

# RECOMMENDATION ON EDUCATION FOR PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS

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## *Abstract*

Educating for peace seems to be more than ever, in light of the ongoing wars, a categorical imperative through which to build a horizon of pedagogical meaning capable of promoting impactful educational actions on topics related to emotional education and education for active and responsible citizenship. These principles underlie UNESCO's recommendation on peace education<sup>1</sup>, which represents a non-binding guidance document focusing on how teaching and learning should evolve to achieve lasting peace, reaffirm human rights, and promote sustainable development in the face of contemporary threats and challenges.

Schools, therefore, can strongly contribute to societal change and play a crucial role in educating for peace.

*Key-words:* Peace, hope, education, citizenship, inclusion.

## *1. Citizenship education: for a sustainable and lasting peace*

The recent adoption of the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development, approved by the Member States during the 2023 General Conference, demonstrates how international institutions are responding to the new challenges of the 21st century. The main goal of peace education is to promote a change in values, attitudes, and behaviors to foster a classroom climate based on

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2024). *Raccomandazione dell'UNESCO sull'educazione alla pace, ai diritti umani e allo sviluppo sostenibile*. Parigi: Unesco. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386924>.

tolerance, respect, solidarity, and justice. It is an education in values that aims to raise awareness among adults, growing individuals, and society in general about the importance of cooperation and solidarity among diverse cultures and respect for all living beings. In this sense, the UNESCO Recommendation on peace education provides useful guidance for the teacher who, in today's educational scenarios, is called to be simultaneously an educator, a researcher, and an experienced witness of the time in which students live, capable of bridging the languages of the new generations. This Recommendation, therefore, provides a roadmap to guide our societies towards a fairer, healthier, and more peaceful future for all. This means ensuring that learners, of all ages and throughout their lives, have the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to take individual and collective action towards achieving this common future. Building on these pedagogical reflections, the contribution aims to analyze the impact of the UNESCO recommendation on teaching practices in early childhood and primary schools at the national level. Emotional education, creativity, and imagination are central elements in the teaching-learning processes. The experience presented focuses on the role of activities such as play, art, and reading in peace education to promote the construction of positive and collaborative relationships. If through play, children learn to respect rules, share, manage, and resolve conflicts peacefully, languages like art, play, writing through story creation, and reading offer spaces of expression that can help them process difficult experiences and develop empathy towards others. Therefore, the school plays a fundamental role in this process and represents a privileged place for the sharing and generativity of attitudes and values inherent in peace education. Peace education, echoing the thought of Maria Montessori who places it as an indispensable existential condition for the development of individual freedom, becomes a practice that requires commitment and dedication from educators and teachers to promote the daily development of positive emotions, respect, empathy, understanding, and solidarity. However, this approach requires a profound paradigm shift, as often in schools, situations are created that generate competition among students and lead to dynamics that predispose to conflict. It is an invitation to rethink the role of the school as an elective place for citizenship education with a strong reference to goals 4 (quality education) and 16 (peace and justice) of the 2030 agenda. It is the constant attention that teachers and students pay to attitudes, actions, and reactions. It draws inspiration from daily events and can be integrated into

the annual curriculum, connecting transversally to all disciplinary areas. Peace, therefore, is a cross-cutting and universal theme<sup>2</sup>. It is present in various cultures, religions, and populations, and in each of these, it finds a specific argumentation. Humanity has always been engaged in its contexts of belonging for its realization, often testifying to it through its actions. Peace, as a personal, community, and even political condition, can be considered as an impulse and opening of “all” humanity to adhere to a plurality of values such as democracy, justice, and freedom; values that can impact the human and educational journey of each individual. Religions, in fact, have always proposed testimonies to share experiences that indirectly lead to peace education in this regard, Pope Francis refers to the three paths “for the construction of lasting peace”<sup>3</sup>:

1. The dialogue between generations to share common projects;
2. Education and instruction;
3. Job security for the realization of human dignity.

These three paths are particularly suggestive to delve into a discourse that recognizes peace as having a universal, educational, and projective meaning in line with the UNESCO Recommendation.

## 2. *The “Hope for Peace” Project: an experience in preschools and primary schools*

The International Research Center for Inclusion and Teacher Training (IRCIT) of the European University of Rome, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace held on September 21, 2024, invited preschool and primary school teachers to conduct educational activities in their classes related to peace education. The idea was to work on two key words: “Hope” and “Peace” to build a better future through drawings, phrases, thoughts on the meaning, stories about the hope for peace in the world, and any other activity capable of activating students’ creative and critical thinking.

The work was based on the 14 *Guiding Principles for Transformative Education* adopted by the UNESCO General Conference:

- 1) Based on human rights

<sup>2</sup> M. MONTESSORI, *Educazione e pace*, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, Roma 2024, prima edizione Garzanti 1949.

<sup>3</sup> PAPA FRANCESCO, *Che la pace sia con te*. Newton Compton Editori, Roma 2022.

- 2) Accessible and of good quality (education as a public and common good)
- 3) Non-discriminatory
- 4) Oriented towards an ethics of care, compassion, and solidarity
- 5) Supportive of gender equality
- 6) Fair, inclusive, and respectful of diversity
- 7) Beneficial for the health, safety, and well-being of students, teachers, and educational staff
- 8) Sustainable, continuous, and transformative
- 9) Useful for co-creating knowledge
- 10) Supporting freedom of thought, belief, religion, and expression and against all forms of hatred
- 11) Inclusive, particularly through an ethical and responsible use of technologies
- 12) Based on an international and global perspective, demonstrating connections between the local and the global
- 13) Functional for dialogue between cultures and generations
- 14) Based on an ethics of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights, and sustainable development for the benefit of all.

