Peace at the heart

A relational approach to education in British schools

Quakers in Britain, 2022

Quakers and peace education

As Quakers, we are encouraged through faith to hold a commitment to peace and nonviolence, in witness to the unique worth of each person, every culture, and the fullness of life on earth. Through our lives and work, we hope to contribute to the health and integrity of all our relationships, from the individual and local to the social and global.

At the heart of our concern is the healthy development of children and young people. We believe in the potential of education to invest in the promise of each child to flourish, and to support the common hopes of young people to shape a more just, more inclusive world.

Quakers around the globe join with others in work towards this vision, particularly in the practices of peace education. This is an approach to learning and growth which, by cultivating healthier ways of relating to one another and to society, aims to enhance wellbeing, promote inclusion, and encourage conscientious engagement in the social challenges of our times.

As the field has grown, advocates of peace education have begun to argue for wider take-up by education ministries. In 2020, the Quaker Council for European Affairs outlined a policy case at the European level in *Peace education: Making the case*. The present document makes the same case in the British context.

Cover photograph: Students at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School create peace graffiti using *Razor Wire & Olive Branches* resource from Quakers in Britain. **Photo:** Michael Preston

Photograph opposite: John of Rolleston Primary School children creating peace animations. **Photo:** Ellis Brooks
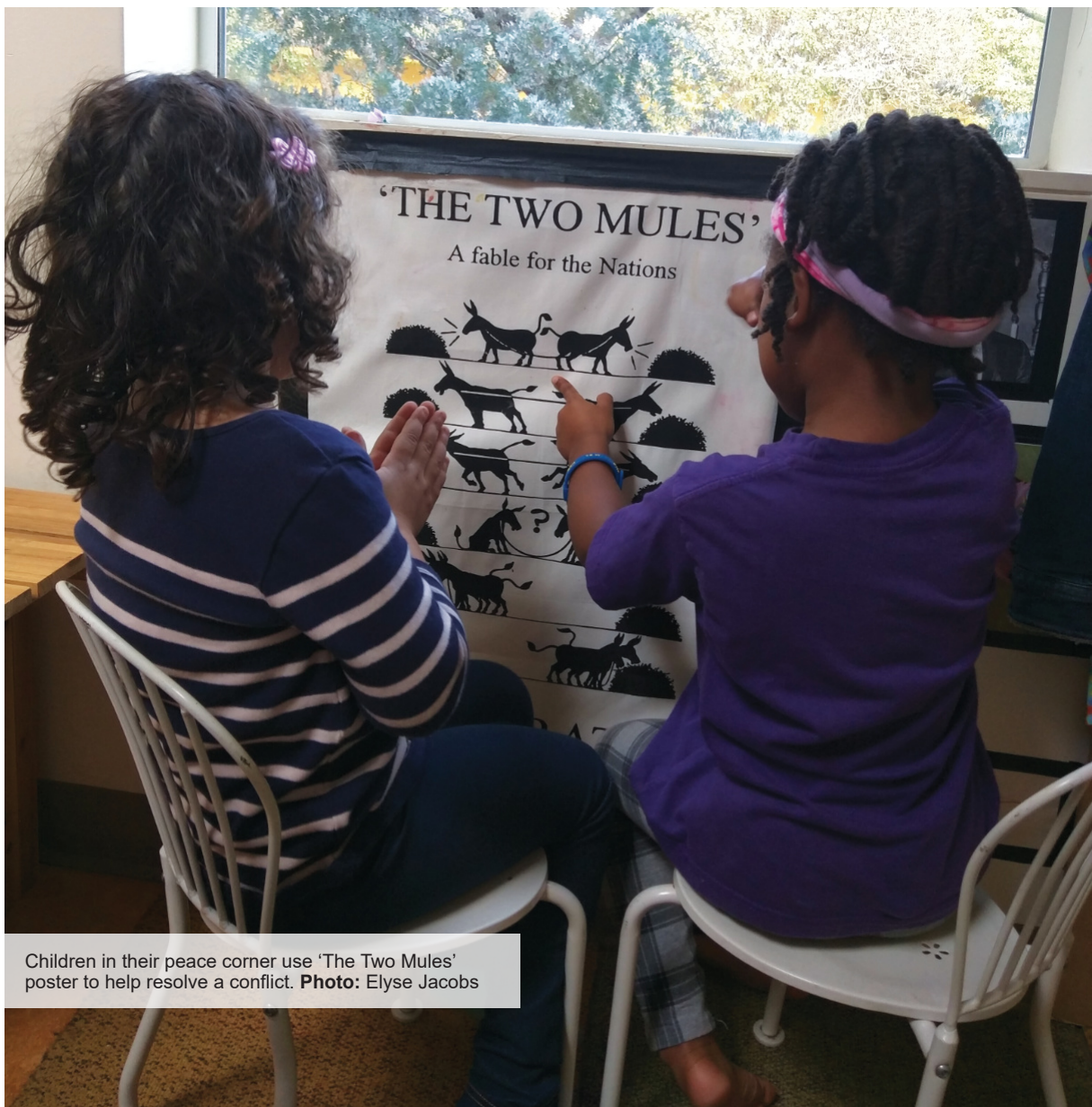
Peace at the heart

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Children in their peace corner use 'The Two Mules' poster to help resolve a conflict. **Photo:** Elyse Jacobs

Executive summary

The need for a relational approach to education

This paper presents peace education as a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning that puts good relationships – peace – at its heart.

The years that young people spend in education shape their whole lives. Their sense of self, relationships, and life chances, as well as the attitudes they take to their community and society into adulthood, begin to mature in this period. Their experience of school in all its aspects is critically influential: the commitments that their teachers model, their relationships with their peers, and the ways that school responds to challenging behaviour, for example, are at least as significant as academic learning to the healthy development of young people. In these and other ways, schools may support young people to grow as they learn, but may also cause harm, compounding disadvantage and perpetuating social problems.

Young people experience a heavy psychological load, which is magnified by mounting expectations to achieve academically and the many demands of an increasingly complex society. The need has grown for schools to be enabling, convivial, inclusive communities that support young people not only to learn academically but also to develop as persons in their social environment. Many schools work hard to support their students accordingly, particularly when care is absent at home, but many young people are left disaffected, feeling that their school experience fails to engage their needs and hopes. When students disengage, teachers struggle to maintain a conducive environment for learning, staff stress intensifies, and job satisfaction declines.

An education centred on good relationships has much to offer schools in Britain. Students and staff agree that schools could do more to cultivate wellbeing and supportive peer relationships, for example. Schools that successfully cultivate a community ethos report that students are more engaged and staff enjoy their work more. Students and staff both believe that schools should equip young people with the skills they need to navigate their increasingly complex world into adulthood, and to help shape its future in the face of pressing global crises.

Peace education: Learning to relate

Peace education is a critical approach to personal and social development rooted in a commitment to 'peace': not only the absence of violence but also the presence of relationships that work well. Conscious of disaffection in the classroom, bullying in the playground, and a troubled society, peace education asks what better relationships mean and how students and staff can cultivate them – with themselves, each other, and their wider world.

We believe that every school can develop as a community committed to the healthy development of all their members, supporting students and staff alike to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to relate well. Even within the contested mix of approaches that frame education in Britain, we show that schools can offer young people a unique, extended opportunity to develop effective ways of relating in every sphere of their lives.

Such a relational approach brings many evidenced benefits, including the fuller development of young people, a more effective learning environment in school, and emerging citizens who are more conscientiously involved in their society. We have seen young people grow in wellbeing and confidence, demonstrate leadership, and take critically conscious perspectives on their world. Young mediators have become community workers and peacebuilders, former gang members have become youth coaches, teachers have witnessed their relationships with students transformed.

> **Children are to be 'brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity'.**
> Convention on the Rights of the Child

In this paper, we outline evidence of the need and demand for a corpus of peace education practices, as well as their effectiveness in meeting the needs and hopes of students, staff, and policymakers. The paper closes with policy proposals to enable more schools in Britain to take up the approach effectively.

Cultivating relationships

We group the practices of peace education according to four complementary aims:

- Individual wellbeing and development ('peace with myself');

- Convivial peer relations ('peace between us');

- Inclusive school community ('peace among us'); and

- The integrity of society and the earth ('peace in the world').

'Peace with myself': Taking care

A pedagogy for good relationships begins with young people's relationship with themselves, inviting them to explore what matters to them, what is good in them, what they need to be well, and what others may need from them to be well.

As the mental health of young people comes under increasing strain, students, parents/carers, and teachers are calling for a greater emphasis on wellbeing in formal education, an appeal that bears on both what is learnt and how. By integrating social and emotional learning into the school day and establishing an environment of collaboration and appreciation, peace education supports both students and staff to develop more self-aware, self-affirming relationships with themselves.

Research shows that when students perceive that their peers support them and that their teachers believe in them, they are more likely to develop their emotional literacy, empathy, and self-esteem. Schools that successfully enhance student wellbeing tend to see less disruption in the classroom and greater engagement in learning. Emotional health is also a powerful predictor of life satisfaction in adulthood, more so than is intellectual development, for example.

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 aims by 2030 to ensure that citizens worldwide develop the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including through education for a culture of peace and non-violence.

'Peace between us': Working together

An essential task of education is to support young people to cultivate good relationships with one another, such that they learn to discern common needs, negotiate divergent wants, and handle conflicts when they arise. A measure of healthy peer relationships may be found in how welcome individuals feel at school, how appreciated by each other they feel, and how willing they are to care for one another, for example.

The UK should 'include the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system' and 'intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including by teaching human rights, building the capacities of students and staff members to respect diversity at school, [and] improving students' conflict-resolution skills…'
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Of particular concern to parents/carers, teachers, policymakers, and especially students themselves, are the corrosive influence of bullying and sexual harassment on wellbeing and learning. Fights are also common in many schools, as are exclusive cliques and identity-based prejudice. A pedagogy for peace persistently encourages peer relationships of kindness and mutual appreciation. Facilitated learning in circles, for example, can cultivate more respectful patterns of relating while enhancing capacities for complex thinking, self-expression, active listening, self-discipline, and leadership, according to research.

When conflict arises, students are challenged and supported to handle it well, thus developing their emotional self-awareness and regulation, social skills, and accountability before others. Peer mediation schemes, in which students are trained to mediate their own conflicts safely, have been shown to be highly effective and popular among staff and students alike. The fairer relationships that result bring multiple benefits to young people, not least in stronger academic attainment.

'Peace among us': Coming together

In peace education, the school is assumed to be a community, rather than merely an institution, with the potential to inspire and support learning in all its members – teachers included – and to develop democratically.

A genuinely peaceful community fosters belonging, facilitates meaningful democratic participation, encourages its members to be themselves, challenges patterns of 'othering' and exclusion, and values dissent as potentially productive. A genuinely peaceful school becomes somewhere students and staff feel valued and believe they can flourish – it becomes somewhere they want to be. Indeed, research shows that students who enjoy school a lot tend to point to strong friendships, a sense of belonging, and the confidence that teachers believe in them.

In response to student disaffection and staff stress, many schools have turned to strict disciplinary regimes to condition student behaviour towards engagement with the curriculum. As commonly practised, these regimes violate children's rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that provide for children's best interests, education, non-discrimination, and dignity in school. They can prove particularly harmful to some students, notably those of minority status. In English schools, the proliferation of punitive responses to student disaffection has coincided with a steep rise in permanent exclusions, degrading the life-chances of many young people and exacting multiple secondary costs on society at large.

Some schools, particularly in Scotland and in Wales, take an alternative approach, striving for a productive discipline of learning through the persistent cultivation of good relationships. The evidence shows that a commitment to the rights and interests of every student, held against a background of ongoing social and emotional learning and a communitarian ethos and combined with 'restorative' responses to conflict, can be powerfully supportive of a disciplined and fair learning community. In Scotland, where an inclusive approach to discipline is officially encouraged, permanent exclusions have fallen over the last decade to nearly zero.

> **'Carr Manor Community School is committed to a relational approach to a child's education and building resource and capacity to develop their character and skills for life.'**
> Simon Flowers, headteacher

'Peace in the world': Taking a stand

As children learn about their wider world, they soon appreciate that its future lies in the balance. Schools share a responsibility with the adult generation in general to support young people to navigate a complex society, but also to discern what is at stake in it and to develop as critically thoughtful, actively engaged citizens.

Surveys show that young people expect to be unhappier than their parents' generation and are losing faith in formal democracy, but they are far from apathetic. In general, young people want to learn how to relate to their world with care and are more likely than adults to get involved in social action such as protests and boycotts.

> **'Children need the opportunity to practise and potentially fail and recover in relationships. When there is time to practise and the structures are there to support them to do so, they will thrive.'**
> Richard Simcox, headteacher, John of Rolleston Primary School

Peace education believes that young people are fully capable of discerning what matters to them and views the social challenges that engage their hopes as valuable opportunities for personal and civic development. Common pedagogical practices include 'open enquiry' into social questions that arise from students' own life experiences. As participants explore the issues intellectually, emotionally, and ethically, they discern their own perspectives, what they stand for, why, and what this might mean for the way they relate to their world. Participants practise critical thinking and speaking up for themselves, while learning to understand and respect alternative perspectives.

Frequent input from external partners helps to ground students' learning in real-world experience, while avoiding interventions from the many, often well-resourced organisations that seek engagement with young people to serve ulterior agendas. Schools still lack adequate guidance to ensure that external input is pedagogically valuable, in young people's interests, not exploitative.

Research finds that students whose education draws on their own hopes and life experience tend to be more engaged in the classroom, whereas those who cannot relate personally to what they are taught gradually lose interest and underachieve. Young people who develop their social awareness and agency also tend to be more resilient to politics that trade on falsehood and prejudice, and are more likely to engage critically with social issues into their adulthood.

What can schools and educators do? Towards a whole-school culture of peace

Peace education practices may be used ad hoc, but are most effective when they express a school's common commitment to a healthy ecology of relationships across 'school life' as a whole. The guiding intention is to bring all the school's tasks – teaching, holding discipline, building community, and so on – under a single, overarching commitment to relationships at every level. Various complementary educational models, already present in many schools, may also extend a peace pedagogy, such as social and emotional learning, restorative practice, and human rights and global citizenship education.

As a school culture of peacebuilding grows, the principles and practices of good relationships become the norm. Over time, the aim is to model a flourishing community of learning and growth. With peace – the integrity of relationships – at the heart of school community, education may come to support and challenge young people to grow in wisdom, vitality, and agency at school, into adulthood, and for their whole lives.

We recognise the many pressures that face students, teachers, and school leaders, but we argue that schools are still places of asset and opportunity. The vocational drive of staff, the ingenuity and empathy of students, the de facto community of the playground, and all corners of the curriculum already suggest the promise of schools as flourishing learning communities committed to all relationships that constitute them.

> 'Upon stepping into the school, the atmosphere of warmth and discovery was immediately apparent. Singing, dancing, laughter, fairy lights and parasols, chickens in the courtyard. The enthusiasm and enjoyment of adults and children was infectious.'
> Peace educator's visit to St Mary's CE Primary School

What can policymakers do? Developing peace education in Britain

Britain's growing network of peace education providers has already supported many schools to take up the approach. Some teacher-training institutions are now integrating the concepts and practices into their programmes also. Nonetheless, this field of practitioners, though well-established globally with a strong United Nations mandate, operates in Britain without statutory support and with geographically limited reach, despite strong demand. The following recommendations aim at greater access for British schools to the many benefits of effective peace education.

> 'Through prioritising relationships using restorative practice, both student-student and adult-student, and focusing on hope, happiness and social justice, our school has not only increased its achievements, but also over the last two years shows a two-thirds reduction in fixed-term exclusions'
> Les Hall, headteacher, Mounts Bay Academy.

Recommendations

1. **Mandate.** The governments of England, Scotland and Wales explicitly recognise a duty to educate for peace, requiring schools to develop whole-school strategies for the cultivation of healthy, engaged, fair relationships across the learning community and beyond.

2. **Teacher training.** Training institutions are supported to embed peace education as a dedicated study stream for the initial training and continuous professional development of school and college teachers.

3. **Funding.** A fund is established for work to enhance school communities and peer and student-staff relationships, and to facilitate the strategic development of existing training providers while seeding new ones.

4. **Research.** Governments commit resources for independent research and evaluation of work in schools to enhance peaceful relationships, particularly restorative practices.

5. **External input.** Governments strengthen guidance on the involvement of external agencies to screen out those that either fail to enhance learning and critical thinking significantly, or compromise schools' duty to consider students' best interests and safeguard them from exploitation.

Introduction

This paper makes the case for peace education, as an approach to teaching and learning that puts relationships at its heart. It argues that an effective community of learning in schools depends critically on the conscious cultivation of healthy ways of relating in every aspect of their daily life.

Peace education begins with the hope that all members of the school community, including students, staff, governors/trustees, and parents, may learn to relate to each other and their society more consciously, fairly, and effectively. In particular, peace education aims to support students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to make sense of a challenging world, navigate it, and contribute to changing it.

Here, 'peace' is defined broadly. More than the absence of violence and war, peace is a common endeavour to build good relationships at every level of society and with the earth as our ecological home. As a guiding principle in schools, 'peace' is manifest in students and staff who learn to relate well to themselves, each other, and wider society, within a community of mutual support and accountability.

But a vision for schools as communities of wellbeing must reckon with multiple pressures, not least shifting policy agendas, overworked staff, and the many challenges that a troubled society brings into school every morning. Given these conditions, how can schools cultivate themselves as rich learning communities, in which students and staff are motivated to participate and able to do so?

This paper attempts an answer to this question. Through our own experience of peace education, we have seen young people grow in wellbeing and confidence, demonstrate leadership, and take critically conscious perspectives on their world. Young mediators have become community workers and peacebuilders, former gang members have become youth coaches, teachers have witnessed their relationships with students transformed.

Here, we present the range of peace education practices as a common, overarching commitment to all the relationships that constitute school life. We outline evidence of the many benefits to young people, school staff, policymakers, and society as a whole, and the closing sections discuss practical implications for schools and make recommendations for policymakers.

Peace education: A global mandate, a national duty

The Charter of the United Nations (UN) includes 48 mentions of 'peace', each time as a principle that member states are expected to honour and promote. The UN's educational arm, **UNESCO**, was founded to advance peace as a primary purpose of education.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child expects children to be 'brought up… in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity'. The treaty confers a duty on governments to direct education to 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples…'.[1] It also enshrines in law the right of every child to a voice in all matters that affect them.[2]

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on the UK to 'include the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system' and 'intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including by teaching human rights, building the capacities of students and staff members to respect diversity at school, [and] improving students' conflict-resolution skills…'[3]

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 aims by 2030 to ensure that citizens worldwide develop the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including through education for a culture of peace and non-violence.[4]

UNESCO's *World in 2030* survey of 15,000 people found that ecological degradation and violent conflict were the most pressing public concerns at a global level, and that two-thirds of those surveyed believe that the response at national level should prioritise education.[5]

Peace in Education

Critical to the wellbeing of young people, as well as to the fabric of a flourishing society, are the opportunity and ability to forge conscientious relationships with themselves and the world around them.

