse over the weekend, with two unfortunate effects: strong winds weakened the banner's attachment to the tower, and rain caused paint to bleed slightly. (David had earlier been advised that the paint was impervious to bleeding.) The 'good news' is that the slight bleeding enhanced the 'look' of the banner. It was moved inside and hung prominently at the front of the church sanctuary, easily visible to all at the workshops, the dress rehearsal and the public performance.



David instructs students about the painting process. (Photo by Jackie, parent-volunteer in Sarah's class.)

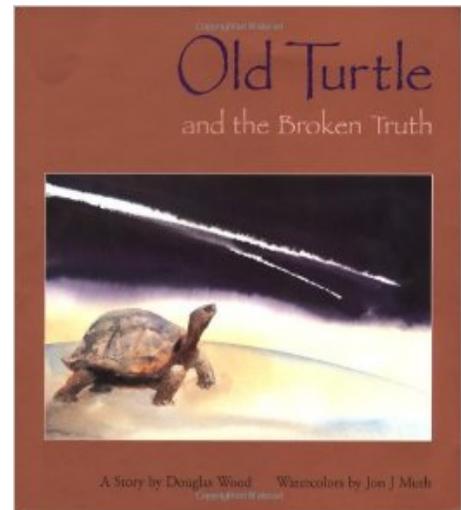
- Story

*Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* is "...a fable about a world full of suffering and violence in which a child, seeking a remedy to the chaos, visits a wise old turtle who explains the fragmentary nature of her people's truth. The child returns to her people and finds a way to mend the 'broken truth,' resulting in wholeness and healing for all of creation." (From a book review at the website of the Friends General Conference, a U.S. Quaker association: [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org).)

The story provided a major 'text' for teaching and learning during the entire project. It was read three different times in Sarah's class, and preparation of the soundscape enabled students to focus even more deeply on ways to understand and express its meanings and messages. Early in the project, I attended the class' second hearing of the story. Afterward, Sarah allowed me to ask the students a question: "The word, 'peace', is never used in the story. Do you think this is a story about peace?"

Sitting in a circle on their discussion carpet at the front of the classroom and passing the 'speaker's feather' around, they told me their answers. Nearly all thought it is a story about 'peace'. Some of their reasons: "The little girl wants people to get along." "The book is talking about the world right now -- so much war -- the book tells us what should happen." "'You are loved' is important -- but also, 'everyone is loved'." "The girl did something for everyone without expecting anything back -- that's what peace is." "People need to stop the fighting." "The little girl did the right thing."

One student had a different (and equally important) view, explaining why the book is not about 'peace': "It's about people fighting each other."



From an on-line search for 'images of Old Turtle and the Broken Truth'.

- Soundscape

The first of five 90-minute workshops to prepare for the final performance took place in Sarah's classroom in early April. David introduced students to the idea of a *soundscape* and the plan for the class to provide a soundscape behind Margaret's reading of the story. He compared it to a soundtrack in movies and videos: they would use vocal, hand and finger sounds to create setting and mood which would deepen the audience's connection to the meaning of the story.

David identified nine elements of sound: pitch, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, articulation, tone colour, harmony, texture and space. Students provided familiar examples of each, to indicate possible soundscape applications of the concepts: "low pitch is scary", "deep music can also be happier", "Indiana Jones has faster music", etc. He led them in practicing elements of sound using their voices, hands and fingers, sometimes produced separately, other times blended together.

He wondered, "Which elements of sound do we want to add to the story?" In particular, he asked them about actions, places and feelings. One example was nature sounds -- a student suggested "the chirping of birds". David supported the student's answer and pointed out that the answer used words rather than sounds -- the student then made some chirping sounds. At the end of the lesson, he invited students to think about other possible sounds (in addition to the birdsong example) to use with the story before the next workshop, which would take place in the church sanctuary a week later.

The following workshops involved the creation of the entire soundscape. The class was divided into three small groups (named A, B and C), each with its own location around the front of the church and its particular role in sound production. Because of limited time (practicing songs also occurred during the workshops), the soundscape was generated for the story piece by piece. David brought a plan to each day's practice -- it often needed to be revised in process, based sometimes on students' input and other times on his own decisions about ways to improve the sound effects. It didn't get a complete run-through behind the story until the dress-rehearsal, the afternoon of the performance. At the event, he directed the soundscape from near the back of the centre aisle. When story with soundscape ended, the audience showed genuine appreciation with strong and sustained applause.