The project involved 7 classes of Primary School, which created artifacts on peace education of great interest and originality. Specifically:

- Class 1<sup>A</sup> A, De Amicis IC, Buonarroti branch, Lissone (MB), produced an artifact titled: “The rainbow of peace.” The UNESCO Recommendation was useful for discussing peace in class; the children expressed their thoughts through words like: love as a fundamental principle of social relationships and respect.
- Class 2<sup>B</sup> B of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome created a collective drawing titled “Imagining peace.”
- Class 3<sup>B</sup> B of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome constructed a peace calligram titled “Educating ourselves to peace” to develop creative thinking and initiate reflection.
- Class 4<sup>A</sup> A of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome created an illustrated book titled “A great sun to warm us all.” The idea arose from a classroom conversation about the meaning of the words Hope and Peace: Hope represents the sun that warms everyone.
- Class V<sup>A</sup> A of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome conducted an interdisciplinary workshop to develop students’ creativity and help

them recognize the value of solidarity, the need to overcome prejudices to appreciate diversity as a resource. Reflections emerged on the educational significance of the concept of peace in children's daily actions, which were written on drop-shaped cards.

- Class 4<sup>A</sup> E of IC San Nilo in Grottaferrata (RM) composed a poetic text: "What peace means to us."
- Class V<sup>A</sup> F of IC *Via del Calice* in Rome created a poster titled «The House of Peace.» Peace was symbolically represented by the students as a multi-story house, each floor containing an identified value. The children decided to entrust their future hopes to hot air balloons.

Regarding Early Childhood, educators and teachers working at Girasole, a Montessori method Nursery and Kindergarten in Rome, describe education as an experience of peace for children. It is a laboratory of life where energies are released, compressed souls expand and reveal themselves: this is where the new child, the new man of the near future, is born. The methodological proposal is cosmic education, where the child is hope for development and for the maintenance of the whole; if adequately supported and guided in their natural development, they collaborate and participate with their peers in the construction of work, cooperation, respect, and love.

Reading the UNESCO Recommendations, educators and teachers realized how these resonate as guidelines and inspiring principles for their daily work.

The teachers at the Municipal Nursery School *Torre di Babele* in Rome, after reading the UNESCO Recommendation, chose to focus on life's big questions in the words of children. They realized that "Peace" and "hope" are complex concepts, difficult to explain, leading them to ask the following questions: What does it mean to talk about peace and hope with 3, 4, and 5-year-olds? How to discuss these concepts with them without falling into stereotypes? How to build genuine thoughts around peace and hope that go beyond simple statements and transform into something internalized and actionable? In conclusion, the group of teachers reflected on the importance of reading and the careful and conscious choice of books to offer, trying to create a "bridge" between school and families, sharing some illustrated books on the theme of peace. The Erodoto Corigliano Nursery School (CS) presented a project titled "Living with respect and growing with kindness:

the pedagogy of hope for the construction of universal peace.” Referring to UNESCO’s Recommendation on peace education and the epistemological references of special and intercultural pedagogy, the following were proposed: moments of reflection in the agora with summarizing brainwriting, realization of linguistic and graphic-pictorial activities, choreutic activities, dress-up games, creation of a peace train, creation of a logo, sharing with families and the community through an exhibition of works at school, in shops, and in significant places in the city. The potential of artificial intelligence was also utilized to generate a story, some images, and a song. The experience was significant both for the themes on which it was possible to reflect and for the accountability towards the entire school and the community.

The experiences presented here have used educational approaches focused on cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral learning and have led children to develop the following skills:

- self-awareness
- ability to anticipate
- citizenship skills
- interconnection, a sense of belonging to a diverse common humanity on planet earth
- empowerment, free will, and resilience
- collaborative abilities
- peaceful conflict resolution
- adaptability and creativity
- decision-making skills
- respect for diversity
- critical thinking.

### *3. Conclusions*

From the presented experience, the need to educate for peace emerges by reinforcing - from early childhood - the ability to imagine it, desire it, understand it, defend it, and build it through the development of positive emotions that build meaningful relationships. It is therefore essential to embrace the theme of “lasting peace” as a renewed commitment, taking up and making our own the words of Maria Montessori (1952) engraved on her tomb: “I pray dear children who can do everything to join me in building peace in men and in the world.”

As previously stated, school inevitably plays a crucial role because it is freedom and inclusion. It is the place where relationships intertwine, but above all, it is a community capable of enhancing the educational dimension, experiences, and the value sphere of the entire school community.

If, when we speak broadly of education, we also refer to “a growth of humanity in man, such growth can only fully occur in peace. Therefore, the task of pedagogy is to think of peace as a condition for full education. And to contribute to an education capable of promoting a culture of peace”<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, the new UNESCO Recommendation is connected to the UNESCO report of 2023, titled “Re-imagining our futures together: a new social contract for education,” which highlighted the need for a more relevant, forward-thinking vision for teaching, learning, and innovation, considering how the world has changed and will continue to evolve in the decades to come.

In this scenario, the school can strongly contribute to societal change and has a crucial role in educating for peace. It is precisely the new generations that can help us imagine and build peace and deeply understand its value.

There are various ways to address the themes of war and peace: building shared meanings, looking at what is happening in the world, reading a book, or exploring works of art are just a few possible examples that emerged from the “Hope for Peace” project.

Education for peace is therefore configured as education for a “constellation” of human rights: citizenship, interculturality, dialogue, coexistence, democracy, legality, justice, social and emotional skills, conflict management, nonviolence, equal opportunities, solidarity, sharing, respect for the environment, energy saving, critical and conscious consumption.

<sup>4</sup> M. BALDACCI, *La via pedagogica della pace*, «Pedagogia più Didattica», 8(1), 2022, pp. 1-3.