School: A relational environment

The years that young people spend in formal education offer a unique, extended opportunity to explore and develop healthy ways to relate to themselves and their world. Students' sense of belonging, the attitudes that teachers model, and the way a school responds to ruptured relationships, for example, are among young people's most formative experiences. Every school day is an experimental exercise in the relationships that engage young people constantly:

- At the personal level: How can I relate well to myself?

- At the peer level: How can we relate well to each other?

- At the community level: How well do we relate as a school?

- At the societal level: How might we relate well to our society in its diversity, and to the big challenges that we collectively face?

Each of these challenges powerfully influences students' engagement in their learning, with far-reaching implications for schools striving to establish an effective educational environment:

- **Student wellbeing: relating well to oneself.** Schools can be communities that support each student to develop a healthy relationship with themselves, a need felt especially keenly by those who feel under-supported at home or lonely in the classroom. Whereas anxiety and low mood undermine learning and engagement, those supported to develop an emotionally healthy relationship with themselves tend to be more involved in the life of the classroom and are more likely to achieve academically.[6] *How can schools better support young people to be well, and to develop their personalities as a whole?*

- **Peer relationships: relating well to each other.** Many young people enjoy good peer relationships, but few are unaffected by experiences of victimisation. Healthy peer relationships, manifest as mutual respect and appreciation, are known to enhance educational attainment,[7] while those who feel ostracised in school tend to be become academically disengaged also.[8] Bullied students in particular are more likely to withdraw or be formally excluded from school,[9] and to underachieve academically.[10] The sexual harassment of girls has a similar impact.[11] *How can young people build better relationships among themselves, with the support of teachers?*

- **School community: relating well together.** Schools have the potential to be enjoyable places to be, where teachers and young people meaningfully shape the learning process to help meet the needs of all. Students who enjoy their school as a place of belonging are more likely to enjoy their learning and achieve well academically.[12] Constructive, 'restorative' approaches to school discipline tend to improve engagement in the classroom,[13] strengthen teacher-student trust,[14] and improve the teaching experience.[15] *How can schools cultivate themselves as communities to which young people and teachers want to belong?*

- **An engaged education: relating well to the wider world.** As our world changes quickly and often unpredictably, children need to be ready to face their future, find their place in it, and shape it. Students tend to find that the most engaging education is grounded in their own life experience and aspirations, and in the hopes they harbour for society and the world.[16] Those who feel engaged in the classroom are more likely than others to participate in class and to achieve academically,[17] whereas those who do not relate to what they are taught gradually lose interest.[18] *How can schools better support young people to understand and engage with the social issues that matter to them?*

Schools can no sooner fix social iniquities and purge society of harmful attitudes than pretend that these do not shape students' – and teachers' – behaviours. But all schools can intend to develop as communities committed to the health and integrity of all the relationships that constitute them.

Research demonstrates repeatedly that young people who learn to relate well grow in confidence and wellbeing,[19] while those supported to cultivate empathy become less likely in adulthood to assume socially toxic attitudes such as sexism and racism.[20] Conversely, where authoritarian attitudes dominate in childhood and critical awareness goes underdeveloped, attitudes that support violence and exclusion are more common in adulthood,[21] and where empathy is degraded, moral reasoning and prosocial attitudes are compromised.[22]

A philosophy of relationship

Peace education proposes an approach to teaching and learning that attends to the integrity of relationships at every level.

Whereas 'peace' is often defined in the negative as the absence of violence, here it means the presence of relationships that work well to meet needs effectively and equitably – in all spheres of life and society. Accordingly, many theorists and practitioners of peace education have broadened the scope of their field to respond to a wide range of relational challenges facing young people, schools, and society, such as self-development, school discipline, and the health of society in its diversity.

Learning to relate well is self-evidently needed in every sphere of life and society, particularly the family, community, workplace and, not least, the education system, where most young people in their formative years spend more time than anywhere else outside the home. In schools, peace education is concerned with the relationships that an individual has with themselves and that peers share with one another. It is engaged with the relational health of the school as a community, and with how it cultivates the discipline of learning in particular. And it seeks a responsible relationship with society and the earth. Peace education does not presume that the goal of healthier relationships is tidy or trivial, but does insist on its possibility.

Accordingly, peace education aims to serve:

- Individual wellbeing (inner peace, peace with myself);

- Good peer relations (interpersonal peace, peace between us);

- Integrity of the community (community peace, peace among us); and

- Integrity of society and the natural world (social and ecological peace, peace with everyone and with the earth).

In engaging with all these relational spheres, the intended outcomes of education are broadened beyond academic achievement through the transmission of knowledge, to emphasise also self-development, social awareness, community-building, and societal engagement. A hope of peace education is that such learning and growth continues once students leave school and for the rest of their lives.

To these ends, the approach imagines the school community as one that supports all its members to flourish, whatever gifts and challenges they bring. Students are supported to grow as persons as well as academic learners, and to navigate more effectively the transition to personally responsible, socially engaged adulthood. Staff develop as professional educators and community elders, with deeper satisfaction in their work.

Common commitments of peace education

To every student. The voice, needs, and agency of every student are worthy of attention, irrespective of their behaviour.

To every teacher. The wellbeing of students depends on the wellbeing, commitment, and competence of teachers, as professionals supported and encouraged by their managers, by one another, and by a society that values them.

To the school as a community. A flourishing educational community depends on a wide ecology of relationally constructive practices, to which every member of the community may contribute.

To society in its diversity. Students are supported to navigate their world, face society's challenges with understanding, and discern their commitments within it.

To every relationship. An effective peace pedagogy will touch on all relationships between and among students, teachers, and school managers, and also on the ethos and policies of the school community. Striving for peaceful relationships means striving for fair relationships.

To hope. Peace educators recognise that all relationships may become injured, but look for what is nonetheless promising in them and aim to work with them constructively.

To mutuality. Good learning is a community endeavour that values the commonalities of, and differences between, all involved. Teachers retain their authority and keep safe boundaries for their students, but both have roles as educators and learners.

To creativity. Peace education values creativity and experimentation, making use of mistakes as opportunities for growth.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School students create peace graffiti using *Razor Wire & Olive Branches* resource from Quakers in Britain.
Photo: Michael Preston

A corpus of principles and practice

Peace educators lead a flexible and creative learning process that endeavours to marry a commitment to relational principles with students' own experiences of their social context and, in school settings, also with the formal curriculum.

Peace education frames the meaning and purposes of education distinctively. In its concern with the integrity of relationships, peace education conceives of the 'student' as a developing person with dignity and agency, which also carries consequences for the meaning of 'discipline'.[23] It defines 'curriculum' broadly, applying the prescribed syllabus creatively while recognising the many informal learning opportunities in the school day.[24] It also has implications for the meaning of 'teaching', since a commitment to a healthy relationship with students bears not only on what they learn, but also how.[25]
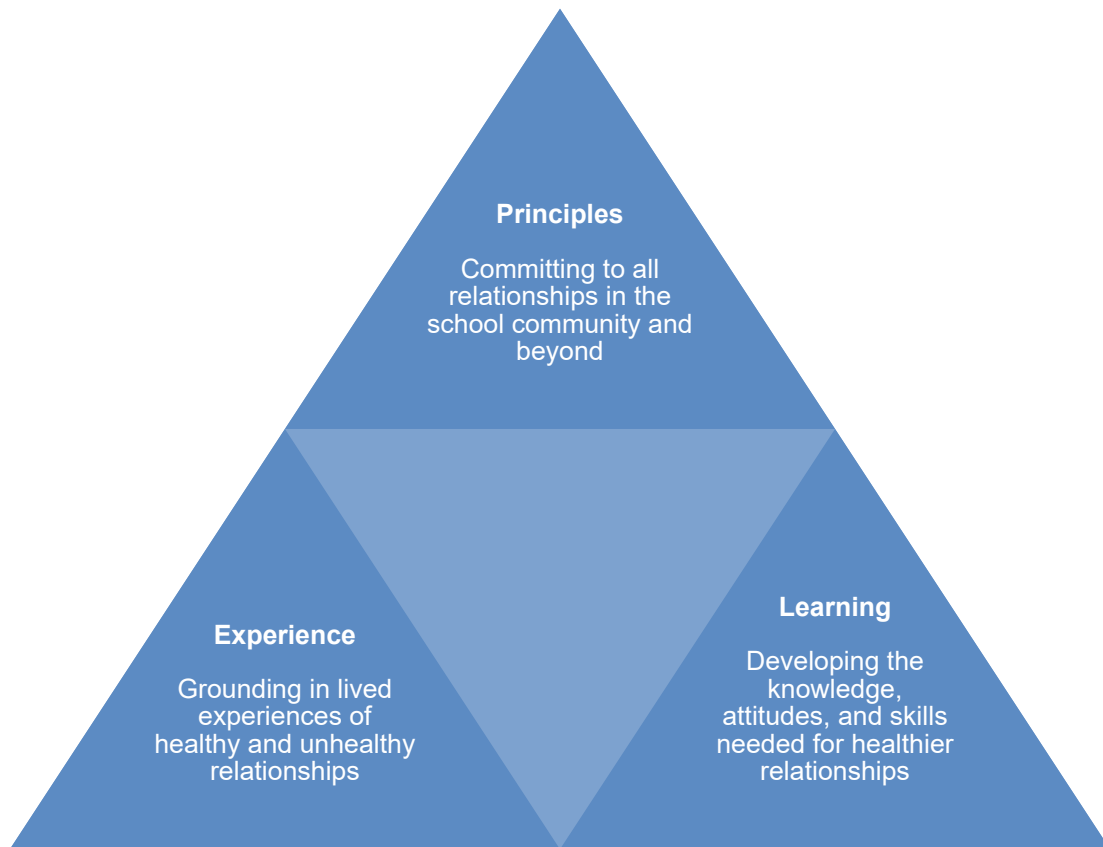
In attending to the integrity of relationships, peace education aims to deliver the school curriculum in a way that actively supports the needs of young people. Where relationships are damaged, as indicated by student bullying and harassment, disaffection and disruptive behaviour in the classroom, or the urgent social issues that matter to all of us, peace education asks how stronger, healthier, more just relationships might look.

The wide rubric of the approach allows educators to recognise a diversity of pedagogical practices as a coherent corpus that contributes to 'peace', such as restorative approaches to school discipline, mindfulness practices, peer mediation schemes, and active citizenship, among others. For example, classroom exercises for reflection and self-awareness, child-centred responses to the challenges of school discipline, and critical approaches to subject areas such as history and geography, can all contribute to a strategy of peace education for relational learning and development. As such, peace education incorporates a wide range of practices that are already common, such as listening circles and citizenship education. It also introduces relatively new practices, such as peer mediation programmes and an ethically engaged exploration of social issues.

Some peace education activities require a whole-school approach, such as building a peaceful learning community. Others, such as encouraging students to evaluate their learning critically, can be incorporated into the pedagogical approach of any teacher who wishes to do so. Indeed, all teaching practices have the potential to build good learning relationships – and to damage them. To a peace educator, even the way in which a teacher greets their class in the morning becomes significant, for example.

Figure 1: Context-specific peace education in schools.

Principles

Committing to all relationships in the school community and beyond

Experience

Grounding in lived experiences of healthy and unhealthy relationships

Learning

Developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed for healthier relationships

A global field

As a field, education for peace has drawn on a wide range of pioneering educationists, social movements, and cultural systems that seek to promote and preserve peace as the dignity of healthy relationships.[26]

Peace education has always been practised, but only emerged as a formal, named field in response to the trauma of the Second World War. An early mandate was established with the founding in 1945 of the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to encourage the cultivation of peace 'in the minds of [people]'[27] and thus help to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.[28]

Despite this mandate, until the end of the Cold War peace education remained marginal to the UN's understanding of peace and security. In 1992, the UN acknowledged the limits of its traditional emphasis on diplomatic conciliation (*peacemaking*) and military violence prevention (*peacekeeping*) in societies riven by armed conflict. A third concept was added: *peacebuilding*, meaning 'sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems…'.[29] With this principle in mind, the UN,[30] with regional organisations such as the European Union[31] and African Union,[32] have repeatedly called for education for peace in schools and communities.

Much of the peace education field has continued to focus on situations of armed conflict. Recently in Syria, for example, a peace syllabus

integrated into the school curriculum, combined with training for adult community leaders, has helped to build local resilience against violence while supporting conflict-affected communities to develop narratives for peace:[33]

'The curricula were developed to address issues including: young people's desire for justice and revenge, normalisation of violence, belonging and identity, lack of knowledge about alternative options or ways of thinking, and addressing the impacts of trauma.'[34]

Typical of the benefits of peace education in settings that are enduring armed violence, or have recently survived it, are those found after a programme for children in Lebanon, where parents

'observed less violent, disruptive behaviour and increased confidence and outgoing behaviour in their children. Facilitators have observed that children are able to overcome problems with more confidence, cooperate and interact with other children better and have more positive outlooks'.[35]

From the beginning of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, informal education with young people proved essential to a 'multi-layered approach' to peacebuilding, helping to lay the ground for the formal conciliation process.[36] From 1982, all schools were formally directed to support students 'to learn to understand and respect each other, and their differing customs and traditions',[37] with the intention that 'children do not grow up in ignorance, fear or even hatred of

those from whom they are educationally segregated'.[38]

Since the many challenges of violence persist in every part of the world, peace education has been recognised as a right of all children, not only those affected by war.[39] In the UK, research suggests that society is becoming more polarised politically[40] and debate is increasingly fractious and intolerant,[41] while the rise of hate groups[42] is fuelling fake news, prejudice, and victimisation.[43] Accordingly, it matters that schools support young people to evaluate conflict in their own society critically, form their own views conscientiously, develop skills for handling personal conflict well, and build their agency for civic responsibility.

Peace educators have also taken critical perspectives on school discipline. As good relationships must be 'built, maintained, and repaired'[44] on the geopolitical stage, so peace education favours the same principles in schools. But in many schools, *peacekeeping*, as an investment in student conformity, has tended to dominate at the expense of *peacebuilding*, as an investment in school community.[45]

This paper argues for a further, conscious evolution of the field. Insofar as the motivating force of peace education is an active interest in the health of relationships at every social level, its scope encompasses every part of our lives. While approaches to conflict, discipline, and social issues education deserve to be central concerns in schools, we believe also that critical interest in the integrity of relationships will shine a light on many other aspects of school life. The healthy development of students and staff as individuals, the integrity of learning as a mutual endeavour, the vitality and inclusivity of the school community, and the freedom of its members to think for themselves, for example, all engage searching questions of relationship – all warrant the attention of critical educators committed to the principles of peace.

A young person thinking global during a peace education session.
Photo: Ellis Brooks

Peace Education in Practice

The following sections outline an approach to peace education, together with evidence of need and effectiveness, in terms of the fourfold concept outlined above: peace with myself (intrapersonal level), peace with each other (interpersonal level), peace among us (school community level), and peace in the world (societal/ecological level).

Peace with myself: Taking care

Educating for 'peace with oneself' imagines wellbeing widely: not as the absence of mental health problems in individuals, but as the presence of a healthy social ecology, characterised by mutual esteem, reciprocal support, and community belonging.

> **'Having a teacher you can connect with on a personal level and who cares about you as a person… has been demonstrated nationally and internationally to be a protective health factor for young people's wellbeing.'[46]**
> Fiona Brooks and colleagues.

Learning to relate to oneself

Students, parents, and teachers all agree that education should nurture students' wellbeing. Four in five students say they want their school to teach them to care for their mental health more effectively,[47] for example, and more than four in five parents and almost all teachers believe that school should encourage kindness, empathy, and community.[48]

Emotional health in childhood is supportive of life satisfaction, school engagement, and academic attainment,[49] and is a more significant predictor of life satisfaction in adulthood than intellectual development.[50] Research shows consistently that peer groups who are supported to develop their emotional literacy enjoy a more positive attitude to themselves and those around them, are less likely to be anxious or depressed, and achieve at a higher level academically.[51]

A pedagogy for peace begins with the support of young people to build a healthy relationship with themselves, but 'peace with myself' means more than 'feeling good'. A comprehensive education for self-development will query

learners on all aspects of the relationship they keep with themselves, asking, for example:

- What matters to me?

- What is good in me?

- What do I need to be well?

- How can I help others to be well?

Each learning hour in school has the potential to cherish the wellbeing and creativity of students and staff, such that learning becomes as enjoyable as it is productive.

Context: Wellbeing in schools

Childhood experiences of school are widely recognised as a major predictor of mental health into adulthood.[52]

The perception that child wellbeing is in decline is widely shared by teachers, parents, and health professionals.[53] While no dramatic decline has been observed since the turn of the millennium,[54] the proportion of young people with diagnosable mental health problems has been steadily increasing.[55] Affective disorders in particular, such as anxiety and depression, have been on the rise in the UK for several decades,[56] with a marked effect associated with the recent school closures and lockdowns during the COVID19 pandemic.[57]

Among the major causes of mental ill-health are early traumatic experiences. Half of children in the UK have been affected by at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), such as maltreatment in the home or family breakdown. In Wales, for example, one in six adults witnessed violence in the home growing up, and one in ten were sexually abused as children.[58]

Experience of four or more different types of ACE is associated with a lasting stress response (indicated by chronic overproduction of cortisol),[59] which is associated with various health problems in adulthood.[60] Around one in ten children have experienced this degree of traumatic exposure to adversity,[61] with children from low-income backgrounds being three times

as likely as those from high-income backgrounds to be affected in this way.[62] Significantly for schools, childhood trauma can severely complicate the competence of young people to regulate their behaviour in social settings.[63]

Irrespective of childhood adversity, the psychological upheaval of adolescence is a time of marked formative vulnerability and opportunity for all young people. As they undergo major developmental changes, they are more likely to experience loneliness, particularly girls,[64] and say they lack support at home.[65]

These developmental pressures are readily magnified by the demands of formal education.[66] Increasingly, education policy rewards schools that push students hardest to achieve academically, leading to a hothouse learning culture, which can be developmentally harmful and educationally counter-productive.[67] Many secondary school students in particular feel over-pressured by work to the detriment of their mental health.[68] Students in England, for example, report the third-highest workload in the European region; nearly three-quarters of girls at 15 and two-thirds of boys say they feel pressured by school.[69] Nine in ten UK headteachers believe that their students are now more stressed than they were a decade or so ago, according to YoungMinds.[70]

From the student perspective, a high-pressure exam culture is not necessarily matched with a high level of care.[71] Although most teachers hope to forge good relationships with their students,[72] around half of 15-year-olds believe their teachers do not care about them as individuals.[73] While four out of five 11-year-olds say they could share a personal problem with a teacher, a third of 15-year-olds can think of no teacher at all they could trust in the same way.[74]

These observations go some way to accounting for the alienation that a large minority of young people face, and which is likely to exacerbate the common adolescent experience of low self-esteem and social stress. Depressed students, for example, are more likely than others to feel that school controls their lives,[75] such that their school experience may only re-traumatise them rather than help them to heal.

The strains on students readily transfers to teachers, who have one of the most stressful occupations in the UK.[76] The Education Support Partnership has found that a third of teachers are routinely stressed and the same proportion report mental health problems.[77] Despite the strong sense of vocation in the teaching community, teachers in England have some of the lowest rates of job satisfaction in economically-developed countries.[78]

Student wellbeing: A snapshot

In a secondary school class of 22 students in Britain today:

- Around 15 rate their life satisfaction at a high level.[79]

- Four have a current mental health problem[80] and three have a diagnosable mental health condition,[81] of whom two are unlikely to be getting the support they need from an overwhelmed NHS;[82]

- Three have been lonely this week;[83]

- Four have a history of self-harm, of whom at least one child will be self-harming currently, typically for relief from overwhelming feelings and/or to punish themselves;[84]

- Seven have witnessed the separation of their parents[85] and consequently may be experiencing anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem;[86]

- Two have known at least four distinct types of traumatic experience;[87] and

- Girls, LGBTQ students, and those with a background of economic deprivation are more likely than other students to suffer a lack of wellbeing while at school.[88]

An ecological perspective on wellbeing

In recent decades, schools have paid more attention to student mental health, commissioning psychotherapeutic support to help repair deficits in wellbeing among individuals with diagnosable mental health problems. Perhaps surprisingly, this valuable focus on individual mental ill-health has had little impact on the prevalence of anxiety and depression.[89]

For a long time, some health professionals and educationists have called for a shift in emphasis from a deficit-based, individualistic approach to one oriented around the health assets in the social environment.[90] This led, as early as 1986, to the Ottawa Charter of the World Health Organization, which called for an ecological appreciation of individual wellbeing grounded in social wellbeing: healthy, equitable, and mutually supportive relationships.[91] Iza Kavedžija, a medical anthropology scholar, argues that communities of 'conviviality and care' are the ground on which individuals may come to grow and flourish:

> 'Conviviality and care draw our attention to the fact that wellbeing is not only social, but deeply relational. It is not simply what an individual feels about their life, somehow enclosed within a body. It plays out in the relationship with one's surrounding environment: with materials, with tools and technologies, with human and non-human beings… We need to start treating wellbeing as a process of connecting with others – or even a form of "commons".'[92]

Researchers have been finding that child wellbeing is appreciably enhanced by social conditions of mutual support, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging.[93] As is well known, a child's healthy development is influenced by a wide range of social factors, with the socio-economic status of the family and parenting preferences each playing a major role, for example.[94] Schools also play a role, which can be constructive insofar as they develop as healthy communities, characterised by strong peer bonds and mutually respectful student-teacher relationships, both of which are substantially supportive of youth wellbeing.[95]

Schools that achieve an 'academic environment in which students believe that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals' have seen benefits to student satisfaction and personal development, reduced violence and exclusions, and higher grades.[96]

Wellbeing as pedagogy

Children of all ages are likely to need the help of adults to cultivate a healthy relationship with themselves – to begin to identify, for example, what matters to them, what may be their distinctive qualities as a person, why others appreciate them, and how they can give of themselves to the peer group. To this end, the staff-student connection in school is critically important; students who feel that their teachers believe in them tend to report higher levels of wellbeing. Significantly for many young people, a strong student-teacher connection can also help to compensate for a lack of support at home.[97]

The benefits to teachers are also valuable. Teachers who connect well with their students report a greater sense of meaning at work and higher job satisfaction.[98] Insofar as a strong teacher-student connection helps to engage students and reduce disruptive behaviour, it also promises lower levels of staff stress.[99]

Teachers can hope to forge good working relationships with every learner, irrespective of academic ability, and to devote attention equitably, including to students who do not seek it directly. In today's classroom, opportunities for one-to-one attention may be scant, but merely greeting a student by name in the morning still registers as an act of interest and care.[100]

Wellbeing as friendship

Still more critical to wellbeing than the teacher-student relationship is the health of the peer group as an inclusive sub-community. A feeling of peer belonging is powerfully supportive of self-worth and subjective wellbeing,[101] whereas students who feel neglected by their classmates are highly likely to feel low and disengaged.[102] Regrettably, in British schools most students at 15 do not think their peers are mutually supportive in class, which stands in general contrast with the experience elsewhere in Europe.[103]

To promote peer inclusion, peace educators encourage mutual appreciation between their students. Appreciation is a subtle skill that enhances multiple faculties and attitudes including empathy, mentalisation, communication, listening, courage, and 'warmth'. One exercise for primary school children, used by the organisation Peacemakers at the end of their peace education course for primary schools, invites students to sit on a 'magic carpet' while the group ponders the personal qualities they value in them:

> 'The class are asked to think carefully about this person; what makes them a great friend, a great member of the class. What do they bring to the class that no one else does? Those who want to make a positive comment about that person, place their hands palms up on their laps. The pupil on the carpet then chooses three people to make an affirmative comment.'[104]

In learning to express and receive appreciation, students and teachers grow used to a more collaborative atmosphere and share a stronger sense of belonging. Extensive research has shown that two components of appreciation, 'love' and 'gratitude', are powerfully supportive of life satisfaction in childhood and adolescence.[105]

As students move into their teens, the burgeoning limbic system in the brain, which drives emotionally charged, reward-seeking behaviour, is highly stimulated by social interaction. Meanwhile, the prefrontal cortex, which underlies critical reflection on consequential choices, is still developing.[106] During this period, the appeal of toxic social contexts is often strong, as adolescents seek high-stakes rewards through risk-taking behaviour. It is essential that schools support students to develop positive peer relationships, such that an experience of genuine friendship becomes a reference point against which to recognise toxic contexts for what they are. Various experiments in living adventurously together – through performing arts, sport, creative projects, outdoor pursuits, and campaigning – offer young people safe, exciting, and educationally valuable channels for their energy. At Carr Manor Community School in Leeds, for example, students develop and share their own projects to peers in a Study School. The whole school also participates in Peace Campaign Days, featuring such high-energy activities as Jamie Peacock's *Be a Champion* programme.[107]

Wellbeing in the curriculum

Despite privileging intellectual over emotional learning, school curricula offer a wealth of opportunities for students to explore, experience, and develop wellbeing. Typically, England's PSHE curriculum devotes some limited time to develop emotional literacy and understand mental health, but the topic can be explored in other subject areas also.

In a primary school, for example, children may develop self-awareness by naming and reflecting on the physical experience of the feeling that they experience in varying

situations, such as 'When someone praises me, I feel…', 'If I am late for school, I feel…'[108] and 'What makes me feel well?' In secondary schools, the history syllabus may chart the development of public health movements, asking 'How has the meaning of "health" changed over time?' In geography, students may explore the socio-economic and geographic disparities in mental health, asking, 'Who in society is "well" and why?' and 'Is wellbeing more common in certain kinds of societies?' In physical education, students may learn the role sleep, rest, food, and exercise play in their physical and mental health. Repeatedly, students may be invited to relate their learning to their own self-awareness and self-development.

Chestnut Grove Academy students learn about nuclear weapons and make 1,000 origami peace cranes during a Peace and Human Rights week.
Photo: Isabel Cartwright

Peace between us: Working together

Among the cardinal tasks of education is to support young people to cultivate healthy relationships with one another, such that they learn to discern common needs, navigate divergent wants, and handle conflicts when they arise.

> **'The "culture of separated desks" in which each student is a lonely runner in the race for success gives way to a classroom ambience of communal support, the sharing of knowledge and information, and mutual respect for each person's contributions.'[109]**
> Svi Shapiro

Learning to relate to each other

Outside the home, school is the social crucible where young people spend the most time – a relationally rich environment that powerfully shapes their attitudes to other people for the rest of their lives. Giving attention to the health of student relationships encourages both personal development and academic engagement. For example, reducing loneliness and enhancing mutual peer support is supportive of students' emotional wellbeing, which is a potent predictor of satisfaction in adulthood.[110] It can buffer the negative impact of a lower socio-economic status and disrupted family life.[111] Conversely, strained peer relationships, particularly where violent behaviour has become normalised, is associated with low levels of life satisfaction.[112]

Questions of belonging and friendship exercise young people daily at school:

- How welcome do we feel, and how appreciated by each other?

- How willing are we to help each other?

- Are some of us pushed out – why?

- What can we do when someone feels hurt or angry?

- Does our teacher support and believe in us?

Context: Peer relations in schools

At age 15, four in five students say they feel safe at school,[113] more so than outside it,[114] and most young people enjoy generally healthy peer relationships.[115] But a large minority, which grows as students move into adolescence, feel ostracised and unhappy.[116] Falling out with friends, fighting,[117] and being victimised can be confusing and isolating experiences with harmful consequences. This seems particularly common in the UK, which has the highest

prevalence of youth conflict and antagonism among comparable countries.[118]

Of common concern to parents/carers, teachers, policymakers, and especially students themselves, are the toxic effects of bullying and sexual harassment. Such behaviours damage mental health, sometimes seriously, and can impede personal development and academic achievement.[119] Bullied children suffer worse grades than their peers,[120] being three times as likely to withdraw from school and three times as likely to be formally excluded.[121] The sexual harassment of girls has been found to increase the fear of standing out, suppress participation in class, and increase the risk of academic disengagement.[122] This, too, has been found to undermine academic attainment,[123] as well as normalise misogynistic attitudes among perpetrators.[124]

Circle time: Learning as a social experience

Whereas traditional schooling models academic development as an individual, even private, endeavour, a more collaborative approach can help to cultivate productive student relationships while enriching the learning experience. Collaborative learning has been found to enhance capacities for complex thinking, self-expression, active listening, self-discipline, and leadership, for example.[125] Such relational competencies are profoundly socially enabling, a powerful predictor of life satisfaction in adulthood,[126] and widely sought by employers.

Time sat in a circle lends itself particularly well to collaborative learning. With careful facilitation, the exchange between students can encourage subtle skills of awareness and expression, such as challenging over-dominant participants and evaluating group dynamics. For example, participants may be invited to reflect for a few minutes after an exercise to voice their experiences of power in the group, in a brief but rich 'learning moment' for all.

Peer conflict as an opportunity

A peace pedagogy regards interpersonal conflict as an experience to be explored as productive rather than suppressed as uncomfortable. For students, an engaged response to an emerging conflict has the potential both to address an experience of injustice and to develop the relational attitudes and skills of those involved. As such, learning to respond well to personal conflicts is a vital developmental milestone. In the words of Sue Bowers and Tom Leimdorfer:

'Traditionally, little encouragement has been given to young people to take responsibility for resolving conflicts… yet the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect both on the quality of their personal lives and on the prospects for society as a whole. Affirming the personal value of each individual, encouraging mutual respect and consciously developing the skills and attitudes involved in creative conflict resolution must be regarded as an important educational priority.'[127]

In requiring the careful cultivation of empathic awareness, relational analysis, and effective communication, conflict literacy can only be learnt socially, and ideally from an early age. Even young children may be encouraged to speak up for their needs and desires while inviting others to do the same, to be critical of another's behaviour and still respect their personality, and to apologise sincerely and forgive generously. When peer conflict is handled well, and against a background of ongoing social and emotional learning, students can practise and develop essential relational skills, distinguished by RJ Working as:

- Emotional self-awareness (knowing and valuing oneself);

- Emotional regulation (managing self-expression);

- Social skills (communicating, cooperating, empathising); and

- Responsible decision-making (making choices rather than reacting impulsively).[128]

At the heart of conflict literacy is empathy, which develops from infancy when parenting/caregiving relationships are healthy.[129] It lies typically underdeveloped when loving care has been absent in the early years, but it can develop later in children who have the opportunity to witness adults consistently modelling empathic relations in a social setting.[130] Foremost among these is school, particularly the classroom, insofar as young people experience it as a place of safety and trust.[131]

To these ends, educating for peace implies a personal commitment on the teacher's part to develop their own conflict literacy and to model it in the classroom, to support students to do the same, and to learn from them in turn. In supporting students to handle conflict well, the teacher carries the formal authority of the institutional boundary-keeper, but also the informal authority of the community elder, encouraging disputants to draw on their emotional and cognitive intelligence.

Drawing on training from Peacemakers, Samantha Duda-Spencer, a teacher at John of Rolleston Primary School in Burton-on-Trent, uses regular circle time sessions to support her students to handle conflict well:

'Initially I was really sceptical of it; I thought, No, this is not going to work with seven- and eight-year-olds, talking about peace! But actually, just within the space of a few weeks [of] regular circle times… they were able to discuss what their conflict was, what their arguments were, and they had some strategies to be able to solve those. They are going to be our citizens of the future and they will need to know how to manage conflicts, how to work together, how to be resilient, how to support and listen, and actually, teaching them from an early age, really does do that.'[132]

Indeed, research has found that young people who develop their empathic imagination become less likely in adulthood to indulge in bullying, sexism, racism, generalised prejudice against 'out-groups', social dominance, authoritarianism, and homophobia.[133] Under-cultivated empathy, on the other hand, is socially corrosive. It critically diminishes moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour,[134] and risks normalising violent behaviour into adulthood.

Peer mediation

Mediation processes are now routine in many workplaces, communities, and the criminal justice system. More schools are now also taking up 'peer mediation', a youth-led process supporting students to work with conflicts themselves with little adult intervention. Student mediators work with disputants to search for a solution that works for all parties, and to make commitments that will help them to move forwards and manage future conflicts well.

Young mediators are trained to analyse conflicts as a function of unmet needs: that is, as an experience of lack, which is registered in feelings of anger and hurt to condition reactive behaviours that may be counterproductive and unfair. They are taught how the brain reacts under stress to increase the risk of violence, for example. They also commit personally to becoming more aware of their own needs, and to managing their own strong feelings as and when they arise.

As mediators are taught to recognise and name their own feelings and take responsibility for their own behaviour, so they support peers in a dispute to do the same. Josh, a student at Bacon's College in London, explains his mediation role as inviting disputants 'to express yourself respectfully… and to open yourself up to [the other's] perspective'. Fatima, a mediator at Carr Manor Community School in Leeds, emphasises the attentiveness that the process encourages in her: 'It's important to understand yourself and it's very important to use empathy.'

The skillset that mediators develop is wide, including:

- communication, particularly empathic listening;

- enquiry and facilitation;

- critical analysis and bias awareness;

- sensitivity to rights and responsibilities;

- identifying hidden needs; and

- active commitment to others' wellbeing.

By nurturing such essential social skills from an early age, peer mediation helps young people to navigate their complex social environment, as well as to prepare them well for various responsibilities of adulthood, including parenting, community life, and the workplace.

The successes of peer mediation schemes are abundant. A systematic analysis of over 4,000 peer mediation processes in schools in several countries found a very high rate of successful conflict resolution and a similarly high rate of outcome satisfaction among disputants.[135] This and other research shows that peer mediation schemes commonly reduce disruptive behaviour and student exclusions, reduce problem conflicts, improve the school climate, free staff from dealing with student disputes, and lead to a substantial increase in the academic attainment and self-esteem of mediators.[136] The approach is widely popular among school students, especially those in deprived areas,[137] with students frequently feeding back that it should be standard in all schools[138] from the youngest year groups.[139]

Since the 1970s, peer mediation has grown to be used widely in schools across the world, often in tandem with other 'restorative practices' discussed later in this paper, such as conflict coaching, conferencing, and problem-solving circles. In the UK, take-up is higher in primary schools, but successful schemes at secondary level showcase the potential benefits for older students also. Schemes tend to thrive especially in schools that shape their community around the principles of fairness and inclusion that mediation requires, and those that partner with local community mediation services. In the UK, peer mediation providers meeting good practice standards can now be awarded official recognition from the College of Mediators.[140]

Pupils at Coleshill Heath Primary School during Peer Mediation training by Peacemakers.
Photo: Jemma Cox

Peer mediation in practice

'Imagine you are at school, and you have just had a blazing row with your best friend. You feel hurt and angry. You don't know if your friend wants to know you. You don't know if you want to know her. What do you do now? … What if you could talk to your friend in a safe way, get everything you want to say out, and find out why she's been acting the way she has? That's where peer mediators come in. Peer mediators would sit down with you and your friend, listen to both sides of the story and help you agree a solution you can both live with. They won't make you do anything. They won't take sides. They won't judge you. Instead, they offer a chance to find a real solution independently of adults.'

Sara Hagel and Ellis Brooks, peer mediation trainers.[141]

Student experiences

'It's made it a safer place and there aren't so many arguments because if an argument starts it's more likely to get sorted out quicker and we've got better lessons because the lessons aren't taken up by teachers trying to sort out what happened at playtimes.'

Holly, Year 6, Arbourthorne Primary School, Sheffield.[142]

'I feel like I've come out a completely different person and I look at life in a completely different light; I didn't take into consideration [before] that maybe somebody's acting like this because of this and I use the ripple effect and the snowball effect and the iceberg effect in everyday life. It's something that everybody should do.'

Jemima, student and mediator, Newquay Tretherras secondary school, Cornwall.[143]

'Mediation is a core part of our school… we value it so much and all the teachers are on board… Mediation should be implemented into schools and education because you're educating a whole generation of people who don't go straight to fighting…. Why isn't this a standard in all schools?'

Kezia Kerzog, sixth form peer mediator, Bacon's College, London.

Staff experiences

'Learning is not disrupted, lunchtimes are a happier time and it seems to have an overall all-round effect on the school.'

Michelle, teacher, Greenhill Primary School, Sheffield.[144]

'The children who've done the training are much more confident, not only in themselves but in their ability to change things, to make things happen.'

Adrian, teacher, Sandal Primary School, Sheffield.[145]

'We've known for many years that students benefit and respond better to being mediated and spoken to by their peers rather than adults at times of crisis or disagreement, but we've also noticed the secondary benefit of students themselves who are doing the mediations that behaviour improves as a result.'

Clive Rockliff, headteacher, Seven Hills Secondary School for students with severe learning difficulties and complex needs.[146]

Preventing peer violence

Children and young people, particularly in adolescence, say that staying safe from violence is among the needs for which they most want adult support,[147] and that schools could do more to help.[148]

Research indicates that the primary motivation for violent behaviour among adolescents is to gain social acceptance by peer groups that attach value to violence.[149] As such, a student's recourse to violent behaviour may be a rational adaptation to a lack of status and social efficacy,[150] or the want of affirmation at home.[151]

Much violence is identity-based, embedded in ideologies of exclusion such as racism, misogyny, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and so on. Such 'cultural violence' casts some people or categories of people as less deserving than others of care or fair treatment, leading to their passive marginalisation and often targeted abuse. Peace education, in supporting students to cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and social concern, equips them to notice and challenge exclusionary ideas and behaviours in themselves and others. Students might be challenged to wonder how some groups are marginalised and why, and to identify with how it might feel to be treated as such. In turn, students may be asked to consider what it means to be an 'upstander', either for their own rights and dignity, or those of others.