*Groups A and C during a soundscape rehearsal. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*



*From the performance -- Group B was halfway up the centre aisle, in front of David. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

- Songs

The students performed three songs: "Peace Is This Breath" (joined by women from the Chalmers choir -- composed by Margaret for this project); "As We Walk Along This Road" (joined by women and men from the Chalmers choir -- based on a traditional Japanese melody, with words by Margaret); and "Fly Little White Dove Fly" (joined by women and men from the Chalmers choir -- composed and recorded by the Canadian group, The Bells, in 1971 -- group member and Gananoque resident, Cliff Edwards, gave permission to use the song and sent regrets that he couldn't be at the performance).

The first song came before the story and soundscape at the public performance. Right after the soundscape, the Chalmers choir sang "I Dreamed of Rain" (composed by Jan Garrett in 2003) by itself and then were joined on stage by the student choir for the other two songs.

Margaret introduced all the songs to the class at the first workshop. After leading a few minutes of breathing and vocal warm-up exercises and with David providing keyboard backup, Margaret taught the words to each song line by line. They were given a first, tentative run-through by the class.

Nearly half the class was already involved in weekly music lessons: piano, cello, violin, guitar, and two were members of a noted local junior choir. Yet, as would be the case in any such collection of junior-elementary students, many in the class were seriously shy about singing, especially in public. Creating a soundscape was one kind of challenge -- building a choir was obviously another. In this first singing rehearsal and throughout the workshops, Margaret used support rather than admonition to encourage the reluctant ones -- several boys and a few girls -- to sing. At times, she directed the singing from farther back in the centre aisle, to encourage a stronger collective sound from the choir. Progress became apparent, slowly but steadily. At the final performance, everyone was obviously singing in all the songs. Applause by the audience was spontaneous and strong after each one.

Throughout her singing instruction during the workshops, Margaret provided insights and advice about the role of songs in a performance such as this one: singing a song is like telling a story; the importance and joy of singing together; the value of abdominal breathing and open mouths for a strong collective sound; the relevance of the meanings of words in the songs (e.g., "peace is this cry" -- students gave several suggestions: poverty, hunger, etc.);

In the middle of their second song, "As We Walk Along This Road", some students spoke words individually which expressed what the class had accomplished in its understanding of ways in which peace can be built: looking for ways to help others in need; caring for our planet; looking for compromise; forgiving; treating others the way we want to be treated; showing respect; feeding the hungry; raising money for cancer research; gathering resources and welcoming refugees to our city; planting trees; encouraging each other; singing and sharing stories.



*The student choir at the performance. Who says boys don't like to sing...eh? (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

- Public performance

Students connected to the other four project ingredients through their anticipation of a public performance at the end -- in front of family, their teacher and perhaps others from their school, members of a church and a community group whom they wouldn't already know and other strangers from the community. They would not be able to stand back and watch -- they knew they would be the focus of the audience's attention.

Part of teaching and learning during project workshops was about how to do a public presentation: how to stand for long periods of time, where to be at different parts of the performance and how to move there, how to express the sounds of the soundscape and the words and melodies of the songs with strength and clarity, how to follow the director's lead in each case (eyes on the director, attention to cues) and in general how to use rehearsal time effectively.

Beneath it all was students' understandable need to handle the nervousness that can grow over time in an extended project. Right after the dress-rehearsal, just a few hours before the performance, students asked David several 'what-if' questions, revealing how they were feeling. David's answers were reassuring: "We'll get through it." Indeed, David's and Margaret's interactions with them throughout the project was based on genuine respect, treating them as learners rather than as children, as partners in this initiative, never talking down to them.

