Experience determines reality.
Ernst von Glaserfeld

Research has shown that the success of learning interventions is largely reliant upon the education method chosen. In other words, the teaching or facilitation process itself is critical in achieving positive learning outcomes. This applies to peace education and conflict transformation as well. Etymologically, “method” comes from the Greek word *methodos*, meaning “to follow a path”. Thus, methods are learning paths or learning concepts leading toward a desired outcome, and need to be planned, prepared and implemented appropriately. It is particularly important in the context of peace education (and → conflict
transformation) that the chosen method(s) complement and enhance the desired outcome.

Why is it that specific methods are indispensable to the practice of peace education and conflict transformation? Methods play an intermediary role between the learning content and the individual learner. They activate and enable the learning capacity required for complex learning processes on issues such as conflict contexts and causes, parties’ interests and needs, the consequences of particular behaviours, or political action. Studies have highlighted the lack of effectiveness of prescriptive approaches (e.g. learning by rote), as well as the effectiveness of methods that incorporate peer education, dialogue and group work, i.e. elicitive approaches.

Neurobiological research provides evidence to support our understanding of learning as an individual process spanning a variety of learning conditions and learning styles (visual, audio, communicative, kinaesthetic) – each of which is unique to the learner. Appropriate selection and application of methods are therefore essential. This became increasingly obvious through the use of the theatre as an arena for conflict literacy. Augusto Boal, in developing his “Theatre of the Oppressed” in the 1960s and 1970s, created a wide-reaching curriculum of perspectives, replaced monologue with dialogue and mobilised energy for change. Today, this method is known worldwide as the “Method of Social Change”.

It is important to resist a “technical” conception and application of methods. A method must encompass a specific understanding of what it means to learn. This understanding should respect the learner as an autonomous being: supporting the learner is the essential purpose of the method. This means that the teacher’s personality is of utmost importance, alongside a specialist knowledge of the topic and an understanding of group dynamics. This is also the case for facilitators in conflict transformation. It is the internalisation of knowledge and experience on the part
of the teacher or facilitator that creates a positive and successful learning experience. Students or participants must be able to trust the teacher or facilitator.

**Principles**

Peace education methods are not arbitrary, but are based upon the following seven principles:

- **Exemplary learning**: the complexity of reality is reduced by identifying and addressing the varied linkages within a difficult issue area, which are often not immediately obvious.
- **Contrasting and emphasising**: methods focus attention on specific or determining viewpoints and problematical aspects.
- **Change of perspective**: empathy is promoted by expanding the learners’ own standpoint, which can be inflexible and deeply rooted, to allow a plurality of views.
- **Clarity and ability to perceive linkages**: using techniques such as visualisation, problematical issues are relocated from the realm of the abstract and related to learners’ own, concrete experiences.
- **Action-orientated**: themes and issues are made accessible through activity and experience-based learning.
- **Peer-orientated**: shared learning is encouraged by group work and mutual support.
- **Empowerment**: building skills promotes self-confidence and autonomy.

**Creating spaces for encounter**

The methods used in education are often differentiated into “macro methods” and “micro methods”. The former refer to the learning setting in its entirety (e.g. a simulation exercise), while the latter refer to individual activities (e.g. group discussions, character analysis).

The basic approach of peace education is to create a space for encounter, exchange and critical discussion. These spaces do not
create and maintain themselves; sensitivity must be applied to both their design and use. The following approaches to creating such a space are particularly noteworthy:

- **Communication and dialogue** facilitate clarity and debate and help to achieve greater harmony, understanding and compromise.

- **Encounters**, formal and informal as well as national and international, promote intercultural learning and the dismantling of prejudices and stereotypes.

- **Performance-orientated approaches** utilise opportunities for creative design and physicality, and appeal to all senses. They can include drama (e.g. Forum Theatre), art and music (e.g. hip-hop projects), physical theatre, sport and games (e.g. street football).

- **Best-practice examples and role models** can open up discussion and exploration of identity and boundaries (e.g. Peace Counts or Search for Local Heroes).

- **Media-orientated approaches** can range from the analysis or design of print and audio-visual media to the use of new media (the Internet) and social networking sites.

- **Meta-communication, feedback and evaluation** are essential components of reflection, de-briefing and further development. Critical evaluation must be intrinsic to the above approaches; only then can they be developed further.

**Continuous learning**

Peace education methods can be integrated into a variety of everyday educational settings, as well as into existing peace practice (classroom teaching, one-off events, seminars). However, they are best suited to longer-term projects, where, after thorough analysis, they can be documented, translated into suitable learning formats and disseminated more widely. The application of peace education methods requires a specific understanding of what it means to learn, as well as relevant skills and qualifications, and should be integrated into the school curriculum where appropriate.
There is currently little empirical evidence regarding the meaningful progression of methods and method application. Very little research has investigated the outcomes of specific methods. The “do no harm” principle must always be applied. At the very least, peace education methods must avoid reproducing structures of violence within the learning process, whilst creating a culturally sensitive and inclusive atmosphere.

Most importantly, however, they must remain loyal to the insights of peace education. Their application constitutes “rule-governed interaction”, itself a hallmark of professional practice, which must always contain an element of reflection and evaluation (→ reflective practice).

References and Further Reading


Online Resources

Peace Counts on Tour, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnFpdU-5BPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnFpdU-5BPI) [in German]

