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Peace Education

A Guide to Action in Alberta Schools

Educators for Peace and Justice is a collective of educators, parents, and community members who bring peace and justice into their classrooms and lives. We are supporters, developers, and advocates for Peace Education and social justice in the classroom and we deeply encourage enriching the connection and collaboration between educators. We host monthly discussions and share resources on our Facebook Page. We are a subcommittee of Ploughshares Calgary Society.



What is Peace Education?

Peace Education is interdisciplinary and complementary to most pedagogical approaches. It has components of Character Education and Global Citizenship Education. Peace Education encompasses themes of non-violence, democracy, gender equality, international and cultural understanding, disarmament, social justice, and peace. At its core, Peace Education creates positive personal and social change as students develop deeper knowledge and respect for diversity while learning skills in engagement, empathy, and participatory and democratic engagement.

Principles of Peace Education were first developed by Maria Montessori in 1949 (Education and Peace) and the Reggio Emilia approach, informed by Loris Malaguzzi's community of learners' philosophy in which relationships are considered "to be the fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system." (Edwards, 1995, p. 1). Betty Reardon, one of the biggest proponents of Peace Education says that it is: "Learning toward social and political change ...The cycle of care, concern, and commitment is the core of the peace learning process"

(Reardon, 1988). A cyclical process means one can never 'arrive', there are always new things to learn and consider that will continue the cycle. We are always learning no matter how old we get.

Peace Education is extremely customizable and looks different depending on the year, the foundational knowledge of individual peace educators, and the educational philosophy of a school. Some teachers focus more so on land-based learning, others on social-emotional learning, and still others on civic engagement. Teachers may realize that they are already a Peace Educator!

Common Aspects of Peace Education include:

- Elements of Critical Pedagogy (see Paulo Freire): co-construction of knowledge between teachers and students, teachers and students sharing power, students are seen as contributors with knowledge and experience
- Critical Peace Education: "Seven key competencies: critical thinking and analysis; empathy and solidarity; individual and coalitional agency; participatory and democratic engagement; education and communication strategies; conflict resolution

skills; and, ongoing reflective practice” (Zembylas, 2018)

- Decolonization practices through challenging colonial paradigms, structures, and systems as well as incorporating Indigenous and Land-Based Learning
- Students taking action in their school, local, and global communities. (Being cautious that projects are inclusive and collaborative).
- Building on the socio-constructivist model of knowledge to involve exercise, perspective-taking, exposure trips, reciprocal teaching, case studies, etc. (Subramanian, 2016)
- Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) activities and conflict-resolution training
- Using controversy constructively in teaching subject matters
- Cooperative learning
- Exploration of principles of non-violence and conflict resolution training

Teachers can learn more about other Peace Education Theories here.

<https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/a-review-of-12-peace-education-learning-frameworks-and-why-you-should-make-your-own/>

How to Implement Peace Education

There are many ways to implement peace pedagogy. Peace Education works best when teachers are working together as a school to achieve these goals.

Peace Education can be tailored to specific developmental stages to help teachers decide where to start in their classrooms. Students do not need to linearly hit these progressions. Lewsader & Myers-Walls (2017) propose the following learning trajectory as an appropriate path towards mastery of

Peace Education concepts: pre-understanding (ages 3-5), my peace and quiet (ages 3-8), sharing peace with friends (ages 4-9), making peace with friends (ages 6-10), peace in my communities (ages 7-12), and world peace (ages 9-11). Curriculums like URStrong also capitalize on this developmental model when helping students understand friendships and relationships.

Peace Education can begin simply by working elements of peace into classrooms through stories and activities. Students need to see themselves in literature, and by centering them as changemakers and peacebuilders who can make a difference. Use books to introduce tough topics and spark conversation. Teach students how to deal with their conflicts effectively. Talk to them openly about current events, racism, sexism, and injustice. Encourage dialogue and make students a part of everyday decisions. Create content and projects together, captivating students in their work will empower their voices, teach them about democracy, and encourage them to be leaders.