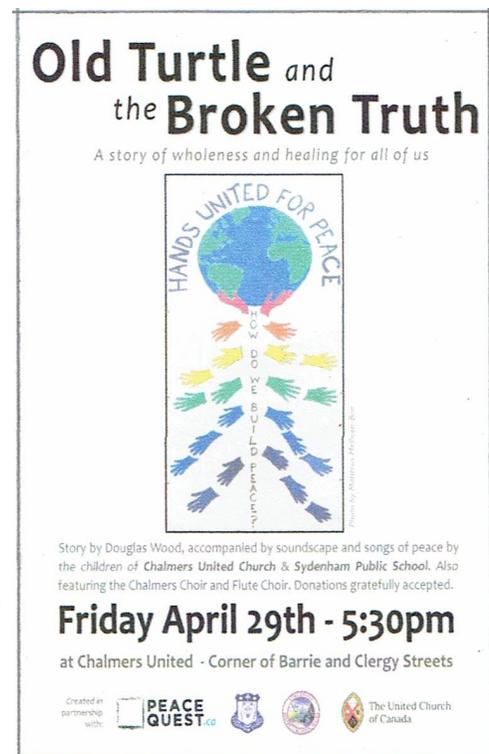
Saying that the performance went well is something of an understatement.

David, Rev. Drew Strickland (minister at the church) and Michael Cooke (for PeaceQuest-Kingston) gave brief welcoming comments. Sarah told the audience she could see the effects of the project on the students: how they listen to each other, how they care for each other.

The audience (of ninety or so, seated in the two centre sections -- a fine turnout) showed obvious enjoyment and appreciation for the songs and story with soundscape, by their careful attention and enthusiastic applause. At the end David thanked the students "...for all we have learned from you."

The event was followed by a well-attended reception in the church hall. Equally impressive to the number of people there (which was substantial) were the obvious positive energy, high spirits and sense of personal accomplishment felt by the students. It was a feeling shared by everyone.

Three (perhaps four) generations participated in the performance, sat in the audience and attended the reception. A PeaceQuest-Kingston volunteer (life-long musician, one of the older people present) commented later: "It was wonderful. Fascinating. The kids put their heart and soul into it. They used their voice and body to represent the story. The singing was beyond just being 'in tune' -- it was transporting. More than entertainment -- there was unity in the program -- a performance with a difference."



Poster for the final performance. Note: the Chalmers Flute Choir was not able to perform. (Poster design by Jolene Simko.)

## Experiential education

Several kinds of education occurred during the project -- for example: values clarification, memorization, skill development, story analysis, practice. What made this project different from many other examples of peace education, however, was that it featured experiential education at its core.

Experiential education has two essential characteristics: productive activity and ongoing, guided reflection about that activity.

- Productive activity:

We usually think of productivity in experiential education as involving things like outdoor adventure, co-op jobs at workplaces or practice-teaching in teacher training.

Much of what the students were doing was certainly productive, creative activity. Their voices (and hands and chests) created the soundscape and musical content for a public performance that was enjoyed by many people. They produced artwork: the banner and their peace flags were hung behind the singers on the stage at Chalmers; their water-colour paintings of meaningful episodes in the story were displayed at the back of the church sanctuary.

- Ongoing, guided reflection about the productive activity:

Part of our folk wisdom is that 'experience is the best teacher'. However, experience sometimes teaches the wrong lesson or no lesson at all. That is why on-going, guided reflection is needed -- so that learners can actively *make sense* of their experiences. The five 90-minute workshops were filled with so many important things to do to prepare the soundscape and songs that little time was left for guided reflection within that context.

It was in Sarah's class that guided reflection about students' experience had time and space to occur. Early in the project, the class watched a video showing the significance of peace flags in Nepal -- and then students each painted a peace flag. During the period of the workshops, her discussions with the class revealed that students' work on the soundscape behind the



*Student painting a peace flag. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*



*Peace flags of four students. (Photo by Jeffrey Piker.)*

story, along with songs about the meaning of peace, were challenging students to do what they say, matching their actions to what they were learning about building peace. On the morning of the final performance, she read the story to the class (for the third time) and asked them to reflect on what they had gotten out of the project: "we change how we see the world"; "singing together can be building peace"; "how to make new sounds and expand how we use our voices"; "we can choose peace -- it doesn't just happen"; "we should have it in our world". It was then that she asked students to each paint a water-colour picture that reflected their response to the story.