With such social drivers of violence in mind, schools need more than a 'firefighting' approach that responds to violent behaviour after the fact, but also proactive strategies to encourage the social conditions that reduce its appeal. A mutually respectful peer group may buffer adolescent insecurities that might otherwise erupt in violence.[152] In particular, a peer group that values common respect, and critically appraises violent behaviour as toxic, reduces its efficacy as a tactic for acceptance.[153] Accordingly, every student needs opportunities to recognise the worth of others, honour their dignity (whether or not they like each other's personalities), and build the social courage needed to handle emotionally charged conflict less reactively.

Peer mediators trained by Conflict Resolution Education Sheffield Schools Training (CRESST).
Photo: CRESST

Non-peaceful peer relationships in schools: Some examples

Bullying experiences are familiar to children throughout their school years.[154] One survey found that a third of 15-year-old children were bullied at least once in the previous two months;[155] another found that six per cent are bullied every day, particularly through petty acts of name-calling, ostracisation, and cyber-bullying.[156] Some children are more likely than others to be bullied at school for their sexual orientation, gender, ethnic background, disability, and/or special educational need. Bullying, together with the loneliness it causes, are associated with increased anxiety and depression, reduced self-esteem, and an elevated risk of suicide.[157]

Unwanted sexual attention is widespread in schools.[158] One survey found that 29 per cent of 16–18-year-old girls reported unwanted sexual physical contact at school, and that two in every five teenage girls in a relationship said their partner had committed some kind of sexual violence against them.[159] Most children frequently hear sexualised put-downs in the playground, such as 'slut', 'slag', 'poof' and 'lezza'.[160] US research has found that the mental health impact of sexual harassment is at least as harmful as that of bullying; the spreading of sexual rumours is especially hurtful.[161] In addition, sexual offending against children, of which perpetrators are often peers, appears to be increasing, according to the police.[162]

Physical violence in and around school becomes a growing concern as children enter adolescence. While minor scuffles among peers are in decline,[163] more serious violence has been on the rise. Over the decade to 2019–20, police records in England and Wales showed a 35 per cent increase in muggings at knifepoint, and a 53 per cent increase in assaults with a blade.[164] Scotland has seen recorded knife crime reduce by nearly half over the same period, but it remains common, particularly in the cities.[165] Most knife crime perpetrators are young people, as are most victims, and both are most likely to live in highly deprived neighbourhoods.[166] In cases where adolescents may be at risk of committing knife crime, the development of self-awareness and interpersonal skills has proved more effectively preventative[167] than programmes emphasising deterrence and punishment,[168] according to the police.

Hate crimes, as particularly traumatic acts of violence that affect young people disproportionately, are believed to be experienced by one in every 250 16–24-year-olds each year.[169] Statistics show that racist, Islamophobic, and anti-LGBT attacks are the most common hate crimes, and that physical violence and damage to property are the most common means of victimisation.[170]

Peace among us: Coming together

While recognising the value of authority and regulation needed in a learning institution for young people, peace education conceives of the school first as a learning community with the potential to inspire and support development and growth in all its members, teachers included, and to evolve democratically.

> **'Most teachers would agree that genuinely "peaceful schools" are institutions in which there is an ethos of calm and care for all, in which mutual respect for persons allows respect for learning to grow. A school as a place of learning is most effective when its members can flourish as human beings, as individuals and as members of the community.'**[171]
> Don Rowe

Learning to relate together

From the perspective of peace education, a school flourishes according to disciplines that sustain inclusive, convivial community and challenge patterns of exclusion, particularly those based on 'othering' students with certain identities. A genuinely 'peaceful' learning community cultivates an environment of belonging; facilitates meaningful participation; looks out for those who feel marginalised; encourages individuals to be the personalities they are; and values dissent as productive. It matters how students and teachers feel when they walk in the school door:

- How open does the space feel, and how safe?

- How much have students and teachers claimed the building as their own space, as seen in what hangs on the walls, for example?

- How much do ease and mutual respect characterise interactions between students and staff in the corridor?

- How well do students respect the authority of staff, and staff respect the freedom of students?

- How well valued are those who feel alienated here?

- How well does this space and its people model the principles of peace, as the integrity of all relationships?

Context: School as a social model

Children who enjoy school are likely to point to strong friendships, a sense of belonging, and the confidence that teachers believe in them as individuals and have high aspirations for them as reasons for their satisfaction.[172]

In the UK, surveys of students show that few rate their school experience highly once they reach adolescence: only one in ten 15-year-olds in England says they like school 'a lot';[173] half do not feel they belong there at all[174] and nearly half are bored of it.[175] Relative to other countries in the European region, students in Britain are among the least likely to praise their school.[176]

In carrying the legacy of the Victorian public school, today's formal education system still largely reduces intelligence to intellect, discipline to conformity, wisdom to knowledge, and progress to performance at examination. The 'hidden curriculum' of many schools encourages children to identify belonging with obedience, stifling free expression and dissent.[177] Strict uniform and silence-in-the-corridor rules, normal in the UK but unusual on the continent, are instances of a culture of containment centred on engineering approved behaviours.

Some schools, particularly in Scotland and increasingly in Wales, are taking an alternative approach, striving for educational discipline mainly through the cultivation of good relationships, rather than mainly through the enforcement of behavioural rules. These schools aim to establish the conditions of an inclusive community atmosphere and trusting teacher-student bonds. The hope is that healthy, mutually respectful relationships at every level within the school community, combined with high expectations, lead students to want to participate.

Cultivating community

Effective communities of all kinds maintain a twofold focus: on their external achievements (the quality of what they produce), and on their internal vitality (the health of their people and relationships). That is, the temptation to neglect the health of the community for the sake of increasing its output is resisted. Members of successful communities habitually collaborate to achieve common goals, and assemble regularly to remember their common commitment, often through ritual. Critical to this is a shared sense of purpose, which yet allows room for dissent as an opportunity for learning and growth.

Schools are already communities by default, but peace education makes this an intention. Community is cultivated in any and every aspect of school life: through collaborative learning, circle-based exchanges, informal student-teacher conversations, impromptu class check-ins, participatory assemblies, and collective celebrations and commemorations, for example.

A communitarian approach brings many benefits to all school members. It promises to enhance the life satisfaction of young people,[178] for

example, and the occupational wellbeing of teachers,[179] while softening divisions between cliques and those they exclude. Insofar as students recognise staff as elders – that is, as facilitators of school society – their authority is more readily recognised as legitimate.[180] A progressively more peaceful community also provides a conducive context for effective learning. Richard Simcox, headteacher at John of Rolleston Primary School explains: 'Peace is essential, so a happy, safe environment is the foundational bedrock of our curriculum. It means that every child can come to school every day and enjoy the learning that takes place.'[181]

A school committed to community will consciously appreciate the diversity of intelligence that its students bring to their learning, beyond the cognitive prowess that traditional cultures of schooling have tended to value somewhat exclusively. Among the often-marginalised gifts that young people may bring to their education are the emotional intelligence on which the humanities draw; the systems intelligence needed for organisation; physical intelligence, as expressed through sports and dance; imaginative intelligence in music, drama and art; and the social intelligence exercised through every aspect of school life. A young person whose characteristic intelligence goes unnoticed begins immediately from a position of exclusion; they are unlikely to feel that they belong in their school. Conversely, a school that recognises the diversity of gifts that young people bring – and actively supports their cultivation – enhances the mutual belonging of all.

Argyle Primary students take part in 'Fly Kites not Drones' workshop.
Photo: Isabel Cartwright

School as community

'As soon as I walked into the school, I could feel it was a comfortable community space. As students welcomed me in and showed me round, I saw children and teachers talking at ease with one another, and when the headteacher came to meet me, I noticed students walking past saying, "Hi, Chris," and he greeted them in return, knowing all of them by name.'

Author's visit to Trinity Catholic School (secondary), Leamington Spa, under the leadership of Chris Gabbett, 2015.

'Upon stepping into the school, the atmosphere of warmth and discovery was immediately apparent. Singing, dancing, laughter, fairy lights and parasols, chickens in the courtyard. The enthusiasm and enjoyment of adults and children was infectious. The walls, corridors and courtyard lived and breathed creativity. From washing lines of self-portraits with descriptions of "Peace to me means..." to a "Black Lives Matter" wall, the school's vision and values were clear.'[182]

Peace educator's visit to St Mary's CE Primary School, Moss Side, Manchester, 2019.

'My meeting with Pali Nahal, headteacher at Blackheath Primary School, in one of England's most deprived wards, was interrupted by a group of children knocking on the door. Pali explained that we'd have to find an alternative room; the group were peer mediators and needed a quite space to help resolve a conflict. As we left, Pali joked about who was in charge at the school, but you could hear the pride in her voice. Speaking with staff and children at Blackheath it was clear that they felt they mattered – really mattered. Wellbeing was genuinely central, and it was thriving as a learning community as a result.'[183]

Peace educator's visit to Blackheath Primary School, West Midlands, 2015

Encouraging student agency

While the proliferation of student councils has helped to enhance youth leadership in some schools, in others they are reduced to token democracy: inadequately supported by staff, largely ignored by school leaders, and privileging the voices of popular students over others. Peace education encourages the genuine agency of all students, and not only in formal structures designed for the purpose, but throughout the daily life of the school community.

The need to support student leadership is legally undergirded by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires schools to ensure that every student – and not only the student body as a whole – enjoys their right to be heard in all matters that affect them.[184] Accordingly, all students share a right to be meaningfully involved in shaping the school's operation (e.g. in agreeing rules that serve the rights and needs of both students and staff) and direction (e.g. in helping to shape the school's vision and strategy). By way of example, the communitarian role of students is often particularly strong in schools with well-established peer mediation schemes, where inspectors have reported students describing their school as a place of youth leadership and inclusive democracy.[185]

A litmus test of a communitarian school, genuinely committed to the agency of all its members, is that students feel free and able to make conscientious challenges to school authority. Many students, particularly those who feel marginalised for their minority status, have described episodes when school staff have neglected or even suppressed their attempts to raise legitimate concerns. In an open letter to her former school, Omie Dale recalls teachers who 'recognised my potential, nurtured it', but also how difficult it was to raise concerns about the casual racism of peers and some staff, which made her feel 'other and less':

> 'So often many minority students feel disempowered to speak up for themselves or what is right – because they are against the majority. Lots of discrimination and treatment we receive is real, it's there, but it's subtle, and as a result is often ignored, particularly when those we complain to have never had to deal with this kind of behaviour.'[186]

Teachers who champion the 'student voice' argue that it is meaningless without a concomitant commitment to their agency, in which the multiplicity of young people's concerns and aspirations are actively exchanged and valued as influential: 'Every child in every school deserves the opportunity to have a say in what they learn and how they learn,' writes Blair Minchin, a primary school teacher in Edinburgh.[187] Research in Canada confirms that a democratic commitment to students' concerns and aspirations also enhances their engagement and learning:

> 'Effective learning environments see students as a diverse community of learners who are both willing to and highly capable of shaping decisions about the content, process and outcomes of their learning. Most importantly, however, they see students' role in co-constructing instruction as a fundamental element of "learning to learn".'[188]

A relational approach to discipline

The school as an exclusive institution: How 'zero tolerance' can harm students, schools, and society

Many young people feel disaffected at school, while also more confident than earlier generations to question and challenge adult power: the assumptions that underpin traditional school discipline are under strain. A teacher survey commissioned by the Education Support Partnership in 2018 found that two in five teachers struggle to maintain a conducive learning environment.[189] In response, many schools, particularly in England, are doubling down with disciplinarian behaviour regimes.[190] Often dubbed 'zero tolerance' and occasionally 'warm-strict',[191] such regimes invest more in *peacekeeping*, as the deterrence and punishment of disruption, than in *peacemaking*, as the management of difficult relationships, and in *peacebuilding*, as the encouragement of participation and belonging.[192]

Advocates of strict behaviour regimes argue that they support often hard-pressed teachers to reduce disruption in the classroom while also enabling students to focus more fully on their learning.[193] By rewarding adherence to school rules and punishing divergence, including minor infractions, the expectation is that students become progressively trained to engage with their education.[194] Stuart Lock, CEO of Advantage Schools, which manages Bedford Free School, explains why he favours this approach:

> 'All young people need structure and routine. They need certainty, both of consequence but also of encouragement and praise when they do the right thing. And at Bedford Free School we sweat the small stuff. We make a big deal out of some of the small things that might go wrong, things that might seem inconsequential on their own: forgetting equipment, perhaps not paying attention 100 per cent of the time, and perhaps talking off-task. Those things are really taken seriously here, and we do that over these small things so that the big things don't happen.'[195]

In Cameron's experience as a prefect at the same school, strict rules have helped students to engage:

> 'Our silent corridors, where we transition around the building in silence, and having our equipment out ready to go when we arrive at our next lesson, all just helps get us focused and keeps us in that working set of mind...'[196]

While behaviour regimes vary, a typical zero tolerance practice is to detain a student who offends more than once in a room set aside for the purpose. There they are made to work in silence, often at a plain booth surrounded by blinker-type dividers. An hour of such 'isolation', sometimes called 'removal', may be the first sanction for minor infractions, such as having no pen, the wrong shoes, or a creative hairstyle. More serious breaches of discipline are punished with longer periods of isolation, in some cases lasting several consecutive days.[197] [198] Children who offend repeatedly meet escalating punishments culminating in suspension from school and, ultimately, permanent exclusion.

Growing use of such regimes in England, with government encouragement, has coincided with a steep rise in formal exclusions from school.[199] At Bedford Free School, for example, 15 per cent of students were temporarily excluded in the 2018–19 academic year, a rate 40 per cent higher than the national average.[200] That average is itself high. Across all English state schools during the decade to 2018–19, annual non-permanent exclusions increased by a third to nearly 440,000, and permanent exclusions by a half to nearly 8,000.[201] Relative to students in other social groups in England, those eligible for free school meals are four times as likely to suffer exclusion,[202] those with special educational needs twice as likely,[203] and Gypsy and Roma students four times as likely.[204] Exclusions are also used disproportionately to punish students of colour,[205] thereby compounding the socio-economic disadvantage and prejudice they already face, such as increased risk of contact with the police and, in adulthood, higher rates of unemployment and imprisonment.[206]

School exclusion has long been common in the UK, in marked contrast other European countries, where the practice is unusual.[207] Now that zero tolerance and similar regimes are driving a rise in exclusions, large numbers of young people face radically degraded life chances, which exacts a considerable secondary cost on wider society in turn. Only one per cent of excluded students sent to alternative providers in England gain five standard GCSE passes,[208] and 45 per cent of those sent to Pupil Referral Units are NEET when they leave (not in education, employment, or training).[209] Students themselves point to the 'trainline' or 'pipeline' from exclusion to criminality[210] – a view shared by the Children's Commissioner for England[211] and the police inspectorate, which confirms a 'strong link between school exclusion and becoming a target for county lines criminals'.[212] [213] In addition to the personal and social costs of exclusion, the economic cost to the public has been estimated by the Institute for Public Policy Research to be c. £370,000 for each permanently excluded student over their lifetime, or £2.1bn per year nationally.[214]

The ethical value of disciplinarian regimes aside, students have also questioned their educational value, arguing that they equate discipline with enforced obedience without cultivating self-discipline as the conscious choice to learn.[215] The zero tolerance approach also fails to account for the reasons why some students are less able than others to fall in with the classroom learning regime, such as the impact of childhood trauma and mental ill-health on mood and behaviour regulation,[216] as well as learning difficulties that often go undiagnosed.[217] In the experience of Aidan McQuaid, deputy headteacher at George Green School in Tower Hamlets in London, which takes a 'trauma-informed'[218] approach to discipline:

> 'Some of these young people haven't got the skills to manage behaviour because their brains haven't developed in that way. Why are [schools] punishing them for something they can't control? Why would you exclude someone to effectively send them back to the place where they are most vulnerable and increase their risk of harm?'[219]

Behaviour rules that operate by suppressing disruption and inducing conformity also leave the causes of student disaffection untouched, such that it continues to resurface.[220] Insofar as the experience of isolation and exclusion is a humiliating one, it is likely to aggravate anxiety, depression, stress caused by prior trauma, and certain conditions such as autism,[221] thereby perpetuating the risk of the challenging behaviour that zero tolerance regimes are intended to prevent.[222] According to Elizabeth Nassem, a scholar of bullying in schools: 'The victimisation that [punished] children feel can lead to them becoming increasingly resentful and hostile towards their teachers and other pupils, which in turn can further marginalise them and increase their engagement in bullying.'[223]

In these and other ways, the institutionally expedient use of isolation and exclusion unambiguously violates children's rights with clearly harmful outcomes. As widely practised, zero tolerance regimes are unlikely to satisfy the 'best interests' of the punished student, as is required by law under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 3). They clearly jeopardise the right of the student to an education 'directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (Arts. 28, 29). In discriminating against certain demographically distinct student groups, they also fall foul of the principle of non-discrimination (Art. 2). And they directly violate Art. 28(2), which requires the government to 'ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity…'

The growing use of zero tolerance practices is attracting criticism from young people,[224] teachers,[225] health professionals,[226] and the House of Commons Education Committee.[227] The Children's Commissioner for England has described isolation practices as 'distressing and degrading'[228] and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on the UK to abolish them.[229] Various campaign groups led by young people are calling for exclusions to stop.[230] 'I saw first- and second-hand the damage that the system had on me and my friends,' says Cristian from London, who now campaigns for a more inclusive approach to school discipline. 'From no support for my mental health, to the constant exclusions of my friends, it left me frustrated at the flaws in the system.'[231]

We have been unable to find any systematic study demonstrating a durable positive effect of zero tolerance on student discipline. Others have reported the same.[232] To the contrary, research suggests that strict behaviour regimes based on arbitrary rules that fail to discriminate between the differential needs of students are unlikely to achieve their educational aims. Indeed, a large body of American research finds that exclusions contribute to, rather than deter, truancy and academic disengagement.[233]

In one such study, a sophisticated analysis of 10,000 students concluded that stricter rules were associated with more classroom disruption, not less.[234] The study found that disciplinarian regimes appeared to provoke defiance in students unless they recognised rules as fair and the teacher's authority as legitimate. Specifically, students who already regarded the school's authority over them as illegitimate became more defiant, their resistance growing in proportion to the strictness of the rules.[235] The strongest predictor of reduced disruption was not the threat of punishment at all, but the health of the teacher-student relationship, in which students felt their teachers believed in them, supported them, listened to them, and did not demean them.

Students' experiences of 'zero tolerance'

'The bare walls… Every single day. They put me in a room on my own, I was in isolation.' Casey.[236]

'I've been sent to isolations where we weren't really given work, we were just told to sit there for six or seven hours doing nothing.' Sima.[237]

'But then how are you supposed to like solve an issue by just isolating a child? Like no one sat down with us… and said, "Right, what's the issue, why don't you want to come in [to school]?"' Unnamed girl.[238]

'My teacher, like, called me a disgrace in front of my whole class and it was really embarrassing, and I felt like after that I couldn't really talk to any teachers because, like, I just don't trust them anymore. I just felt helpless and by myself.' Semi.[239]

'In school there's a punishment called isolation. You're not allowed to talk to anyone, you're not allowed to ask questions. The way it feels is as if you've committed a crime and now you're in, like, solitary confinement. At first you feel really frustrated and you wanna explain… but then after a while you just don't care.' Cristian.[240]

'You still have anger building up inside you and [teachers] will not listen to you about it… the whole idea behind isolation, making children behave themselves and not get into trouble again does not really work – it is more of a theory than a reality.' Chanay.[241]

'I decided I'd rather die than be in isolation because of the mood it left me in. I feel as though isolation rooms should be banned. They tend to make students feel isolated and helpless, knocking their self-esteem.' Sophie, who has an autism diagnosis and attempted suicide after she was sent repeatedly for isolation.[242]

In the isolation booth 'you can't talk to anybody, you can't stand up if you don't ask. Literally, it's like being in a prison.' Esther.[243]

The school as an inclusive community: The promise of a relational approach to the discipline of learning

In common with traditional schooling, a central concern of peace education is students' engagement in their learning. It differs in framing learning as a need and right of students (and staff), rather than as institutional conformity, and in emphasising the cultivation of trusting relationships over the threat of punitive sanctions. The approach is invested in an inclusive and motivational environment that continuously encourages mutual trust between staff and students.

Accordingly, the meaning of 'discipline' moves away from a test of a student's character as policed by a teacher's authority and towards a common responsibility shared by all involved. The teacher's role also shifts, moving away from policing rules and towards facilitating healthier relationships, by combining their authority to set boundaries with their relational skill to encourage students to make conscientious choices. And the meaning of 'rules' also evolves, away from duties that oblige unquestioning obedience and towards established boundaries that encourage healthier patterns of relationship in the school community. As such, school rules are crafted to: be relevant to student wellbeing and learning, rather than merely arbitrary; be necessary and proportionate for the purposes for which they are intended, rather than merely expedient; and enjoy the general consensus of the school community.

In this relational model of discipline, its cultivation is rooted in an 'ongoing attachment to each child', such that the teacher's commitment to the student's best interests does not depend on their behaviour.[244] Though sometimes criticised incorrectly as the naïve faith that 'every child just needs a kind word and everything will be OK',[245] the approach continuously challenges and supports both students and teachers to relate well to one another. As former headteacher Chris Straker explains, a relational understanding of discipline 'at no point makes an excuse for bad behaviour,' but 'contextualises it and then works to resolve the issue'.[246] In encouraging conscientious choice rather than enforcing legalistic conformity, a relational approach raises, rather than lowers, expectations on students, challenging and supporting them to develop the self-discipline of learning in community.

Peace education is at least as concerned with building peace in the school community for the long term, as with the immediate need to keep the peace in the classroom or playground.[247] Indeed, research shows that long-term and community-oriented approaches to building school connectedness appear to be more effective than short-term interventions and those targeted at underachieving or disruptive students.[248] This also aligns with the recommendations of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence,[249] and the advice of educationalists and public health and mental health bodies.[250]

A study commissioned by the Department for Education examined 20 schools in England that had recently improved their Ofsted grading for 'behaviour and safety' to Outstanding. It found that many of the schools had chosen not to 'repeatedly sanction poor behaviour', but to focus instead on 'identifying potential issues early and intervening to help prevent them from escalating'.[251] 'Schools spoke of the need… to focus on relationship development and building rapport with students, and to oversee or enact early intervention,' for example.[252] The study noted repeatedly that a clear system of rewards and sanctions could condition student behaviour, but also highlighted schools that had effectively focused instead on 'fostering positive,

understanding relationships with the child… identifying triggers of behaviour and putting strategies in place to help prevent and manage these…'[253] Several of the schools examined had received 'formal training in restorative practice', for example,[254] and at least two had replaced 'behaviour policies' with 'relationships policies',[255] as noted in the following observations of a school for students with special educational needs and disabilities:

'The school's policy for behaviour is being re-written as a relationship policy. Much has been done in recent years to change the behaviour management policy and practice within the school. The previous system – action A leads to consequence B – was felt to be too inflexible and to have limited effect on the range of students in the school. It was considered to be too impersonal and adversarial, focusing on rule breaking, punishment and guilt. The new approach is based on fostering positive relationships between pupils and staff where staff get to know the students. Restorative practice and a person-centred approach are key tenets of the methods adopted. Students and staff are still clear of what is expected of students and there are ground rules but the key approach has been to develop closer relationships between staff and students.'[256]

Restorative practice (RP) is now a well-attested corpus of practices used in schools worldwide.[257] For its practitioners, a restorative perspective 'views misconduct not as school-rule-breaking, and therefore as a violation of the institution, but as a violation against people and relationships in the school and wider community'.[258] The focus is thus on the harm caused, the needs the harm has generated, and whose responsibility it is to meet them.[259] Emerging from this perspective, restorative practices (RP) are 'a creative approach to dealing with harm proactively and constructively, through an everyday culture of problem-solving and communication'.[260]

Brenda Morrison and Dorothy Vaandering propose the three-tiered model of public health provision as a useful framework for conceptualising RP in schools:[261]

- Primary practices, requiring the prime investment, proactively seek to establish a healthy, inclusive school ethos of motivated learning over the long term;

- Secondary practices attend to individuals disaffected with their learning; and

- Tertiary practices are intensive interventions in response to serious disruption and to prevent exclusions.

Figure 2: A public health model for a restorative approach to school discipline
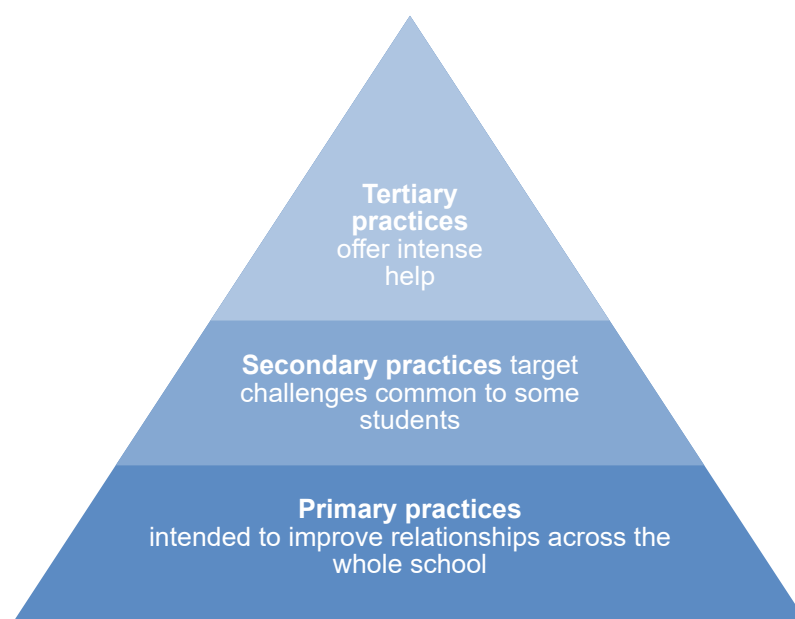
Among proactive practices are all those that this paper has discussed so far, from support for student wellbeing (peace with oneself) through the cultivation of healthy peer relations (peace between us) to community-building (peace among us).

Responsive practices range from a quick teacher-student chat in or after class to deal with a minor issue. Responses to more serious incidents include dedicated time for a conference of all parties, first to explore the incident and its effects in depth, and then to decide together what should happen next. Accordingly, it is critical that offenders make authentic apologies for the harm they have caused, rather than token admissions that avoid genuine responsibility. This depends, in turn, on how well they are supported to develop their relational competences over the long term, such as empathy, self-awareness, and emotional literacy.[262]

Typically, training begins with the school's senior leadership team, moving then to other staff and, finally, to students.[263] Training support then continues, gradually tapering as RP is integrated into the school's culture. Over time, restorative concepts 'become the language of the corridor, become the language of the classroom', observes Belinda Hopkins of Transforming Conflict,[264] as they are gradually established as the norm. The longer that students experience a restorative environment, research shows, the more likely they are to assume its principles as their own.[265]

Despite the name, RP cannot always 'repair the harm' that bullying and personal conflicts cause.[266] Nor is it a panacea for student disaffection conditioned by adversity at home, in the community, and in students themselves as their personalities develop. Advocates of RP claim not that the approach is absolutely effective, only that it is more effective than traditional approaches to discipline, while also being fairer and pedagogically more valuable. In contrast to a disciplinarian approach, RP builds conflict literacy into a school's disciplinary arrangements, centres them on the needs of individuals (those who have caused harm and been caused harm) and broadens the range of options available for maintaining a healthy learning discipline.[267]

The restorative approach recognises that interpersonal conflicts are frequently conditioned by cultures of dominance and exclusion, particularly those that target students' class, gender, heritage, (dis)ability and sexuality, among other markers of identity. Were RP merely concerned with 'resolving conflicts', remaining insensitive to the wider social norms that often drive them, it would not only leave intact the conditions for future conflict but also tacitly condone them. Increasingly, practitioners in schools are taking a social justice perspective on the work,[268] the scope of which is consequently expanding to include 'creating restorative justice structures and systems, not just restorative justice interpersonal processes', according to the activist and restorative justice pioneer, Fania Davis. She continues:

> 'If we as restorative justice practitioners truly are committed to the goals of restoring interpersonal harm, we must also be committed to transforming the contexts in which we do this work: the socio-historical conditions and institutions that are structured precisely to perpetuate harm…'[269]

Evidence from various countries shows that practices associated with a restorative approach bring multiple benefits right across the ecology of the school community. In brief, restorative practices:

- Tend to be recognised as fair by students,[270] enhance self-discipline,[271] and lead to an improved experience of school overall;[272]

- Improve classroom discipline,[273] strengthen teacher-student relationships,[274] and improve the teaching experience;[275]

- Enhance the conflict-management skills of teachers;[276]

- Reduce the anger and fear of students who have been victimised;[277]

- Contribute to a calmer school atmosphere;[278] and

- Are more effective in reducing school exclusions than more punitive approaches, without apparent detriment to the learning climate.[279]

- In addition, some evidence from the criminal justice system indicates that restorative conferencing is more likely to reduce the recurrence of violent behaviour than formal disciplinary responses, such as going to court.[280]

Typical of the impact of restorative practices on exclusions is this report from a British study in 2020:

'In many of the [school] settings – particularly the ones in which RP was deeply embedded – rates of… exclusion were widely reported to have significantly reduced, or in the case of permanent exclusions, to not take place at all. This was generally seen as a policy decision where a will to not exclude was linked to organisational change and innovative ways of working that were supportive of RP.

'In schools that still felt the need to exclude in some capacity, the "massive reduction in fixed-term exclusions" [headteacher] from 250 per year to 14 that was reported in [a secondary school] was pinned directly to the use of RP and a broader relational ethos in school… As a result, fixed-term exclusion in embedded settings changed from a broad brush and frequently applied approach to behaviour management, to a more targeted and rarely used [measure].'[281]

The abundant evidence for the benefits of a restorative approach shows that the cost of sustaining a conducive learning environment need not be the exclusion of students who disrupt it.

Experience of restorative approaches to school discipline

'Through prioritising relationships using restorative practice, both student-student and adult-student, and focusing on hope, happiness and social justice, our school has not only increased its achievements, but also over the last two years shows a two-thirds reduction in fixed-term (temporary) exclusions. Since introducing restorative practice we've made no permanent exclusions.'

Les Hall, headteacher, Mounts Bay Academy, Cornwall.[282]

Carr Manor Community School in Leeds is 'committed to a relational approach to a child's education', striving to cultivate 'positive peace' through its whole curriculum and community. Having integrated coaching circles, restorative practices including peer mediation, and peace language into the school's culture, students and teachers report reduced violence and increased agency among students: '[T]he confidence that the children have… Normally that's a skill that you acquire later in life, but because they're empowered and they know that the adults around them really care about not only their academics but how they develop as a person, you can see that in how confident they are…'

Bena Asomaning, teacher and coach, Carr Manor Community School, Leeds.[283]

'There is a palpable difference in a restorative school as soon as you walk through the door: greater connection between children of different ages; greater connection between students and teachers, between teachers and administration. Students describe a sense of pride in their [school] community because they feel like they have ownership. They develop a skillset for problem-solving at the ground level. Teachers describe their classrooms as being calmer. Administrators spend way less time doling out suspensions and much more time delegating peacemaking.'

Katy Hutchison, who advocated for restorative justice after the murder of her husband and has shared her story of reconciliation in over 500 schools around the world.[284]

A tale of two countries: School discipline in England and Scotland

As zero tolerance has proliferated across English schools over the last decade, in Scotland the policy culture has tended to turned away from punitive strategies and towards a more inclusive approach to discipline,[285] as is commonly seen in continental Europe.[286]

Whereas the English strategy equates the loss of classroom discipline with 'poor behaviour' and the solution as 'improving behaviour', loading the burden of responsibility onto the student who has 'no excuses',[287] policy in Scotland emphasises the cultivation of relationships.[288] While headteachers in England may expel a student for 'repeatedly disobeying academic instructions',[289] the Education Scotland's guidance presumes the inclusion of all students, including those who repeatedly exhibit challenging behaviour.[290] The view of Education Scotland is that mere punishment of disruptive behaviour 'can be ineffective, dangerous, breed resentment and make situations worse as a child or young person can be resentful of punishment rather than reflective of their actions'.[291]
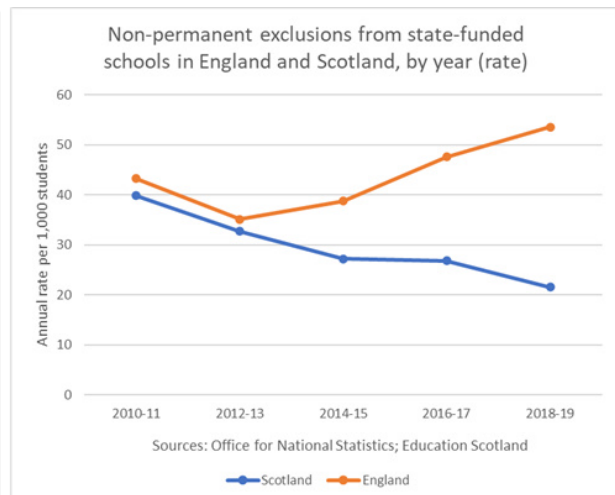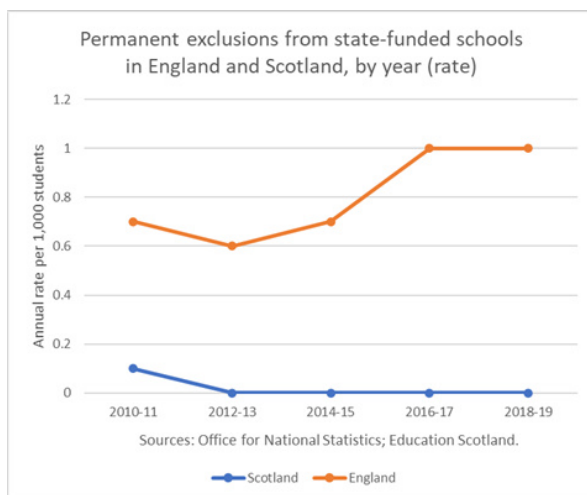
Titled *Included, Engaged, Involved*, the Scottish guidance argues that the way to an effective learning environment lies in a communitarian climate of mutual respect between students and staff:

'The foundation for schools, learning establishments and education authorities is a whole school ethos of prevention [of exclusion], early intervention and support against a background which promotes positive relationships, learning and behaviour.'[292]

The guidance promotes restorative justice practices, anti-bullying programmes, and inclusive community, while reserving exclusion as a sanction of last resort for cases when the safety of students and staff cannot otherwise be assured.

In Scottish schools, this relational approach is becoming more common than behaviour-centred models,[293] and teachers have tended to embrace it.[294] Rather than precipitating widespread ill-discipline, teachers report no increase in seriously disruptive behaviour while the government guidance has been in place.[295] Research found that school ethos in Scotland has been particularly important as a determinant of student behaviour, more so than both the (in)experience of teachers and local socio-economic conditions.[296] Researchers also found that teachers tend to value working in a school with a communitarian ethic, in which student voices are valued and heard.[297] Similarly, students in Scotland are more likely than those in England to rate their experience of school highly.[298]

Meanwhile, the rate of exclusions from Scottish schools has plummeted. By 2018–19, the annual number of non-permanent exclusions had fallen by nearly half over a decade, from 26,784 to 14,987, while the annual number of students permanently excluded had dropped from 60 to just three.[299] [300] Charts 1 and 2 show the diverging exclusion rates in England and Scotland.[301]

Permanent exclusions from state-funded schools in England and Scotland, by year (rate). Sources: Office for National Statistics; Education Scotland.

Non-permanent exclusions from state-funded schools in England and Scotland, by year (rate). Sources: Office for National Statistics; Education Scotland

Peace in the world: Taking a stand

As children learn about their world, they come to appreciate that its health is in the balance; it invites their attention and care. Schools should support them to explore the issues that matter to them and to grow into adulthood as thoughtful, active participants in their society.

> '[Children are] capable, from the earliest years, of thinking in critical and exploratory ways, of developing valid opinions and of moral reasoning – and hence of being trustworthy in the search for authentic truth and understanding.'[302]
> Don Rowe and Ann Watson

Learning to relate to society

In the words of Hannah Arendt, education becomes 'the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it'.[303] Schools fail young people if they merely guide them to subsist in their society as passive citizens; they also have a responsibility, shared with the adult generation in general, to support their students to discern what is at stake in their world and to act on it in good conscience.[304] Schools must be 'more than transmitters of information but also sites of complex personal and civic development',[305] so that young people make the transition to adulthood with the critical awareness and social concern needed to help sustain and shape their society.

Peace education is citizenship education.[306] It believes in young people by assuming that they broadly share humane concerns and aspirations for the world around them,[307] and it treats the challenges that society faces as opportunities for socially engaged learning.[308] The hope is that young people develop as critically thoughtful and socially concerned members of society, actively engaged in its wellbeing.

- What do we care about in our world, and why?

- How is our school helping us, or otherwise, to handle the pressures that today's society places on us?

- Are we cultivating the courage to develop our own viewpoints and speak up for them, while sustaining a genuinely open interest in the views of others?

- As learners, are we becoming more critically aware, better able to tell subtle truths from appealing lies?

- As citizens, are we becoming more compassionately concerned, taking an active interest in the wellbeing of other people and the natural world?