Critical Peace Education, actively works to decolonize the Program of Studies by genuinely including Indigenous Knowledge and Land Based Learning. Challenging the dominant Eurocentric thinking and white supremacy is key to helping students think about the world differently and accept differing perspectives. Education for reconciliation is essential for changing the narratives surrounding Indigenous communities.

Experiences of a variety of educators suggests that by cultivating these values early and systemically in education institutions,

teachers will give out decreased suspensions and reduce discipline that requires administrative intervention. Students are directly taught how to interact with other students peacefully and positively which has huge social-emotional benefits. Long-term benefits of a stress-free and peaceful atmosphere can have positive results on mental and physical health, so costs of future health care would be reduced. Future work and home environments can thrive when students learn the skills needed to resolve conflicts and have positive relationships.

Teaching Conflict Resolution Strategies

Our group spoke with a long-time Peace Educator, Alyson Zwack, in November 2020 about Conflict Resolution Training in Schools. Watch a recording of the webinar here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9AgC4BaaGQ>

- Begin by creating a group with a clear purpose that gives students meaningful opportunities to lead. Recruit students and teachers who are interested in joining.
- Build in the language. If the whole school already uses social-emotional language, bring that in. Talk about positive and negative (being the absence of violence) peace. Talk about harmony, leadership, and community. The concept of the "Zones of Regulation" can also be used to support conflict resolution by understanding the need to be in the 'Green Zone' to process conflict.
- Start by having the students observe the playing area at lunch to get an idea of what types of conflicts are regularly occurring. Students need time to contemplate how they would handle those conflicts. Students can role-play the different conflicts they see to understand how to solve them.

-Co-create a process together. Use videos and their playground observations to have conversations about effective conflict resolution approaches. Students need to have a sense of ownership in the process. It may be different each year. Though the students will have their say, it usually ends up looking similar from year to year. The process for students can be simplified to look like this:

- Stop: take a breath. Help all parties calm down.

- Talk: each party to the conflict should be able to speak without being interrupted. Restate what you heard from both parties to ensure you understood them.

- Think: brainstorm the solution with all parties involved.

- Action: what is next? Agree about what to do.

- Practice role-playing with scenarios in training first. Practice using positive tone and body language to show active listening. Do not rush sending students out to be mediators. Make sure supervisor staff know what to do if the students need help solving the conflicts. At one school, students put up an orange card so that a supervisor will come over to help.

Listening is an extremely important activity for students to learn. Active listening skills include patience (learning that silence does not need to be filled); body language showing engagement (nodding, facial expressions); asking questions; requesting clarification; and reflecting on what is said. These skills can be modeled in everyday classroom environments as teachers encourage students to give feedback to each other or work together. Some teachers teach their students a feedback model following the

lines of: "I like how you did ____ and next time you could ____" as part of their regular sharing routine. Students can also say "I did this ____ and next time I may try this____" to help students begin to have ownership and acknowledgement of behaviour.

Peace Education as a Whole School Focus

The following examples are based on research and the practices of a specific K-4 school. Examples here are not all-inclusive of the variety of ways that Peace Education can be expressed but provide a glimpse into the inner workings of Peace Education.

The core values that the administration have chosen are prominently displayed on the walls here. They are Peace, Harmony, Hope, Kindness, and Joy. These values may seem obvious, but in a school community, if actively taught and practiced as a communal expectation, they can have powerful effects. Showcasing these values in physical and intellectual spaces constantly reinforces students and staff alike of the attitudes to strive for each day.

Incorporating Physical Spaces into Peace Education

The core values of Peace Education can be displayed through physical spaces and elements of school through practices of:

- Erecting Peace Poles on the playground as a monument for mindfulness and an everyday reminder of peace. Peace Poles can be used as conflict resolution centres for students to go to when they need support solving conflicts on the playground.

