

Blog Version

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Title: [UCL Peace Education Special Interest Group Updates](#)

This piece was modified from the next edition of Teaching Citizenship Issue 56 themes Conflict and Peace – The practitioner journal of the Association for Citizenship Teaching, which will come out in Autumn 2022.

Peace education is often spoken about as being somehow a radical endeavor. It is often considered to be on the left wing of political ideas, an expression from the left field or alternative culture. We would advocate that peace, as opposed to conflict, is ordinary rather than extraordinary, and that peace is the status quo. As we write this we are in a state of relative peace. Notwithstanding the realities of mental and emotional ill health, we are often at peace with ourselves, with the world around us and each other. Indeed, more often than not, peace is simply part of the everyday. Even in the midst of conflict or violence, whether physical, internal or structural, peace still exists as a potential state of being. On the other hand, conflict can also be a norm. So-called ‘healthy’ competition in education or sport, argument, oppression, injustice, marginalisation, territorial claims and religious disagreement are all part of the discourses of conflict. Indeed, conflict can define experience and the nature of existence.

Our point is that peace education should reflect this tension. In an ideal world, peace is the default, but we recognise the influence of competing tendencies and ideologies that threaten peace. For this reason, peace education should exist in all educational settings. It should be part of the substance and framework of education with the value and application of any broad scale educational aim, principle or practice. Other authors in this edition of the journal have expressed the theoretical aspects of peace, peace education and conflict, they have discussed the practical application of this and how to embed it in the classroom. Our article is not to repeat those elements but to bring educators together to reflect on peace education practice, peace discussion and peace research so that peace education has its rightful place in educational settings.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (4.7) require peace education to be further developed as one of the 17 goals that are identified to support sustainable development. There is a clear appreciation at a supranational level for all of us to develop peace education and yet we see a significant absence of peace education in multiple settings, not to mention a lack of awareness of what peace education even is. As the tragedies of Putin’s War in Ukraine continue and media coverage is a constant, it is easy to imagine how fragile young people’s ideas about the possibility of peace are.

We need to educate about peace and how to go about it in practice. We need to connect, for example, to those in Russia and elsewhere who courageously resist tyrannical regimes. We need to think about peaceful practice and endeavors, around the world and through time and consider dialogue such as ACTs deliberation methods in the classroom that promote safe spaces for peaceful discussion.

As Subject Leaders of Citizenship and Religious Education (RE) with experience in peace education with charities and informal and formal education settings, we set up UCL’s Peace Education Special Interest

Group (PESIG) to help connect peace education to theory, policy and practice as part of the university's curriculum, culture and commitment to social justice. We want to bring educators and researchers together to de-mystify peace education and bring this important area of education to students and staff. We were both aware that some aspects of peace education were treated as 'tick box' exercises and appeared in the curriculum in a purely academic way limiting genuine engagement and restricting experiences of peace education to prescribed models of engagement. As teacher educators, we have a huge responsibility to support the values of the student teachers we work with. Exposing and nurturing commitments to peace from the outset of the teacher development process is the least we can do. We set up the UCL PESIG to connect and reach out beyond our contexts to colleagues, students and professionals across subjects and educational settings. We held a launch event in July 2022 as part of this endeavor as a sharing space for peace practitioners. We have a blog series and we invite contributions from anyone interested in writing about practice, policy or theory in peace education: in <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/peaceeducation/>. Do have a read of it as there is already good variety of contributions that reflect the multidisciplinary and context-driven nature of peace education with many more to come.

At the end of this piece we share insights from the PESIG launch event as quotations to begin conversations about the role we as educators have in our students' lives when considering peace education. So as you read the quotes here – think about how you can bring all of the elements of this journal together in your teaching practice. If you would like to get more involved in peace education policy, practice and research, if you want to come to an event to share ideas or write for the blog and share some of your own practice, we would be delighted to hear from you contact us.

Quotes relating to Peace Education to support thinking about peace:

'Educating for a better world has to be the focus, and more imperative than ever to push for peace education and social justice, to build pockets of hope and resistance to amplify ideas and solidarity. We have to find communities and challenge ourselves' **Maria Hantzopolous Co-Author of Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction.** (See Teaching Citizenship Issue 54 for a review)

'We are seeing a critical mass where educators are enabling peace education in the mainstream. Be willing to grow... in dialogue with others. All growing and approaching things in humility.' **Monisha Bajaj Co-Author of Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction.**

'Food is the anthesis of war. It brings people together and in love and community. The best thing about building communities and building peace education is through storytelling. This is what brings people together. Telling stories with dignity. In education we should be telling the stories of families, love, food, laughter, not destruction, violence and hatred.' **Giles Duley, CEO of Legacy of War Foundation**  
<https://www.legacyofwarfoundation.com/> <https://gilesduley.com/one-armed-chef/>

'How can we be sure that when we talk about these sustainable development goals peace education can be seen as an integral part bringing many of the themes of human rights, sustainable development together: holistically, personally, locally and globally?. Communities are seeing the connections in education, we need to do the same in Higher Education'. **Professor Douglas Bourn, Director of Development Education Research Centre at IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society.**  
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/development-education-research-centre>

'If war is answer, we must be asking the wrong question. It's time to ask the right question. Learning from practice and experience as we did in the Peace at Heart report:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/peace-at-the-heart>. We need to think about every layer of the education system and the experience of social justice and peace education. There are glimmers of light with restorative justice and peace education becoming mainstream. We need to persuade others that our relational approach is important to them. What if peace was a FBV?' **Ellis Brooks Peace Education Co-Ordinator Quakers in Britain.** <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace>