

Teaching Tolerance & Peace in Education: Perspectives from the East and West

March 27, 2017

University of Central Florida (also hosted by The Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research & Studies)



The University of Central Florida (UCF) Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research & Studies hosted “Teaching Tolerance & Peace in Education: American Experiences & International Lessons.” The March 27 thematic forum, funded in part by a grant provided by the Association of International Education Administrators, brought together civic, education, and business leaders – from the local, state, national, and international level – to discuss the role of education as a catalyst for tolerance and peace in an increasingly globalized society.

The event featured four topical sessions (expert-moderator):

- (1) Defining Tolerance, Diversity and Peace (Dr. Patricia Avery, University of Minnesota);
- (2) Tolerance, Diversity, and Education in Practice (Dr. James Gibson, Washington University St. Louis);
- (3) Education for Tolerance and Global Peace (Dr. Peter Levine, Tufts University); and,
- (4) Understanding Local Efforts Promoting Peace & Tolerance.



During the first three panels, moderators provided background on key topics and steered discussion. This format allowed for an informative, open but framed conversation of ideas among participants – all of whom have a stake in education. The local panel, which featured four very unique speakers (a public school superintendent from a diverse school district, a religious leader dedicated to interfaith relations, an executive from a prominent international corporation dedicated to diversity in the workforce, and a historian working to prevent history from repeating itself) dedicated to finding ways to bring a diverse (race, nationality, language) community together for the common good.

After the forum, a UCF team met to summarize discussion and identify findings. The fruits of this postmortem assessment will be a paper describing different approaches to peace and tolerance in education, explaining how conversations can continue, identifying projects/programs which promote the concepts, and how to apply concepts internationally, particularly in the Middle East-North African region.

Special thanks to UCF partners: the Lou Frey Institute and Partnership for Civic Learning



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN FAHD PROGRAM FOR
STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND STUDIES

“Teaching Tolerance & Peace in Education: American Experiences & International Lessons”
University of Central Florida
Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program
March 27, 2017

AIEA Forum Report

- 1) **Forum Title/Date/Location:** “Teaching Tolerance & Peace in Education: American Experiences & International Lessons,” March 27, 2017, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida
- 2) **Basic Information:**
 - a. **Host:** University of Central Florida Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research & Studies, in cooperation with the Lou Frey Institute and Partnership for Civic Learning
 - b. **Attendees:** 100
- 3) **Description of Event/Schedule/Presenters**
 - a. **Event Description:** The University of Central Florida (UCF) Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research & Studies hosted “Teaching Tolerance & Peace in Education: American Experiences & International Lessons.” The March 27 thematic forum, funded in part by a grant provided by the Association of International Education Administrators, brought together civic, education, and business leaders – from the local, state, national, and international level – to discuss the role of education as a catalyst for tolerance and peace in an increasingly globalized society. The event featured four topical sessions (expert-moderator): (1) Defining Tolerance, Diversity and Peace (Dr. Patricia Avery, University of Minnesota); (2) Tolerance, Diversity, and Education in Practice (Dr. James Gibson, Washington University St. Louis); (3) Education for Tolerance and Global Peace (Dr. Peter Levine, Tufts University); and, (4) Understanding Local Efforts Promoting Peace & Tolerance.
 - b. **Further Explanation:** During the first three panels, moderators provided background on key topics and steered discussion. This format allowed for an informative, open but framed conversation of ideas among participants – all of whom have a stake in education. The local panel, which featured four very unique speakers (a public school superintendent from a diverse school district, a religious leader dedicated to interfaith relations, an executive from a prominent international corporation dedicated to diversity in the workforce, and a historian working to prevent history from repeating itself) dedicated to finding ways to

bring a diverse (race, nationality, language) community together for the common good.

c. Primary Presenter Profiles:

- i. ***Dr. Patricia Avery, University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development:*** Avery is a recognized expert on civic education and creating an informed citizenry. She spoke of the importance of incorporating a diversity of ideas into the classroom setting, and the payoffs to a democratic, inclusive society. Her discussion centered on the challenges facing today's educators regarding the divisive nature in the current American political climate.
- ii. ***Dr. James Gibson, Washington University in St. Louis Department of Political Science:*** A luminary figure in the field of political science in terms of understanding the challenges posed by intolerance in the context of conflict resolution, Gibson offered immense insight based on data and experiences in places such as South Africa and the Balkans. Gibson elucidated that common understandings amongst various groups can serve as the foundation for building reconciliation and tolerance. He also explained that while tolerance is challenging to achieve, it is something that all should strive for – but cannot be forced.
- iii. ***Dr. Peter Levine, Tufts University School of Arts and Sciences:*** Another noted expert in the field, Levine offered an innovative approach on the power of ideas and thoughts as a way to connect individuals. Levine stated that taking time to prioritize things in life can improve communication with others and establish a platform of common ground. What Levine ultimately concluded is that by taking time to map one's beliefs, people quickly discover that they are more similar to others than they might have originally thought and this improves tolerance and responsiveness.

d. Other Presenters:

- i. ***Rachel Allen:*** Professor and Coordinator of Valencia College Peace & Justice Institute
- ii. ***Dr. Jesus Jara:*** Deputy Superintendent, Orange County Public Schools
- iii. ***Imam Muhammad Musri:*** President, Islamic Society of Central Florida and co-host, "Friends Talking Faith" NPR radio
- iv. ***Bailey Robb:*** Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida, UpStanders Program Coordinator

4) Thematic Forum Outcomes: Unsurprisingly, the forum raised more questions than it answered. But one thing was perfectly clear after talking to participants: this forum needs to be the start of an ongoing initiative – an ongoing conversation – rather than a one-off event intended to identify immediate results. The questions discussed at the forum – involving the many aspects of teaching and promoting tolerance and peace, using education as an agent of change – are complex and have roots at the local, state, national, and international level. In metro Orlando, the questions have particular

resonance at this juncture of history. Last year, a self-described ISIS adherent committed the most deadly mass shooting in American history at the Pulse nightclub – a business that catered to a gay clientele. While tragic, the shooting brought the community together. Moreover, the American political climate has also raised concerns over social tolerance and inclusiveness. The event was intended to see how local issues related to the thematic topics could have global impact, and how global issues could have local impact. Those committed to diversity, tolerance, and peace need to continue the conversation, strengthen and expand partnerships, implement programs, and be prepared to adapt to changing political, social and economic dynamics.

- 5) Lessons Learned or Insights for Senior International Officers:** The most fundamental lesson to be learned by SIOs is that universities can take the lead in promoting discussions and undertaking initiatives to promote peace, tolerance, and other concepts related to them, such as diversity. Leadership does not necessarily mean having the expertise in-house, but the willingness to facilitate the conversation. And the conversation on the topics pertaining to peace and tolerance, in the educational setting, must include national, international, and local figures – civic, government, educational (from multiple levels), law enforcement, academics, cultural organizations – who have a stake in their community and seeing progress. Local lessons and examples can be adapted to larger, more global issues, or to problems in other regions of the world – albeit with recognition of the uniqueness of different locales. Thus, putting together experts and practitioners can produce conversations that lead to sustainable initiatives and local-state-national-international partnerships. SIOs can lead efforts by their global focus and unique ability to bring together a diverse group of individuals and entities.