That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.

UNESCO

Peace education aims to reduce violence, support the transformation of conflicts, and advance the peace capabilities of individuals, groups, societies and institutions. Peace education builds on people’s capacities to learn. It develops skills, values and knowledge and thus helps to establish a global and sustainable culture of peace. Peace education addresses every phase of life and all stages in the socialisation process. It is context-specific, but is essential and feasible in every world region and all stages of conflict. Peace education takes places in many settings,
formal and informal: in every-day learning and education, in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of professional projects with selected target groups, and in the support provided for conflict-sensitive education systems.

There is no uniform concept of peace education and the international discourse on this topic is still in its infancy. For a shared understanding to be achieved, the various social, political, economic, historical and cultural contexts must be taken into account, along with the different traditions and levels of intensity in the systematic debate and practice of peace education nationally.

The importance of peace education for peaceful coexistence is emphasised in numerous declarations by governments, non-governmental organisations and associations at the national and international level. UNESCO states in its preamble: “That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. This statement – and its critical assessment – have shaped the conceptual development of peace education. Although the importance of individual peace capacity is unquestioned, the complexity of causes and types of violence means that peace education must also seek to exert political influence and support the transformation of social structures. With the “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World” (2001–2010), the United Nations provided an additional international frame of reference for peace education. The “culture of peace” concept has become a globally recognised reference point for peace education.
Essentials
In accordance with the above definition of peace education, a number of essentials can be formulated:

1. Peace education pursues the following goals: (1) to end war, (2) to reduce violence in family, society and politics, (3) to promote a perception of conflict as an opportunity for positive change, and finally (4) to develop visions of peace and solidarity among the world’s people, irrespective of ethnic origin, religion, gender, cultural or social background, and to make these visions a reality.

2. Peace education has to deal systematically with major challenges to peace, such as conflict, hostility and enemy images, violence and war. Relevant findings from peace and conflict studies are indispensable here. Conflicts need to be recognised and analysed in their full complexity in order to prevent their escalation and handle them constructively (→ conflict; conflict transformation). By considering the many functions of violence in detail, we can develop a better understanding of violence and identify risk factors and prevention measures. Peace is not perceived as a static condition but as a process of decreasing violence and increasing justice. Peace is also not seen as an exception to the rule, but as the preferred rule. It thus serves as both a normative aim and a pragmatic orientation for action. Models such as the “civilisatory hexagon” can provide a basis for reflection, offering guidance and facilitating the visualisation of linkages between normative aims. In this sense, peace education has significant overlaps with other approaches such as civics or human rights education.

3. Peace education initiates and supports social and political learning processes, in which positive social behaviour, empathy and capacities for non-violent communication can evolve (peace capacity); knowledge about peace and war, conflict and violence can be acquired (peace competence); and the willingness to show civil courage and engage for peace is fostered (peace action). Peace education offers practical advice for education in
family and preschool settings, in school and in the non-formal education sector. Conflicts within society must not be concealed but should be made visible within the framework of peace education. And lastly, peace education aims to combine social and political learning processes.

4. The UNESCO concept of “Education for All” (EFA) is an important basis for peace education. The key prerequisite for its success is the renunciation of all forms of corporal punishment, violence and psychological pressure as a means of delivering education. People learn from experience and benefit from inspiring learning environments with appropriate multimedia-based and dialogue-oriented methods. All the senses, emotions and also humour play an important role in designing learning arrangements. The encounter with “the other”, be it members of conflicting parties in post-war societies, minorities and majorities or locals and migrants, is indispensable.
5. People all over the world need spaces to learn and experience peace – at the micro level of the family and in daily life as well as on the macro level of society and international politics. An approved peace education approach is the discussion of examples of successful peacebuilding and its protagonists. Authentic role models who promote the principles of non-violence are helpful. Outstanding educationalists and advocates of non-violence (Maria Montessori, Paolo Freire, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King) have long been sources of inspiration for the theory and practice of peace education. They have shaped the concept and image of peace education in their respective world regions in a distinctive way.

6. The way in which peace education is delivered has an important role to play in convincing people of its benefits, as do the substance and credibility of the peace message. Education methods must be adapted to a changing social and technological environment. Nowadays, the widespread use of new media (including the Internet) offers new opportunities for education processes. While the depiction of violence and pornography, the transmission of hostile world views and cyber warfare may pose threats to peaceful coexistence, new media also facilitate participation, knowledge-sharing and freedom of speech and information. Peace education should capitalise on this opportunity by using these new media intensively for its purposes, making online materials and media accessible and creating networks.

7. Peace education in the 21st century has to be a multi-track process that is grounded in holistic, interconnected and systemic thinking. Experience shows that if peace education is to be sustainable, it must involve actors on different levels. Peace education envisages learning spaces in which multipliers, teachers, journalists, NGO staff, members of conflicting parties, community leaders and politicians can support the development of peace structures and a genuine culture of peace. This includes creating conflict-sensitive education systems which prevent the misuse of education facilities for the purpose of manipulation, falsification
of history or hate and violence. Moreover, the development, implementation and dissemination of peace education curricula as a contribution to capacity-building are long overdue.

References and Further Reading


Online Resources

Interview with Gavriel Salomon (video), www.berghof-foundation.org › Glossary › 13 peace education principles
Interview with Christoph Wulf (video), www.berghof-foundation.org › Glossary › 13 peace education principles [in German]