- Hang slogans like 'Teach Peace' were on display in the hallways.
- Declaring a school motto such as: 'Building Peaceful Communities Together' and ensuring it is prominently displayed within the school and on the school's website.
- Organizing the students into hallways of pods of classes or grade groups. Each pod uses one of the core values for its name: Peace, Harmony, Hope, Joy, and Kindness. The hallways are labeled as such in big letters.
- Although not at use in this school, many other schools have adopted 'Buddy Benches' which is another great way to have inclusive learning spaces and safe places to be vulnerable. Sitting on the Buddy Benches is an easy way for students to connect with their classmates when they are feeling lonely or left out.

Mindfulness

Each day, teachers can easily schedule 10-20 minutes to talk to their students about Mindfulness (fitting this into Junior or High School is just as important). Students need to develop strategies to cope with the stressors of life by focusing on various forms of social-emotional learning and inner peace. Carving out intentional time is key for a successful program.

The efficacy of mindfulness has been uncovered through studies indicating "that mindfulness training significantly enhanced the participants' experience of inner peace, compared with baseline and compared with the control group" (Liu et al., 2015, p. 251).

Skills and Strategies to consider:

- Guided Meditation.
- Understanding elements of Peace: Inner, Outer, Peacebuilding, Peacemaking, Peacekeeping.
- Positive/Self-Affirmations.
- Mindfulness Toolbox with strategies for coping.
- The Zones of Regulation.
- Conflict Resolution Strategies.
- Friendship work (curriculums like URStrong).
- Anxiety coping.
- Test-taking strategies.

Student Leadership

Students as young as grade four can take part in student leadership. Peace Ambassadors is a special interest group at the K-4 school mentioned earlier, designed to cultivate leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. The purpose of the group is ultimately to mediate peer conflict on the playground. Grade 4 students are trained over the span of a few months in conflict mediation strategies to help their peers solve disagreements during lunch hours. They also work on projects within the school and community: clothing drives, letters to seniors, telling students about initiatives going on, and fundraising for other causes.

The participation in Student leadership of any kind: Student Council, Students 4 Change, Link Crew, GSA's (Gay-Straight Alliance), etc. is so important. Students deserve to have these kinds of opportunities at school that allow them to enact positive change in their communities and learn crucial skills early on. Student-led action is very important as it broadens the perspective of those participating in to, developing a

more informed worldview and increased levels of empathy.

Student leadership also happens in the classroom when including students' voices and choices. Games are an effective way to teach important lessons around cooperation, teamwork, and conflict resolution. Games can be used for a variety of different reasons. The international non-governmental organization known as Right to Play has powerful games that teach students about human rights. Leadership should not be isolated to an elective group but can be built into everyday assignments and projects. Students may decide as a class they would like to undertake a project in their community. Supporting students in leadership at all ages is imperative to creating active citizens.

Peace Assemblies

The K-4 school used 'pods' (groups of classes) to create and lead a 'Peace Assembly' to showcase their learning about Peace, Indigenous Education, and related matters they might choose to share. Students perform, sing songs, act out skits, display artwork, and create videos. Families are invited to come to the school to view the assembly as well. Students are empowered into action through a collaborative undertaking to show the rest of the school what they have been doing.

Social Justice Education

Teaching respect, acknowledging/accepting differences, and recognizing strengths are key elements when teaching peace. Social justice is an important part of the concern and commitment cycle of Peace Education.

Students transition in their learning about these topics as the scales increase through the years, starting with the classroom, expanding to the school, and then outward to local, provincial, national, and global communities. Perspective-taking is important as students learn concepts of Human Rights; they can be encouraged to think about how others might feel around a particular injustice or event. Social justice does not need to be siloed into Social Studies/Humanities. It is interdisciplinary and should be incorporated into math and science. Some of the greatest problems humanity is facing can be solved using math and science and we need students to see this real-world application of the skills they are using. There are many resources online on how to incorporate social justice into these subjects. Themes concerning Indigenous peoples, clean water, environmental protection, racial justice, gender equality, and food security are all suitable for coverage in early elementary school.

Community Involvement/Action

When showing commitment to Peace Education, students must be empowered to make a difference in their communities.