## Learning outcomes

### For the students

The Monday morning after the final performance, I visited the class to get students' feedback about the project. Here is some of what they wrote -- it well represents all their comments.

- ***What is the main lesson you learned from the story?***

"To include everyone." "Everyone is loved." "Everybody is equal."

"Share with others." "You should care more about other people." "You shouldn't be greedy."

"Don't get caught up on one thing and make war and hate people who are different -- you need to see how everything is special." "It doesn't matter if you're different."

"You shouldn't judge people." "Everyone should be treated the same."

"One big thing is part of many little things." "Peace takes time." "It's really complex."

- ***What are two valuable things you learned from being part of the project?***

"How to build peace." "Peace is important." "Peace can be anywhere."

"I'm not sure about this project because for peace there has to be war."

"We should be more aware about peace because of what's happening in Syria, etc."

"Listen to what other people have to say." "With people look at the things you have in common"

"We can make peace by entertaining." "How to make new sounds." "Use music to tell a story."

- ***Complete this sentence: "In our search for peace we need to..."***

"Work together." "Stay with a person to find out how they act." "Be kind."

"Help the world in small ways, but big ways for who we're helping." "Help each other."

"Use our brains." "Not have wars." "Find the wildlife."

"Change." "Never give up." "Always look for different ways to build peace."

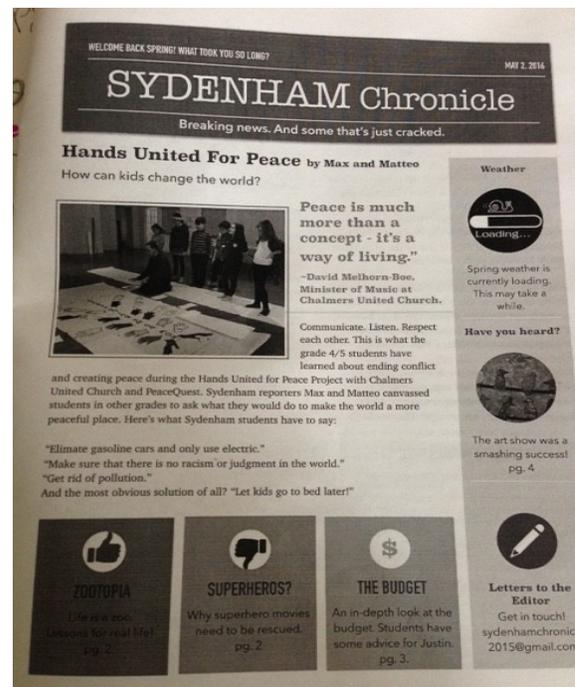
## For the partner groups

Because of the many challenges of information-gathering during the project and serious limits on participants' time, I was not able to gather much information to document learning taking place within the three partner groups based on their participation in the project.

- Sydenham Public School

The Monday after the final performance, the May 2 issue of the student newspaper ("SYDENHAM Chronicle") was distributed at the school. Most students and teachers see the publication and read it regularly. It also goes home to many parents. The feature story in this issue was about *Hands United for Peace*.

In an interview not long after the end of the project, Sandra reported that she, David and Margaret had started talking about how to move the partnership forward into other activities in the future.



(Photo by Sarah McCourt.)

- Chalmers United Church

David and Rev. Strickland both pointed out that a major goal for the church was to "...foster deeper relationships between the congregation and the neighbouring elementary school". They both acknowledged that community outreach ("...to connect with what others in the community are doing...") can be difficult to accomplish, because it requires "...new ways of envisioning and practicing collaborative ministry."

During April, the project's most active period, the church bulletin featured the banner: "...a fantastic metaphor for building peace." Rev. Strickland said, "For us, (the project) was a major educator about how we need to be as a church."

One Sunday morning service that month focused specifically on the project and its meaning and implications. David wrote three questions for a panel (himself, Margaret and Michael) to answer, followed by discussion with the congregation: Why do this project now? Do we need a war to understand peace? How do we build peace? (The second question came directly from one student's comments during in-class reflection.) The presentation had originally been scheduled to take fifteen minutes and actually lasted more than thirty minutes.

- PeaceQuest-Kingston

This was the group's first opportunity to participate directly in the delivery of peace education in a local school. Indeed, one person suggested that this was a major reason for its decision to be an active partner in this particular project. (It is also true that, through the leadership of Ann Boniferro, its education coordinator, the group has been working long and effectively to encourage and facilitate peace education in many area schools.)

During the period of project planning and implementation, there was no real opportunity for the group as a whole to learn from its participation. Michael and I gave regular reports to monthly steering committee meetings -- these were well received but didn't generate much discussion. Its anticipation from the start was that this descriptive report (plus an evaluation of the project, soon to be completed) would be valuable resources for the group's future consideration of effective ways to support -- and participate in -- peace education in schools.

### **Three challenges facing the project -- and their solutions**

In an educational initiative as significant in learning objectives and complicated in operational format as *Hands United for Peace*, challenges are simply part of the territory. Three are presented here as examples in telling the project's story -- others might well have been included in this list.

- The 'adventure' of the banner

Sometime during the project, it seemed as though the banner took on a life of its own. David's original idea for the project had already included the concept of a public banner which would express to the community the project's 'message' (*hands united for peace*). He also had a preliminary sense of its design (a tree with branches, roots and leaves consisting of hands in rainbow colours) and the notion of a creative role for students and youth from the church in its production. Making that a reality was indeed a challenge.

In the early stage of project planning, he needed to focus on logistics, seeking advice from several sources: material for the banner itself; appropriate paint (environmentally safe, impervious to weather conditions); a good way to hang it outside at the church; finding an artist who could skillfully apply an outline of his design idea onto the banner, so that students and church youth could participate in the painting; scheduling banner-raising so it fit the project's and Sarah's teaching schedules. Step by step, the tasks got accomplished.

Then, as related earlier in this report, Mother Nature made her presence felt. (Given the central theme of *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, could this have been more than merely coincidence?) First, a winter-induced postponement of the banner-raising. Then, a few days after it was successfully raised, persistent wind and rain required it to be taken down and moved inside to dry-out -- a necessary but by no means pleasant decision for David to make.

But all was not lost. A few people (myself included) thought that the bleeding of colour caused by heavy rains had somehow added nicely to the banner's overall appearance. With some slight touch-up of outlines here and there, it could still be effectively used. (Was Herself perhaps smiling knowingly at this point?)

It was hung inside the church at the front of the sanctuary, prominent during the workshops, at church services and at the final performance. The planning team considered some other community locations (certainly including the school) at which it could later be displayed inside.

Final note about the resolution of this challenge: When I gathered feedback from the students just after the end of the project, I listed the five project ingredients and asked them to (anonymously) circle their favourite. The banner received half the total votes.



*During the soundscape at the performance: behind Group A can be seen the banner -- as revised by Mother Nature. Also in view are many of the students' peace flags. (Photo by Sarah McCourt.)*

- Communication among the three partner groups

The partnership consisted of three groups very different in structure and organizational culture: a faith community (Chalmers United Church), an elementary school within a large public board of education (Sydenham Public School, within Limestone District Board of Education), and a community-based, mainly volunteer peace group (PeaceQuest-Kingston). Major differences can easily be seen in the formal and informal rules and procedures which guide the operations of each one. And yet they needed to find good ways to communicate and cooperate together.

Six individuals -- two from each partner group -- were essentially the project's leaders: David and Margaret from Chalmers, Sandra and Sarah from Sydenham P. S. and Michael and myself from PeaceQuest-Kingston. Although these six never met all together, effective communication needed to flow among them and the groups they represented.

David, Margaret, Michael and I met together five times as a 'planning team': in August, October, December, January and April. The hour-long meetings focused on specific planning tasks: communicating with the school (and school board) and gaining necessary approvals at

both levels; writing a project proposal; identifying the specific teacher and class that would participate; setting a budget and seeking funding; preparing a schedule of project activities; making decisions about production of the banner; establishing bookkeeping responsibilities; specifying the roles of documentation and evaluation (and again getting school and board approval); clarifying procedures for including singing in the project; addressing issues related to the possibility of taking photos of students; etc.