Context: Hope and despair in a society under strain

Young people wrestle often with their hope for the world and their despair of it. On the one hand, they face consumer pressures and fake news daily, hate groups are on the increase, climate breakdown and economic crises loom. Many are dismayed at political leaders and the press.[309] Surveys show waning hope among the young for their society and their place in it,[310] with two-thirds of adolescents in the UK expecting their generation to be unhappier and poorer than that of their parents.[311]

On the other hand, more young people eschew than assume hostile social attitudes. Many are actively involved in, and often helping to lead, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Fridays for Future, while others are involved in local projects to support vulnerable migrants and homeless people. More than half of young people in Britain recognise climate breakdown as a major issue facing the country,[312] and US research shows that young children are effectively schooling their parents in climate issues.[313] And despite geopolitical pessimism and loss of faith in traditional democratic institutions, young people are more likely than their parents' generation to get involved in direct action, protests, strikes, boycotts, and rallies.[314]

A complex picture emerges of anxiety about the future, combined with a desire for a better world, and yet also frustration with political marginalisation. Children repeatedly report that their concerns go unheard and their opinions unsought. In the words of a young *Newsround* interviewee: 'I don't think adults are listening enough to children because even though we protest, they don't hear it, like, it seems like they're in a different room…'[315]

Young people have the right and responsibility to live politically expressive, socially conscious lives. Amid our ecological, economic, and cultural crises – however they may be understood – it matters that schools are where social norms are first negotiated and embedded. It matters, in consequence, whether schools encourage and stand by their students' hopes for their world or compound their despair. Few young people believe that their school encourages them in their nascent political interests. Surveys of young people in nine European countries have found that 'high per centages' believe that their education badly underprepares them to participate in the political questions of their society, and that they want this to change.[316] If it does not, society will pay a high price too, as an increasingly disengaged public faces an increasingly unequal and volatile world.

When researchers asked students in Canada to imagine a school that engaged them effectively in their learning, they replied that they wanted to 'solve real problems, engage with knowledge that matters, make a difference in the world, be respected, see how subjects are interconnected, learn from and with each other and people in their community, connect with experts and expertise, [and] have more opportunities for dialogue and conversation'.[317] In Finland, this is the norm. Its government has integrated a critical thinking curriculum into its school system, and the country is ranked as having the highest level of media literacy in Europe, as well as the most-free press.[318] Polling of parents and teachers in Britain shows that they also want this for their young people and believe that schools should be teaching skills such as critical thinking and creative problem-solving.[319]

The exploration of political issues in schools is actively encouraged by government.[320] It is 'particularly important in certain subjects, for example, citizenship or history', according to the Department for Education.[321] But many teachers remain wary of bringing overtly political questions into the classroom,[322] mindful of their statutory duty to introduce controversial topics in a balanced way.[323] Critical educators respond that politics is already latent in the curriculum. The teaching of history, geography, and literature, for example, involves inevitable, if often unconscious, choices to include and exclude certain content according to the passions, preferences and prejudices of staff.

Such implicit, uninterrogated choices constitute invisible political messaging that powerfully influences students' attitudes and may reproduce cultures of exclusion and violence. A history curriculum based on the stories of kings and queens conveys a different message about political power and social progress than one that draws on the public experience of their reign. A science curriculum that lauds white male pioneers alone conveys an implicit message about the relative worth of women and people of colour as thinkers, leaders, and social benefactors. For the same reason, it matters what Remembrance Day assemblies remember of war and what they forget, and which charitable organisations are chosen for school community fundraisers and which are passed over, and why.

Societal pressures on young people

- **Major societal stresses** – economic, ecological, cultural, social, and most recently epidemiological – are putting families and communities under strain. A consequence is a more polarised society[324] and increasingly fractious political discourse.[325]

- **Waning trust in democratic institutions** is turning the public off formal politics, with younger people most likely to report disenchantment with official avenues for participation.[326] Asked to rate the trustworthiness of the government and parliament on a scale of 0 to 10, young adults rated each institution at 4 in a representative poll in 2017.[327] Dissatisfaction with British democracy has grown markedly since 2018 to include more than half of the public.[328]

- **Fake news** is on the rise, including hateful material in the popular press and online, much of it targeted at children.[329] By intentionally manipulating children's perspectives, propagators of fake news abuse their right to make informed judgements about the social issues that matter to them, and yet their education commonly leaves them without the core skills to tell the truth from the lies. The Commission on Fake News and Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills found in 2018 that only two per cent of children learn how to discriminate between real and fake news stories.[330] Half of the teachers surveyed believed the curriculum fails to equip students with the critical thinking skills they need.[331]

- **Hate groups** are also on the rise.[332] Islamist groups spread disinformation to recruit school students to their lasting harm, as shown by the stories of Shamima Begum and others.[333] Meanwhile, far-right groups feed on prevalent anti-immigration and Islamophobic public attitudes. Approximately 45 per cent of the public believe that 'there are too many immigrants' in the UK,[334] a third believe that Islam presents a threat to a notional 'British way of life', and a similar proportion of secondary school students believe that 'Muslims are taking over our country'.[335]

- **Social media** present politically marginalised young people with accessible opportunities to express themselves on the issues that matter to them, but online political discourse tends to be reactive and intolerant, with few occasions for open-minded exchange. Research shows that girls and socio-economically deprived young people are also much less likely to participate.[336]

Open enquiry

As a critical pedagogy, peace education treats social issues not as abstract intellectual questions waiting for the correct answer, but as open-ended queries that are rooted in the experiences of learners themselves and which lead towards active engagement in society. Concerned with 'peace' in its broadest sense as social and ecological health, educators wonder with their students why they experience unsafety in their community, consumer pressures, discrimination, bias in the news, and uncertain employment prospects once they leave school. Indeed, critical peace educators invite their students to reimagine the meaning of 'peace' itself, and of 'violence', drawing on their own experiences.[337]

As children develop an interest in major socio-structural matters such as wealth-creation and inequality, ecological health and breakdown, global security and war, human rights and their abuses, and political participation and marginalisation, their education should support them to come to their own conclusions about social progress and the causes of social problems. Indeed, all children are entitled in law to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds', and to express themselves freely,[338] including on controversial topics such as war, racism, and climate breakdown. They should be supported to discern for themselves, with critical awareness, when to support the *status quo* and when to dissent from it.

A facilitative approach is needed: 'The purpose is not to imprint the world that has to be accepted as such, but to show the world as a dynamic process in constant need of renewal,'[339] writes the educationalist Dirk Postma. For this purpose, a peace pedagogy draws on a range of other specialist educational fields, such as global citizenship education, sustainable development education, and human rights education, with an emphasis on facilitating collaborative enquiry to explore the questions these raise. Factual learning is essential, but the pedagogy is equally concerned with education as a peace process itself: an exploratory exchange, to which students bring expertise as well as curiosity, and teachers come as learners as well as elders.

Centred fundamentally on the rights and needs of young people, peace education aims to encourage students' developing political thought without manipulating it – to raise political questions without answering them on students' behalf. Teachers, mindful of their power, try not to know best; their knowledge-wisdom matters less than their process-wisdom, which is used to cultivate trust and respect.[340] Mike Ogunnusi, a youth worker and peace educator writes:

'Encouraging participants to recognise and hear their own voices, and those of each other, can be empowering, especially for those people who feel their voices are often unheard, silenced or muted. This requires that adults deliberately allow the [circle] to be a young person's space, and not submit to the desire to fill silences, smooth awkwardnesses, or simply react to what is heard.'[341]

In practising paying attention to others, speaking up for themselves, and keeping an open mind, mutual inspiration and mutual dissent both become educationally productive for participants.

Such 'authentic open enquiry'[342] faces both outward to the wider world and inward to the values and motivations of its participants. The process should engage participants intellectually through factual discovery, but also emotionally and ethically, such that they discern their own considered viewpoints and, essentially, can point to the principles that lie behind them. The risk of omitting the emotional and ethical dimensions of enquiry is to leave the learning 'rudderless', such that participants acquire abstract knowledge without a sense of its consequences for them or their world.

As the enquiry progresses, participants begin to shape a conscious, reflexive relationship with their world, coming to their own sense of what they 'stand for' as members of their society. They are invited to wonder together about how society might be different, in ways worse and better than it is now,[343] and how this relates to them personally: 'What does this subject have to do with me, my life, and the society in which I live?'[344] They may wonder also: Where is the hope here, can we see ourselves as part of it, and what kind of commitment might this lead into?

An interest in peace as the health of society concerns more than a series of personal lifestyle choices such as recycling, neighbourliness, and charitable giving. While ethical behaviours matter, as a critical pedagogy peace education is also concerned with power: who has it, how it is used, in whose interests, to whose benefit, and whose cost. Educators encourage learners to notice how power structures relationships to establish a social culture in which certain attitudes, values, and behaviours are encouraged and rewarded, and others shunned and suppressed.

Figure 3: Learning for informed civic responsibility[345]

Rudderless Civic Knowledge
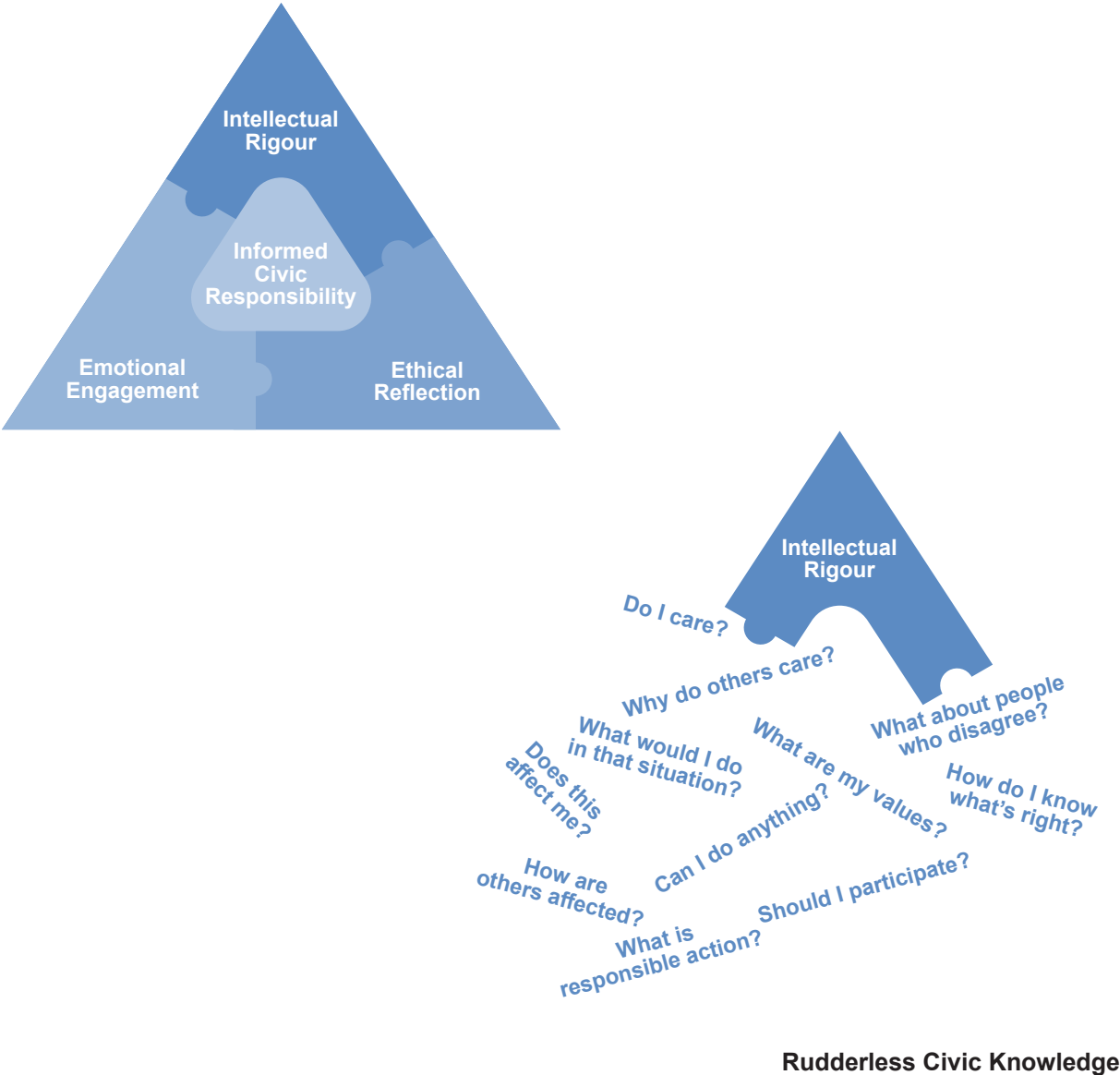
Source: Adapted from
Facing History and Ourselves[345]

Critically aware students, who have been supported to explore their own views reflectively rather than merely digest what they have been told, are more resilient to politics that trade on hate. Research in Germany, for example, found that children who develop critical awareness are more resilient to fascism and authoritarianism in adulthood.[346] Multiple secondary benefits of similarly dialogic approaches have also been reported: increased student engagement, sustained attention, improved listening skills, greater respect in communication, and reductions in disruptive behaviour.[347]

Society in the curriculum

Whereas the teaching of social issues in schools is usually squeezed into one or two subject areas, notably PSHE and citizenship, complex social problems are transdisciplinary challenges that benefit from insights across the school curriculum. A critical, coherent exploration of the climate crisis, for example, is hard to imagine without perspectives from maths and science, social science, the humanities, and the creative disciplines. A learning community committed to the principles of peace will also consider critically how it responds to events in wider society, such as Remembrance Day, Black History Month, and royal events.

In turn, major social issues offer engaging, real-world frames for teaching, particularly if they can be brought to bear on students' own experience. For example, young people encounter the industrial food system in what they eat, the global clothes supply chain in what they wear, bias in the marketing and media they consume, and economic dynamics in their community's quality of life. These are the contexts in which young people may appreciate intimately the social and political issues in which they themselves are implicated. Such themes lend themselves to study across several subject areas – through maths and science, for example, or art and design – while offering an appealing 'way in' to the prescribed curriculum. Sarah Beagley, headteacher at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson secondary in London, describes her school's commitment to shape the curriculum around the interests and perspectives of students:

'For our young people, they have to see themselves in the curriculum – they have to see themselves represented positively – and you will see that all around the school building in the displays, in the choices of texts, in the people that we hold up to aspire to, in the people that come into the school building to talk… [T]he culture is now established to such a degree that the young people would not allow us *not* to engage in this work, and I think that is really powerful in and of itself.'[348]

Sixth Formers at Bacon's College learn conflict resolution skills from local mediation service
Photo: CALM Mediation

England: Government guidance on political impartiality in schools

Guidance issued in 2022 elaborates the Westminster Government's understanding of the law, which prohibits schools in England from 'the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject' and requires them to offer a 'balanced presentation of opposing views' on such issues (Education Act 1996, Sections 406–407).

'Political' and 'non-political'

The Government understands 'partisan political views' to mean those that concern social issues about which more than one reasonable perspective may be held, such as those concerning public policy, political ideology, and current affairs at home and abroad. As examples the guidance mentions economic ideologies, funding decisions about the health and police services, and perspectives on violent conflict overseas.

Some 'areas of ethical debate' are not deemed 'political' for the purposes of the guidance:

• Issues based on 'shared principles that underpin our society', such as human rights principles, challenging prejudice, and opposing identity-based discrimination.

• Perspectives substantiated by a general 'factual consensus', such as official medical advice on Covid19 and the fact that the climate is changing.

It is for teachers to 'continue to use their own judgement' to determine when an issue is 'political'.

Teaching 'political issues'

Students' engagement with political issues 'should be encouraged' and is 'particularly important in certain subjects, for example, citizenship or history'.

Teachers should 'avoid implying that a single view' is the only reasonable one to hold, though all views can and should be critically assessed according to a 'fair and dispassionate' approach. Incorrect or unsubstantiated factual claims should be challenged.

A 'balanced presentation of opposing views' refers to views that are 'significantly different'. Such balance need not be achieved immediately, provided it is achieved over time. For example, two outside speakers, each with opposing political views, may be invited to visit a school several weeks apart.

Implications

The following school activities would not be deemed 'political' under the guidance, provided they are based on 'shared principles that underpin our society' such as 'fundamental rights, tolerance and challenging discrimination and prejudice':

- Setting up a students' human rights group, anti-racism group, or climate awareness group.

- Promoting 'British values' through school displays and communications.

- Black History Month activities.

The following teaching content is compatible with the guidance provided 'significantly different' perspectives are included in a 'dispassionate and fair' manner:

- The impact of immigration.

- The history of a violent conflict.

- The meaning of Remembrance Day.

It would be also compatible with the guidance to introduce such significantly different views as the following, provided they were not promoted over reasonable alternatives:

- That students should be proud of their country's history or ashamed of it.

- That the neoliberal economic model is more or less beneficial than others.

- That the Second World War was either a just or unjust war.

The following staff-supported school activities would be compatible with the guidance provided that the initiative came from students who were at least 12 years old, and not from staff or external agencies:

- Setting up an asylum seeker solidarity group.

- Calling a peaceful protest in the community.

- Writing to the local MP.

Accountability

Teachers are discouraged from expressing their own views on political questions, but may do so judiciously, mindful not to misuse their position of power and privilege before their students.

Parents/carers' concerns about political partiality in the classroom should be 'treated seriously', and they have the right to raise a formal complaint.

Teaching political issues: Open enquiry in practice

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School, a north London secondary, aims to support the social conscience of its staff and students.

In 2020, when violence in Palestine and Israel hit the headlines, students voiced concerns to the headteacher. Teachers responded with a 'Thought for the week' in tutorial time, while sharing some anxiety about the politically charged nature of the issues raised. A need for staff training was identified to prepare senior leaders and teachers to talk about the issue, and the learning was risk-assessed to ensure it would be safe for students of different backgrounds, including Jewish and Muslim students. Teachers then felt better able to support students to come to their own critical appraisals of the actions of the Israeli government and Hamas, and develop an appreciation of distinct identities like Palestinian, Jewish, Israeli and Muslim. The school's explicit commitment to anti-racism allowed it to foreground this in the response.

The response proceeded in two phases. In the first, the school's History Lead identified queries to guide students' critical thinking: *What is happening in Palestine and Israel, and what are its effects?* Teachers drew on information from official sources and reputable independent sources to create their own learning materials.

The second phase aimed to deepen students' understanding of the social and historical context. Prompted by students' desire to understand why the events were taking place, staff began to facilitate and support their enquiry, conscientiously querying any reductive narratives. The school dedicated an off-timetable day to learning on the topic with follow-up in class afterwards.

The History Lead characterised the approach as one of 'principled impartiality', which consciously eschewed taking one side over another, remaining committed to the right of all sides to peace and justice. 'I was really inspired by how they responded,' she said of the students.

This process predated new guidance on political impartiality in English schools, but is compatible with it nonetheless:

'When political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, including by the activity and political expression of other pupils, and schools are aware of this, they should offer pupils a balanced account of opposing views. This means that where there is the widespread political activity by pupils, it may be appropriate for schools to proactively address and teach about the issues being raised. This should be done in line with this guidance and requirements on impartiality.'

Beyond the classroom

As a socially engaged pedagogy, peace education seeks opportunities for students to learn directly from their community. External speakers are chosen, often by students themselves, for their pedagogical value in illuminating the practical meaning of healthy relationships in the wider world. Speakers may be drawn from welfare and wellbeing organisations, social enterprises, solidarity groups, and campaigners, for example. Especially, individuals with stories to share, such as war veterans or refugees, can engage the 'whole student', stimulating critical thinking, creative imagination, and social concern. In turn, learners are also encouraged to contribute meaningfully to their local community's wellbeing through projects and campaigns. Building connections with people living in unfamiliar sections of the community, for example, contributes a sense of local belonging and social purpose, which can elude many young people.