Many schools have undertaken global projects with organizations like Me to We, however, educators must be mindful of the message they are sending about different countries, as often these projects can be 'white saviourism' experiences and that North Americans know best (neo-colonialism) (see No White Saviors).

Partnering with a local organization on projects in the local community is a great way to get students involved. Students can participate in choosing a cause, researching, brainstorming ways to help, and teachers just need to facilitate and guide their understanding.

Involving students in the entire organizational process to help their community can help their creativity to flourish. Students often are connected to the problems in their communities and can have interesting solutions to common problems. Interdisciplinary community projects reveal the connections between subjects in the real world and help teachers cover multiple learning outcomes in the various programs of study. A grade three teacher interviewed for this project worked on making quilts for homeless babies and families as a class project. This was a math-heavy project involving measuring and patterns, but the task was meaningful and students were highly engaged in learning how to quilt and help other children.

Roots of Empathy

The Roots of Empathy program connects classrooms and instructors with parents and babies to help children grow in empathy and care. The mission of this program is "To build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults."

Students learn about a baby's milestones and development. The baby comes to the class and students observe what it does, label the baby's feelings, and ask questions of their parent. The program also includes stories and discussions around culture and care.

Students love this time as it allows them to connect to themselves and others; One student said, "I really miss the Roots of Empathy...I felt really in control of myself."

Schools can sign up here:

<https://rootsofempathy.org/school/>

Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta)

Peace Education is easily connected to our professional responsibilities as teachers in Alberta. The commitment teachers have to make their classrooms safe spaces is taken one step further when they enact the values of Peace Education.

Empathy and care should be evident in the methods and values teachers directly teach to their students. TQS #1: “A teacher builds positive and productive relationships with students, parents/guardians, peers and others in the school and the local community to support student learning.” A classroom and school centred on the values of peace, joy, kindness, harmony, and hope is crucial. The cycle of care, concern, and commitment that Betty Reardon describes should be on full display in teachers’ professional lives.

TQS #2 “A teacher engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to improve teaching and learning.” Learning and adjusting teaching practices to support students and affect community is essential. It does not take much to change how one interacts and teaches students, especially when there are others to team up with! Through this work, teachers will see that spaces and lives can be transformed.

By teaching conflict resolution, care, concern, and participatory and democratic engagement to students, their learning will connect them to the world around them. Students can be taught how to show empathy to themselves and others through the values of Peace Education. A safe classroom begins with the teacher and can inspire students to act and be responsible for their community. Conflict resolution training can add to classrooms community by

allowing students to solve their conflicts to restore relationships on their own. TQS #4 “A teacher establishes, promotes and sustains inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe.”

We hope that this resource can inspire teachers to get started tangibly and make important contributions to Peace Education. Peace Education does not need to be complicated and can be easily achieved in small steps. We have created an extensive resource section on our website and a Facebook group to check out. We also host monthly discussions online.

Notes

Sponsored by the Government of Canada.

Educators for Peace and Justice is a sub-committee of Ploughshares Calgary Society. We work to bring peace and justice into classrooms and schools!

This resource would not be possible without Lorraine Kinsman, Alyson Zwack, Teresa Bowles, and the other teachers at this school (you know who you are) and others interviewed!

About the Author: Danica Derksen is a long-time social justice advocate and community leader. She is a grade 8 teacher with experience in Peace Education through research, observation, and field practice at a school that practices Peace Education as its primary pedagogical approach. Danica has been working with Ploughshares Calgary since 2020 and has founded the Educators for Peace and Justice group in Alberta.

Citations

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Resources

How to Build Empathy
<https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/how-build-empathy-strengthen-school-community>

How to Deal with Conflict for Kids
<https://childmind.org/article/teaching-kids-how-to-deal-with-conflict/>

Global Peace Education:
<https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/category/categories/curricula/>

Building Peace Education UNESCO
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-peace-programmes>

International Institute on Peace Education
<https://www.i-i-p-e.org/>

Peace Games
<https://www.seedsofpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/PeaceGames.pdf>