Communication between the planning team and the school was essentially the responsibility of David and Margaret, although after information-gathering got underway, I also had a role to play in this aspect. For nearly all planning tasks through the life of the project, email contact was essential -- it often included cc's to relevant participants.

Each partner group's two representatives were responsible for communication within their group. Because banner-painting, four of the five workshops, the dress rehearsal and the public presentation all took place at Chalmers, David and Margaret had significant responsibility in this regard. Once project activity got underway, Sarah had major responsibility for communication within her school. There were three times when Jolene Simko, PeaceQuest-Kingston's administrative coordinator, took an active role: preparation of the poster and informing the media about the banner-raising and about the final presentation -- her main project contact for these tasks was David.

What perhaps enabled such a complicated communication network to function effectively was the strong commitment each partner group brought to the success of the project. That plus the insights the six major leaders and others brought to the challenge of respecting the working contexts of their partner participants.

- Getting school board approval

Early in its meetings, the planning team realized that getting the approval of the Limestone District School Board was an essential step. Sydenham Public School (and its parent school board) were being asked to partner with a faith community and a local peace-work group.

The first partnership seemed challenging because a public board was being asked to partner with a faith community. The second partnership was potentially challenging since Kingston is, among other things, a military town -- Royal Military College is here, as is CFB Kingston. The school regularly attracts students from outside its catchment area, some of whom might come from military families, whose expectations are clearly as valid as all other families'.

Two items required board-level approval: the project's over-all plan (as defined in its formal, five-page proposal), and the planning team's documentation and evaluation plan.

Approval for the first was accomplished by early September. David was in contact with Sandra, who vetted the proposal to the Superintendent of Education at the board. Minor wording changes needed to be made, which specified that the partnership was 'open' and not necessarily limited to this particular faith community and this particular community group. The planning team readily agreed.

Approval for the second was accomplished in January. Michael and I drafted a letter to Sandra on PeaceQuest-Kingston letterhead, detailing the documentation/evaluation process. She vetted the letter to the board and received its approval without the need for revisions.

### Three recommendations for peace education

While writing this report, I was telling the story to particular people and groups. The students (and their parents) stayed front and centre in my mind's eye. I wanted to share with project leaders and the partner groups my impressions of how it seemed to fit together: to support what they had tried to accomplish, encourage them to reflect about their efforts thoughtfully, assist them to spread the word.

Especially though, I imagined that I was talking to other organizations that might want to consider undertaking an educational project something like this one: faith communities, schools of all sorts, community-based groups -- and in particular, groups working for peace.

I do believe this project contained valuable insights and creative ingredients for peace education. In that regard, here are three recommendations for groups wanting to utilize aspects of this educational model -- for learners of any age, any level of schooling, any social background, anywhere.



*Students are all smiles at the banner-raising -- with some of the gathered crowd in the background watching the banner reach its prominent position on the church tower. (Photo by Jolene Simko.)*

#### 1) Pay attention to context.

Context may not be 'everything' (as some would have us believe), but it is extremely important -- and it surely had profound effects on the processes and outcomes of this project. Consider a few examples of the context-specific resources here present: David's knowledge about soundscape production; Margaret's experience doing music education with children; Michael's familiarity with project design and planning; Chalmers' and PeaceQuest-Kingston's fund-raising networks; Sarah's commitment to the educational power of reflective learning. The list of resources available here could be much longer.

It would be difficult to replicate this specific model for peace education in other contexts. More valid is the possibility of identifying valuable ideas and ingredients in this project and applying them in new ways and combinations, in formats appropriate to resources and opportunities existing in each particular location and readily available to be tapped.

2) Make careful decisions about which project ingredients to adopt.

The following ingredients were key to the operation of this project:

- Feature a story as major input into education about peace.
- Locate student creativity at the core of teaching/learning.
- Incorporate on-going, guided reflection as part of experiential education.
- Connect project activity to the wider community.
- Establish respect for differences of opinion and background.
- Focus project outcomes on a final public performance.
- Operate the project within a partnership format.

3) Effective communication and planning are essential for working in partnerships.

"Partnership' is a bit of a buzzword in community-based activities these days. Understandably so, especially where peace is a major objective of project activity.