For the same reasons, peace educators are sceptical of contact with organisations that offer to support learning only to seek something from students in return, such as their time, money, labour, or support for a particular viewpoint. These tend to be the best-resourced organisations, well-placed to capitalise on schools whose choices of external contributors are merely opportunistic. Companies with large school outreach programmes include those that profit from arms,[349] fossil fuels,[350] and fast food,[351] for example. The risk to students is that partial, biased information skews their perspectives on important social subjects. Students may also be led into making consequential choices without the information, critical perspective – and sometimes the maturity – needed to make an informed choice in their best interests. The risk to the school is that, by allowing the trust invested in it to be leveraged for commercial interests, students lose faith in it.

Visits by external agencies are covered by the Department for Education's official guidance on political impartiality only insofar as speakers intend to convey overtly political messages.[352] Tacit political messages are not touched upon. For example, the guidance does not point out the risk of deception that arises from business interests that present marketing messages as educational, and which also convey political perspectives. For example, a classroom visit by a fast-food company, though not overtly political, is tacitly political if the speakers present the effect on health and ecology of agroindustry and fast-food multinationals as benign. Reasonable alternative perspectives to the company's message clearly exist, without which students may be gravely misled about an important social issue. Even were the company's intervention not deemed 'political' for the purposes of the Education Act, it would still be exploitative if, for example, it characterised fast-food products as good to consume. Such would constitute a tacit marketing exercise, by which the company seek not only children's favour but also their money, and which schools have a duty not to indulge.

Similarly, the guidance clearly requires schools to treat campaigning organisations that argue for the prevention of military action in all cases as 'political', but not the arms companies that sponsor some schools and offer curricular support for STEM subjects by showing students how weaponry works. That both these types of external intervention convey a 'political' message about the value of military action is a fact that the official guidance fails to recognise. No organisation visits more schools in the UK than the armed forces, whose personnel offer curricular support but with the overriding purpose of encouraging students to enlist, which they may do from age 16.[353] The army's schools teams are 'skilled salesmen', according to the former head of army recruitment.[354] They paint a glamorous picture of military life while playing down the risks and difficulties.[355] Absent from recruiters' overtures is vital information in young people's interests: that enlistment withdraws fundamental human rights and imposes sweeping legal obligations that would be unlawful in civilian life,[356] for example, and that nearly one in three young army recruits choose to leave or are dismissed within the first few months.[357]

In response to longstanding concerns about armed forces' visits to schools, the Welsh government has agreed on the need for written guidance for headteachers,[358] and the Scottish Government has proposed similar guidance for local authorities.[359] The Children's Commissioners for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have gone further, calling for the enlistment age to be raised to 18, as have the UN, health professionals, and the National Education Union.[360] Despite these well-evidenced concerns, most headteachers readily accept requests from the armed forces to promote military careers to adolescents and younger children, and some schools have signed formal partnerships.[361]

Military recruitment in Leicester city centre.
Photo: Civic Leicester
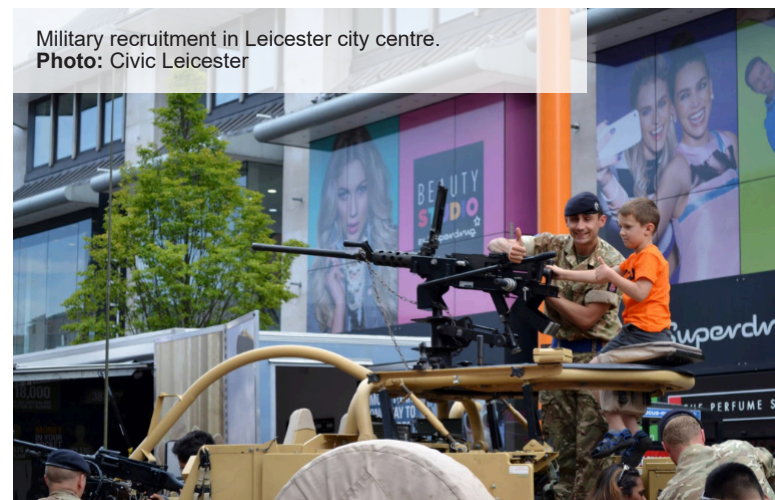
Managing external relationships: Three queries for critical peace educators

Is it useful? Does this contact with students promise to inspire educationally productive queries and exchanges?

Is it balanced? Does the organisation provide balanced and impartial information? If not, can this be balanced in the classroom by the teacher and students, or by a visit from a second organisation to offer a dissenting view?

Is it gifted? Is the organisation's offer made without the intention of influencing students for its own gain?

Democratic action

Peace education treats students as more than citizens in waiting; they already enjoy a right as children to develop their political literacy and to express themselves in thought and action. Schools may support students in thoughtful, democratic acts of their own, as both an exercise of civic rights and a first-hand education in the value – and limitations – of social action.

Research in several European countries has found that direct democratic engagement through social movements tends to widen students' concern beyond a personal interest in lifestyle choices towards lasting and active involvement in their society.[362] Research in Canada has also found that student involvement in democratic action can bring lasting benefits to themselves and their society:

'[Y]oung people who become involved in civic associations, as well as young people who vote, are significantly more likely to have been involved in civic education at school and to have been able to practise democracy at school, through acting as a student representative or being involved in associations, political meetings or protests. Significantly, practising democracy at school [was found to increase] political activism of young people later in life through activities like protests, petitions, strikes and solidarity actions even when those young people had a low level of trust in the political institutions.[363]

'Engaging students as active and respected decision-makers also contributes to important adolescent development outcomes such as agency, belonging, and competence and to the development of skills necessary for students to participate as active citizens beyond the classroom.'[364]

School support for student–led social action

In 2005, Agnesa, a student at Drumchapel High School in Glasgow, was arrested in her home with her family in a dawn raid and incarcerated pending deportation to Kosovo. Her schoolfriends rallied round, among them refugees whose own families had, like Agnesa's, fled war crimes in their home countries. With the support of a teacher, Euan Girvan, the girls collected signatures from their community on a petition, persuaded parliamentarians to take an interest, and gained national media coverage. When the Home Office admitted that Agnesa's family could be killed if deported to Kosovo, they were released and returned to Glasgow. Agnesa's solidarity group, now known as the Glasgow Girls, stayed together to raise widespread public awareness of the trauma that Home Office raids cause to children and their families, and to campaign for an end to them.[365]

On their own initiative, the Glasgow Girls took democratic action on an urgent matter of shared concern that arose from their own experience, and the school supported them. In the words of Amal, herself a refugee: 'Without the support of teachers and the community I wouldn't have achieved any of this. The school made us who we are. They guided us and allowed us to follow our passion. I am proud to be from Glasgow, and from Drumchapel.'[366]

Peace education in schools: Striving for coherency

As outlined so far, peace education in schools is concerned fundamentally with a coherent ecology of relationships across 'school life' as a whole: from the intrapersonal, through the interpersonal and collective, to engagement with the wider world.
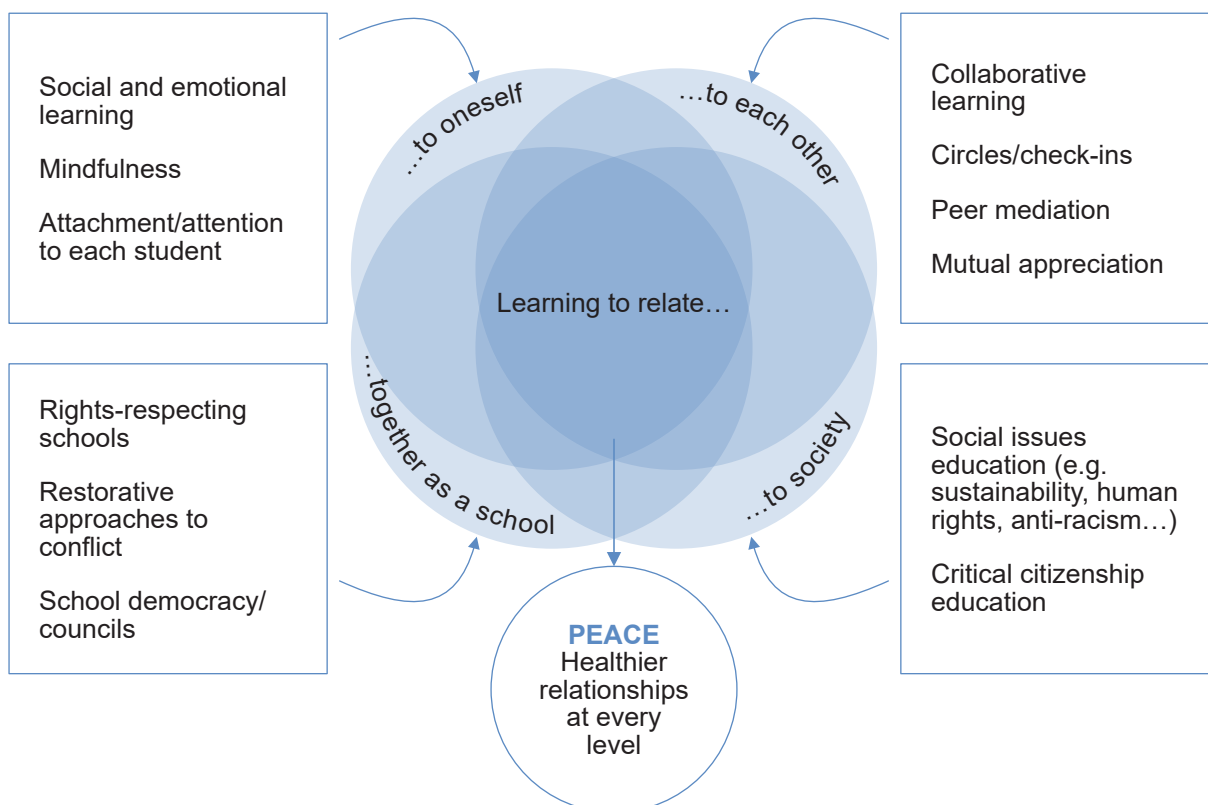
To this end, the approach brings all the school's tasks as an institution – teaching, cultivating discipline, building community, and so on – under a single, overarching commitment to the health of relationships at every level, with the hope of modelling 'peace' in the school as a flourishing community of learning.

A 'peace school' is not so much a place where the principles of peace are fully accomplished, but where they are practised and learnt every day. Schools need not start from scratch. The vocational drive of staff, the ingenuity and empathy of students, the de facto community of the playground, and all corners of the curriculum, already lend promise to every school as a daily experiment in healthy relating. In addition, various complementary educational models may be integrated naturally into a school committed to peace. Social and emotional learning (SEL), for example, supports students to cultivate healthy relationships with themselves, and restorative practices help to cultivate healthy classroom relationships and to build the school as a community. Global citizenship education and sustainable development education are among the pedagogical approaches concerned with students' relationships with their wider world.

Another is human rights education; 1.6 million children in the UK attend schools that carry the Rights-Respecting Schools Award sponsored by Unicef.[367] For these schools, incorporating complementary approaches into an overarching commitment to peace may be a natural step. For example, Alaw Primary, a rights-respecting school in Tonypandy, joined the Wales Peace School scheme to combine their existing commitment to human rights with mindfulness practices, restorative approaches to discipline, and active citizenship into a coherent approach to the health and learning of their school community.[368]

While striving for a coherent approach, peace education must stay alive to the contradictions that complicate its aims. Notable among these is the tension between aiming to model peaceful relationships at school and the unpeaceful conditions that young people may face at home and in their community. Other contradictions may be of the school's own making. A school that teaches children about the history of slavery but overlooks literature by people of colour or racist bullying in the playground, for example, or teaches self-esteem in PSHE but isolates children in silence for breaking a uniform rule, manifests contradictions that undermine it as an inclusive learning community. Further contradictions are communicated by society at large. A nation that rightly forbids young people to defend themselves with knives but also projects its military power abroad will struggle to convince them that civilised society has no place for violent behaviour, for example. Nonetheless, such contradictions, if highlighted as such, have great educational potential, and any school striving for a coherent approach to its relationships must be willing to work with them.

Figure 4: The peace school: Integrating complementary education practices into an overarching commitment to peace

Social and emotional learning

Mindfulness

Attachment/attention to each student

Rights-respecting schools

Restorative approaches to conflict

School democracy/ councils

...to oneself

...to each other

Learning to relate...

...together as a school

...to society

Collaborative learning

Circles/check-ins

Peer mediation

Mutual appreciation

Social issues education (e.g. sustainability, human rights, anti-racism…)

Critical citizenship education

PEACE
Healthier relationships at every level

Building knowledge of…	Cultivating attitudes of…	Enabling skills for…
The presence of violence and peace in behaviour, culture, social structures, and the causes and conditions of each.	Inclusive respect for self, other individuals, other cultures, and alternative viewpoints and values.	Constructive cooperation, mediation, facilitation.
Dynamics of relationships in conflict, and of peaceful, effective alternatives to violence from the interpersonal level to the social and ecological.	Curiosity, open-mindedness.	Inclusive dialogue, including attentive listening and the confidence to express thoughts and feelings.
Human rights in law and in practice.	Mutuality and interest in cooperation.	Critical awareness (including self-awareness and emotional literacy) and critical thinking.
Experiences of gender, race, class, (dis)ability, and of identity-driven inclusion and exclusion.	Empathy and solidarity, desire for inclusive justice.	Reflection and rumination.
Intercultural learning.		
Democratic processes and institutions.		
Current affairs and social issues.		

Peace schools in Wales

In Wales, a Peace Schools scheme supports staff to integrate peace principles and practices across four areas of school life: leadership and management, school ethos and community, teaching and learning, and the active involvement of students.[370] Over 40 primary and secondary schools are currently signed up.[371]

In each school, the project is led by a Steering Group that includes students. The group first drafts an action plan with specialist support for each of the four areas, tracking progress with a simple traffic light system. Schools can work towards recognition as a Peace School at three levels: Level 1 (*Laying the Foundations*), Level 2 (*Embedding Peace*), and Level 3 (*Global Citizens for Peace*). The scheme, simple to administer on a modest budget, continues to grow, and is readily replicable in other regions across Britain.

A complementary initiative – the Mid-Wales Peaceful Schools Project – aims 'to create an atmosphere in schools where pupils treat each other with respect, work together and learn skills to solve problems in a constructive way'. The project focuses on 'circle time' in primary schools, making use of games, stories, and discussion in pairs.[372]

The 'peace school' concept meshes well with the major changes in education policy in Wales since 2018. The new approach values experimentation, expecting schools to shape their own curriculum around four core purposes, of which two are to encourage students to develop as 'healthy, confident individuals', and as 'ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world'.[373] The peace schools initiative also helps to meet various new legal duties of schools in Wales: to consider the long-term impact of their work; to be informed by human rights; and to integrate the histories of people of colour into the curriculum.

At Clytha Primary School in Newport, a Peace School, students have learnt to recognise that they have a 'safe and peaceful place within them', cooperate more effectively and respect each other, and become more aware of events in the wider world and better able to discuss them.[374]

Rachel Evans, a history teacher at Dyffryn Aman Secondary School in Ammanford subscribed the school to the Peace Schools scheme because '…it fitted ideally with the work on critical thinking we wanted to do as a school. It is super for a cross-curriculum project – history, geography and maths… We began with Year 8 and are building it through the school'. Every fortnight, an assembly is dedicated to exploring the Sustainable Development Goals, including Ted talks and class discussions.[375]

In 2021, over 100 students and their teachers gathered online for the annual Wales Peace Schools conference. Focused on climate justice, participants learnt what this means for some of the world's most vulnerable communities, Among the pledges they made were to set up a Climate Action Group, plant trees, buy Fairtrade, recycle school uniform, and lobby politicians. One primary teacher said: '[The students had] originally thought that we're only one school so what difference would we make? They now understand that every small change makes a difference.'[376]

Cyfarthfa High School students re-enact tribunal of conscientious objector in WWI as part of Welsh Centre for International Affairs Peace School activities.
Photo: Isabel Cartwright

Peace Education and Public Policy

In Britain, particularly since the turn of the millennium, a growing network of peace education providers has won praise from teachers, headteachers, and school inspectors, and especially students.[377] As more schools take up the practices described in this paper, students report enthusiastically on the benefits to themselves and their peer group, not least to their learning, with staff affirming the same. Some teacher training institutions are also taking an interest, beginning to integrate peace education concepts and practices into their programmes.

Nonetheless, training in peace education and restorative justice practices is still mainly delivered by small charitable organisations without statutory funding. While they draw on a clear international mandate for their work, they lack the same at the national level. Meanwhile, a high-pressure school culture that tends to value students mainly for their academic output constrains opportunities for peace education, which values students for their inherent worth as persons with diverse gifts of intelligence and encourages teachers to experiment.

With these challenges in mind, this section addresses policymakers with a request to meet three essential needs of the field: the need for a clear moral commitment to students and staff; the need for a clear mandate from education departments; and the need to build the capacity for peace education and to develop its practices.

The need for a moral commitment to students and staff

If students are to learn to relate well to themselves and their world, education policy should be guided by a moral commitment to young people, and not only as learners in the narrowest of senses, but also as thinkers in their own right, co-creators of their own learning, and emerging democrats. Education should support and challenge young people, each as a whole person with their developing personality, encouraging them to grow in wisdom, vitality, and agency – at school, into adulthood, and for their whole lives. This is, after all, *their* education, which should therefore be centred on their fundamental interests and rights; and if their learning is to be shaped *for* them, it must also be shaped *with* them.

For students to benefit fully from their education, and from peace education in particular, the policy culture should:

- Centre the system and practices of education around students' rights, needs and hopes;

- Invest more trust in young people as learners, creators, thinkers, and agents, and encourage them accordingly;

- Believe in them unconditionally as whole and growing persons with intelligence of diverse kinds, rather than selectively for their academic performance alone; and

- Welcome the gifts that each offers to the school community, and accept the challenges they bring.

Much that peace education hopes to offer students, staff also need: a healthy relationship with themselves, with each other, with students, and with their school community. It follows that peace education invites as deep a commitment to a school's staff as to its students. At the least, it presupposes the cultivation of a professional culture that values and supports teachers in their socially vital vocation – one that recognises that students' interests lie not only in holding teachers to account, but also in trusting them with the freedom to create and experiment.

Unsurprisingly, teachers who experience a supportive, trusting culture report higher levels of occupational wellbeing.[378] But in Britain teachers show some of the highest rates of stress, depression, and anxiety,[379] and are twice as likely as their colleagues in economically similar countries to report work stress.[380] Most teachers in the UK do enjoy their work,[381] but their job satisfaction has been in decline since 2013 and is the lowest among comparable countries.[382] Teachers in England are more than twice as likely as the general population to rate satisfaction with their life in general as medium or low.[383]

To account for their stress, school staff point first to a relentlessly heavy workload, much of it administrative, and second to pressure to achieve continual improvements in their students' exam results.[384] Full-time teachers in England work an average of 51 hours per week, of which fewer than half are spent teaching.[385] Although most staff speak of their school as a collaborative environment, fewer teachers in the UK than in comparable countries say they participate meaningfully in decision-making.[386] Meanwhile, school leaders race to stay abreast of changing statutory requirements, which increase inexorably, particularly during the COVID19 pandemic.[387]

All our educators need:

- A greater measure of trust, and the freedom of action that this implies;

- Stronger support from each other, school leaders, and government;

- A working culture that better values their needs as professionals alongside the needs of students as learners; and

- Thorough and ongoing training, including stronger training in the relational skills on which an effective, inclusive teaching praxis critically depends.

