

Peace Literacy: Are we ready for virtual reality?

By Paula Smith Apr 27, 2019

Knox County Public Library staff recently attended a motivational program hosted by the Vincennes Rotary Club. The speaker was Paul K. Chappell. According to his website (paulkchappell.com/author/) Paul “is an international peace educator and serves as the Peace Literacy Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He graduated from West Point, was deployed to Iraq, and left active duty as a Captain ...”

Paul Chappell has written several books about war and peace. The fact that he now works for peace literacy is inspirational. However, it wasn't the typical pom-poms and inspirational quote type of program.

He talked about human needs and, as it turns out, if our emotional and intellectual needs are not met, we won't survive. Most people think survival means having enough food and water. Paul argues that if our emotional and intellectual needs aren't met, we won't have a reason to seek food and water. Makes sense.

He pointed out that social media meets all of the emotional and intellectual needs that he listed as necessary. He then talked at length about the coming virtual reality revolution. It was scary. At first, I didn't understand where he was going with this, but then it dawned on me that when virtual reality becomes reality, humanity could forget what it means to be human. Being certain that we don't lose that is our responsibility to the future.

We must ensure that our children know what it means to be connected apart from web-based social media. We must ask ourselves if social media is a healthy way to feel connected to other people. In the book “Empathic Civilization,” author Jeremy Rifkin argues that human brains are wired for empathy. Can the web really meet that basic neural need?

Paul talked about virtual reality as being the next great leap in how humans interface with technology. Right now, we all need to think about this and ask ourselves how we want the world to look when this technology goes mainstream. Do we want to rely on information bytes to bring about peace? Or do we want to be actively involved?

When we decide how we want the future to look, we all need to work to make this vision a reality in the tangible world. How does this tie into peace? When we all strive to respect each other as humans, strive to help someone struggle for their humanity, then we can have peace, even if it is only in our sphere of influence. That may seem small, but if everyone can affect their own sphere of influence, all of the spheres will eventually overlap.