It is by no means an easy format within which to operate. Yet, using *Hands United for Peace* as an example, its potential virtues and values can readily be seen.

Two important insights can be gained from the experiences of this project:

- Effective communication among partner groups is neither automatic nor straightforward. Any partnership trying to accomplish the kind of peace education seen here will be well advised to take seriously the communication challenges which are likely to become apparent. Key for success will be appreciation of and respect for the working knowledge and workplace culture that each partner brings to the process.
- Not everything can be planned ahead of time. And even the best plans often need to be revised, when unanticipated realities come into play (...tip of the hat here to Mother Nature). Still, detailed and careful planning are crucial for effective operation of partnerships -- especially in complicated contexts for peace education projects. One useful step will be for the partner groups to meet together early in the planning process, to share goals and clarify mutual expectations.

## **Other people whose efforts helped to make the project happen:**

### *Sydenham Public School and the Limestone District Board of Education:*

Jennifer Lawless (principal) gave ongoing encouragement to the school's involvement.

Parents supported their children's participation in the project: volunteering in some project activities, attending the banner-raising, the public performance and reception.

Holly Reichstein (office administrator) was unfailingly helpful whenever project workers visited the school for information-gathering and other tasks.

Doug Reansbury (long-time Kingston singer-songwriter, and parent of a student in the class) played back-up guitar for 'Fly Little White Dove Fly' at the public performance.

Krishna Burra (Board Superintendant for the 'family of schools' that includes this one) and Barbara Fraser-Stiff (Board Superintendent of Education) assisted planners to obtain approval for the project at the Board office.

### *Chalmers United Church:*

Rev. Drew Stickland strongly endorsed the project from earliest plans through the final public performance, and incorporated project themes into several Sunday services.

Carol Sleeth (church administrator) provided behind-the-scenes assistance when project activities affected church operations.

Joan Simeon (church treasurer) worked on project bookkeeping.

Ivan Brandsma (church custodian) shared his expertise for the original raising of the banner, and helped organize the reception in the church hall after the performance.

### *PeaceQuest-Kingston:*

Jolene Simko (administrative coordinator) helped draft the poster advertising the final public event, and contacted media regarding banner-raising and public performance.

Ann Boniferro (education coordinator) provided valuable insight and information about the group's rationale for becoming a partner in the project.

Joanne Gunning (financial coordinator) worked on project bookkeeping.

### *Design artist for the banner:*

Lise Melhorn-Boe (local fabric artist) worked with David to design the banner. She painted the outlines to be filled-in by students and some youth from the church. And she did some minor touch-up after foul weather caused some 'bleeding' of the colours.

**Project budget:   \$5000.00**

Funding sources:   Chalmers Special Project Fund. PeaceQuest-Kingston. Four Winds Presbytery. Church in Mission Vision Fund. Community Foundation for Kingston and Area. Donations collected at the final performance.

Expense categories: Stipends (two teachers; art designer for banner). Banner materials. Promotion. Event costs (piano accompanist at public performance, caretaker, reception refreshments). Documentation, evaluation and resource kit. Contingency.

### **On-line information about *Hands United for Peace***

- A reading of *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* along with the book's artwork -- on Youtube:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GTYbsI6UYE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GTYbsI6UYE)
- Cogeco-TV banner-raising interview with Sarah and student, Maeve -- on Youtube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFRKt7-O9gQ&feature=youtu.be>
- Kingston Whig Standard article from the banner-raising:  
<http://www.thewhig.com/2016/04/11/banner-day-for-peace-as-project-begins>
- snapd Kingston photos of the banner-raising  
<https://kingston.snapd.com/event/935489#/>
- Chalmers Sunday morning service panel discussion about the project -- from the Chalmers website (audio only):  
<http://chalmersunitedchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/04-17-16.mp3>

### **A personal note**

My sincere appreciation to all the many people who, despite their incredibly busy work and personal lives, took time to help me in information-gathering for this report. Their assistance was invaluable. Special thanks to Sarah McCourt, who supported my work in more ways than I could ever have imagined would happen.

Mistakes and misinterpretations in the report are entirely my own responsibility.