Some schools, such as Roath Park Primary School in Cardiff, have taken principles of this kind to heart, having made explicit commitments to the wellbeing of their staff, centred on mutual trust and support.[388]

The need for a clear mandate

Learning to relate well to oneself, each other, and the wider world should be a fundamental aim of education in any society concerned with the rights of its young people and with its own wellbeing into the future.

Global and regional institutions recognise this, having given education for peace a clear and longstanding mandate. The UN,[389] European Union,[390] and African Union,[391] have repeatedly affirmed the need to educate for peace in schools and communities. The Paris Declaration of the European Union, for example, commits all its member states to 'promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education', which it defines as inclusive, values-based education that challenges discrimination and inequality.[392] The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals also both lay a duty on governments to ensure that education helps to build a culture of peace in the long term.

This duty is inconsistently enacted, but various education ministries have taken some steps towards embedding it into schools. French law, for example, requires that teachers be provided with 'training for the prevention and non-violent resolution of conflicts'.[393] The Bosnian government has approved the integration of peace education into all primary and secondary schools.[394] Jordan has committed substantial funding to large and successful peace education projects in schools, as had Afghanistan prior to the collapse of its government in 2021.[395]

In the UK, it falls to the Westminster and devolved governments together to enact their duty to educate for peace. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on the devolved governments of the UK to 'include the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system'.[396] This should include activities such as 'teaching human rights, building the capacities of students and staff members to respect diversity at school, [and] improving students' conflict-resolution skills'.[397]

Despite a clear international mandate, British schools and peace education providers lack political support at the national level. Schools that strive to put the quality of relationships at the heart of their mission, though they can achieve extraordinary results, are pushing uphill. In England, the policy climate incentivises headteachers to focus resources instead on behavioural conformity and academic output. In Scotland, where inclusive approaches to school discipline are more common, and in Wales, whose government has reimagined the school curriculum to give students' relational needs a central place, the ground may be more promising.

There is precedent for a peace education mandate in the UK. During the Troubles, all school in Northern Ireland were directed to educate for peace,[398] with a view to supporting all young people:

> '– to learn to respect and value themselves and others;
> – to appreciate the interdependence of people within society;
> – to know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions;
> – to appreciate how conflict may be handled in nonviolent ways.'[399]

The result was a wealth of pioneering peace education initiatives in schools and communities.[400]

A similar mandate today would establish a framework for ensuring that the essence of peace education – learning to relate well – suffuses the school experience for all students. Consequently, it would inform decisions about curriculum content, teaching practice, classroom discipline, and choices about which external organisations should be invited to work with students. To root the principles and practices of peace education into the policy culture in Britain, an effective mandate could include:

- A requirement that schools develop whole-school strategies for education towards healthy, engaged, fair relationships at all levels, including: relationships between peers, between peers and staff, as a community, with the wider world, and of each individual with themselves.

- A requirement that schools screen external interventions, such as outside speakers, according to students' desires, needs, and best interests, and particularly for the interventions' value in enhancing peace, inclusion, and relational learning.

The need to build capacity and develop practice

Providers of peace education and restorative approaches have earned a strong reputation, having grounded their practice in the research literature and built lasting relationships with local schools, particularly those in economically marginalised areas. Peacemakers in Birmingham, for example, has now been training schools in the West Midlands for over 30 years, supporting them to work creatively with conflict and build peaceful school communities.[401] CRESST in Sheffield has worked with 75 primary schools over 20 years to embed peer mediation schemes.[402] The Welsh Centre for International Affairs currently works with over 40 schools committed to becoming 'peace schools'.[403] In the West Country, RJ Working supports a growing network of schools and colleges to put restorative principles at the heart of education.[404] Transforming Conflict cites evidence from schools across Britain showing that introducing a restorative approach to school discipline has reduced exclusions against the national trend, while also increasing participation, enhancing engagement, improving academic attainment, and reducing staff absence due to stress.[405]

The record of these and similar organisations offer clear evidence of the demand for, and effectiveness of, the practices associated with peace education, but many areas of Britain have no access to this kind of support. With relatively modest statutory support, further training centres, operating as regional hubs, could be established to support many more schools more consistently across Britain.

Also essential is the progressive integration of peace education principles into initial teacher training courses, so that teachers may be equipped from the outset to bring the same principles into the classroom. Some teacher-training institutions are already exploring this, including Roehampton University, the Learning Institute in Cornwall, and University College London.[406] Meanwhile, further academic partnerships are needed to promote the continuing, critically reflective development of the field. The Peace and Education Research Group hosted at Cambridge University is an effective and replicable model.[407]

In sum, to support more schools and to develop the practices of peace education, practitioners and training providers need:

- A clear mandate and political support from national education departments;

- Statutory funding for development and training delivery; and

- Funding support for independent evaluation.

Opportunities and barriers: Prospects for peace education in the English, Scottish and Welsh education systems

England

The school system in England makes use of a prescribed curriculum to convey the 'essential knowledge' needed to be an 'educated citizen'.[408] The curriculum is divided into traditional academic subject areas, with English, maths, and science at the core, and places a strong emphasis on exams as the principal measure of learning.

The separation of most schools in England from local authority control, followed by widespread privatisation ('academisation'), the ranking of schools in league tables, the growing use of business values, and the extension of the right of parental choice, have created an education marketplace.

English schools have the largest class sizes in Britain.[409] Compared with Scotland and Wales, the English system is more stratified and less inclusive, with a higher degree of student selection; the streaming of high- and low-achieving students is common. Student exclusions have been rising steadily since the government has encouraged a 'zero tolerance' approach to unwanted behaviour.[410]

Scotland

The Scottish curriculum is defined more broadly than in England, intending young people to become 'successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; and effective contributors'.[411] Schools are directed 'to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes [students] need to adapt, think critically and flourish in today's world'. To these ends, schools are encouraged to make use of both the formal and the informal, or 'hidden', curriculum, such as in the character of the school community. Alongside traditional subjects and an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, the Scottish system gives a central place to the expressive arts, health and wellbeing, and social studies. While the purpose of the curriculum is prescribed, the content is largely left to teachers and school leaders to develop.

The Scottish system is less stratified and selective than the English, and since most schools remain in local authority control and league tables are not used, the marketisation of education is less pronounced. Scottish schools also enjoy the highest per-pupil funding in the UK and the highest teacher salaries, as well as the smallest class sizes, the greatest control of their own budgets, and the highest rate of satisfaction with their school infrastructure.[412]

Education Scotland's guidance on discipline is the most inclusive in Britain, leading to steadily falling rates of student exclusions over the last decade.[413] Scottish schools are more likely than those in England to seek feedback from students, and following the Scottish Government's decision in 2021 to incorporate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law, education policy will soon be tied to international human rights standards.

Wales

Of the three jurisdictions, the Welsh Government is the most adventurous in broadening the meaning and purposes of formal education. Following the Donaldson Review of 2015, from 2022 schools will be encouraged to use 'innovation and creativity' to design their own curricula.[414] Schools are to 'enable learners to develop' as rounded and capable personalities, as defined by four cardinal dimensions: 'ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society'.[415] The WCIA's Peace Schools scheme seems to cover every element of 'ethical informed citizens' and several aspects of 'healthy, competent individuals'. We therefore hope this scheme can be properly evaluated, and continue to develop and grow. All public bodies in Wales also have a legal duty to consider the impact of their work on future generations.[416]

As in Scotland, the scope of curricula is expected to branch out from traditional subjects to include arts and wellbeing, as well as communication skills, and to be informed by all the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was incorporated into Welsh law in 2011.[417] In 2021, the Welsh government also conferred a duty on all schools to include 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories and experiences in the curriculum'.[418] For more on peace education in the curriculum for Wales see the WCIA's peace education policy paper.

Despite these ambitions, Welsh schools are comparable to those in England as the least funded and with some of the highest student-teacher ratios in Britain.[419] In common with England, though to a lesser extent, the rate of exclusions in Wales has been increasing over the last decade, in marked contrast to the trend in Scotland.[420]

Conclusion

This report has outlined a comprehensively relational approach to learning in schools, which envisions education as a rich experience that combines academic achievement with personal development and social involvement, and the school itself as an inclusive community devoted to the needs of every participant. In particular, a fundamental intention of peace education is that young people leave school as more creative, thoughtful individuals, equipped for adult life with well–practised interpersonal skills, and ready to share responsibility for a society facing serious challenges. The evidence presented here shows a clear need for an approach of this kind, strong demand from students, teachers and parents, and manifest benefits to young people, school staff, and wider society.

> **'The education system should help all students, regardless of their social situation, so that they can fulfil their full potential.'**
> Semi, youth activist, *No Lost Causes campaign*.[421]

While not the responsibility of schools alone, their potential to establish a formative culture of peace complements the same, equally vital potential in other settings, particularly the family, community, and society as a whole. A significant obstacle in the UK is a degree of discord between peace principles and educational norms. The policy culture still tends to conceive of the school as a hothouse institution, measure success in narrow terms of academic performance, and constructs discipline as behavioural conformity. Nonetheless, educators and schools that take up peace education and related approaches such as restorative practice report remarkable results. The approach offers educators a creative, effective pedagogy that reaps rewards for teachers in job satisfaction and occupational wellbeing. It shows promise, also, in responding to problems raised by policymakers, particularly those concerning discipline in the classroom, anti-social behaviour in the streets, and the perennial need to cultivate critical citizenship.

Recommendations for policy

1. **Mandate.** The governments of England, Scotland and Wales explicitly recognise a duty to educate for peace, requiring schools to develop whole-school strategies for the cultivation of healthy, engaged, fair relationships across the learning community and beyond.

2. **Teacher training.** Training institutions are supported to embed peace education as a dedicated study stream for the initial training and continuous professional development of school and college teachers.

3. **Funding.** A fund is established for work to enhance school communities and peer and student-staff relationships, and to facilitate the strategic development of existing training providers while seeding new ones.

4. **Research.** Governments commit resources for independent research and evaluation of work in schools to enhance peaceful relationships, particularly restorative practices.

5. **External input.** Governments strengthen guidance on the involvement of external agencies to screen out those that either fail to enhance learning and critical thinking significantly, or compromise schools' duty to consider students' best interests and safeguard them from exploitation.

Educators on peace education

- 'If human beings are to move towards a less violent, more cooperative and caring mode of existence, it will require the broad development of all our potentialities […] educating individuals in the totality of their lives as moral, intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual persons.'[422]
Svi Shapiro, education scholar

- 'For me it's about relationships, with self, each other, community, nation, world, earth, and trying to develop respectful relationships which are as equal as possible while recognising structural inequalities, and trying to model the principles of peace so that we can build it one step at a time…'[423]
Isabel Cartwright, peace educator

- 'The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.' bell hooks, activist and scholar

On peace with oneself

- 'It's unfair to require the individual to simply be resilient – to regulate themselves – in the context of trauma and injustice, but educators can empower young people to build both the inner and the outward peace together.'
Ellis Brooks, peace educator

On peace with others

- 'We need to build the basic skills of communication, speaking, listening, cooperation, self-esteem, and valuing yourself, and also valuing of the other as well. Right from nursery schools… we can encourage young people to talk about themselves and listen to other people to get a sense of the other, to be able to work with everybody in the class… and for them to begin to develop social and emotional skills, which mean they are a healthy member of a healthy peaceful community.[424]
Hilary Cremin, education scholar

- 'Children need the opportunity to practise and potentially fail and recover in relationships. When there is time to practise and the structures are there to support them to do so, they will thrive.'
Richard Simcox, headteacher

On school as a peaceful community

- The aim of the school is 'the establishment of a community to which each child should contribute from [their] own growing confidence and competence, and in which [their] contribution would be spontaneous, not the by-product of regimentation…'[425] Alex Bloom, education pioneer

On peace in the world

- 'For citizens who will look after our civilisation and our world, we need all young people to develop these skills... communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, relational skills, and for that, they need not just to learn about them, but to experience them happening in school.'[426]
Sara Hagel, peace educator

- After visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Israel: 'When I came out into the sunlight I was overwhelmed with the realisation that as a teacher I had to help children find their peace so that they can create a peaceful world.'[427]
Neil Hawkes, former headteacher

- Addressing secondary school students: 'For me, every single one of us has a power, and that power is: we can commit to live our lives in peaceful ways; we can commit to make sure that, [with] the people who we surround ourselves with, we are part of their journey. [W]e can be educators, we can make change, and change happens right here, it happens with the relationships we form with each other. So never think that you are powerless, we are all stronger and more powerful than we know.'
Sarah Beagley, headteacher

Appendix

Who's who

For an annotated list of practitioners in the UK Peace Education Network, visit https://peace-education.org.uk/about-us.

Selected further reading

On peace education

- Belinda Hopkins, *The Restorative Classroom: Using Restorative Approaches to Foster Effective Learning* (Taunton: Optimus Education, 1999) and more at https://transformingconflict.org/teachers/belinda-hopkins/.

- Betty Reardon, *Comprehensive Peace Education: Educating for Global Responsibility* (2nd ed.) (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021).

- Colman McCarthy, *I'd rather teach peace* (New York: Orbis, 2008).

- Don Rowe and Anne Watson (eds.), *Faith and experience in education: Essays from Quaker perspectives* (London: Trentham Books, 2018).

- Global Campaign for Peace Education, https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

- Hilary Cremin and Terence Bevington, *Positive peace in schools: Tackling conflict and creating a culture of peace in the classroom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

- Hugh Starkey and Lee Jerome, *Children's Rights Education in Diverse Classrooms: Pedagogy, Principles and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

- Margaret Thosborne and Dave Vinegrad, *The Continuum of Restorative Practices In Schools, An Instructional Training Manual for Practitioners* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2022).

- Maria Hantzopoulos and Monisha Bajaj, *Education for peace and human rights: An introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

- Nancy Riestenberg, Gillean McCluskey and Margaret Thorsborne (Editors), *Getting More Out of Restorative Practice in Schools: Practical Approaches to Improve School Wellbeing and Strengthen Community Engagement* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018).

- Nel Noddings, *Peace education: How we come to love and hate war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

- Svi Shapiro, 'Towards a critical pedagogy of peace education', *Kultura, Społeczeństwo, Edukacja*, 2015, 1(7).

- Quaker Council for European Affairs, *Peace education: Making the case* (Brussels, 2020) www.qcea.org/peace/peace-education.

Resources for schools

- **IDEAS** is the network for championing Global Citizenship Education in Scotland https://www.ideas-forum.org.uk/

- Peace Education Network – resources and skill shares: https://peace-education.org.uk

- Peer Mediation Network – working with partners such as Scottish Mediation, the College of Mediators and the Mediation council, the members of the PMN provide training to make conflict resolution for young people widely available in Britain www.peermediationnetwork.org.uk

- Our Shared World – works in England to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 which states that by 2030 we 'ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including…a culture of peace and non-violence' www.oursharedworld.net

All schools

- Anna Lubelska, *How to be a peaceful school: Practical ideas, stories and inspiration* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018). For the Peaceful Schools Movement see https://www.peacefulschools.org.uk

- Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, Index for inclusion: Developing learning participation in schools. A well-researched and thoroughly tested suite of materials for auditing and building inclusiveness in schools. http://www.csie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-index-explained.shtml.

- Isabel Cartwright (ed.), Peace Week: Transforming activities for whole school engagement in human rights, citizenship and peacemaking. Creative activities for a school peace week.[428] https://www.quaker.org.uk/peace-week.

- Peace Education Network skill share sessions are usually free and open to all. https://peace-education.org.uk.

- Quaker Peace & Social Witness peace education resources. https://www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education.

- Restore Our Schools – Providing a restorative perspective, curated by a restorative collective of researchers, practitioners and school leaders in the light of Covid-19: https://restoreourschools.wordpress.com

- Welsh Centre for International Affairs, information on Peace Schools in Wales and resources https://www.wcia.org.uk/global-learning/peace-schools-in-wales.

Primary

- Peace Education Network, Teach peace. Ten assemblies, follow-up activities, and other resources on peace and peacemaking for 5–12 year olds.[429] www.peace-education.org.uk.

- Peacemakers – 'Building peaceful schools: Junior Peacemakers workshop guide'[430] and 'Learning for peace: A guide to developing outstanding SMSC in your primary school' and many more highly effective, fun peace education activities for younger children[431] at: https://peacemakers.org.uk

- Peacemakers and Restore our Schools, Circle time sessions to support primary pupils during COVID-19.[432] https://www.tes.com/member/peacemakers.

Secondary

- David Holmes, Peaceful PSHCE: A framework for personal, social, health and citizenship education in primary schools. Suggested content for two years' teaching the PSHCE curriculum in secondary schools.[433] https://www.peacefulschools.org.uk/application/files/3815/9284/1910/Peaceful_PSHCE_2020.pdf.

- Oxfam, Teaching controversial issues: A guide for teachers. Acclaimed, widely-used guidance on facilitating complex conversations well.[434] https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/teaching-controversial-issues-a-guide-for-teachers-620473.

- Restore our Schools, Activities for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. A set of social, emotional and wellbeing activities to support schools in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.[435] https://www.tes.com/member/peacemakers.

Notes and References

[1] CRC Preamble, Article 29. ▲

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[9] Kristen Brown, 'Bullying: A review of the evidence' (London: Education Policy Institute, 2018), https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/bullying-a-review-of-the-evidence. ▲

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[11] House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, 2016, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/91.pdf, pp. 12–13; and (US research) Gruber and Fineran, 2007, op. cit. ▲

[12] Irene García-Moya, Fiona Brooks, Anthony Morgan, & Carmen Moreno, 'Subjective wellbeing in adolescence and teacher connectedness: A health asset analysis', 2015, *Health Education Journal*, 74(6), pp. 641–654. ▲

[13] For example, see evidence listed in Catherine Augustine, John Engberg, Geoffrey E Grimm, et al., *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district* (New York: RAND, 2018). ▲

[14] Ibid.; Constanze Weber and Leen Vereenooghe, 'Reducing conflicts in school environments using restorative practices: A systematic review', *International Journal of Education Research Open*, 2020, Vol. 1. ▲

[15] Gillean McCluskey, Gwynedd Lloyd, Jean Kane, et al., 'Can restorative practices make a difference?', *Educational Review*, 2008, 60(4), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228364418_Can_restorative_practices_in_schools_make_a_difference, pp. 405–417; Augustine et al., 2018, op. cit. ▲

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Chestnut Grove Academy students study war propaganda and create their own peace art during Peace and Human Rights week.
Photo: Isabel Cartwright

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