

Research Article

Harnessing Education for Lasting Peace and Sustainable Development

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- Education for Peace
- Peace Education
- Colombia
- Cátedra de la Paz
- Brazil
- Global Citizenship Education

Abstract

The HLPF in July 2024, convened annually under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, emphasized the pressing need for transformative action in global education amid escalating conflicts and violence. António Guterres highlighted the challenge of advancing educational progress in such contexts in a special event, underscoring the essential role of education in both addressing and preventing conflict. Discussions explored the concept of "peace" in education, noting its dual role in fostering non-violence and promoting social justice. Peace education is a dynamic and multifaceted approach that seeks to foster understanding, reflection, and action toward resolving and preventing violence. It is characterized as a process, philosophy, and pedagogy rather than a fixed concept. Peace education aims to develop learners' ability to contribute to harmonious and just societies by integrating critical reflections on violence and promoting community-oriented solutions. It distinguishes between negative peace, the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, which addresses structural and cultural injustices, highlighting the need for context-specific and transformative educational practices. Case studies from Brazil and Colombia illustrate varied approaches to integrating peace education within different educational frameworks. The event called for improved quality and contextual relevance in education to build resilient and peaceful societies.

Introduction

In a world where the pursuit of peace remains a constant topic of discussion, the international community tirelessly explores solutions to find lasting harmony in society.

Despite these efforts, numerous communities around the world remain embroiled in conflict, deprived of fundamental rights, and seeing their hope for peace decline.

This July 2024, the 12th session of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) took place at the UN Headquarters in New York under the theme of “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions”. It featured an in-depth review of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The HLPF involves the review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a variety of sessions, namely, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), where countries report on their progress towards the SDGs, general debates on sustainable development, and thematic reviews of the specific selected goals. Led under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), official meetings feature the participation of representatives from member states, as well as representatives from major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS), encompassing civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and academia. The forum facilitates dialogue, sharing of best practices, and addressing challenges. In addition to the main sessions, it includes diverse side events organized by various stakeholders, from UN agencies to civil society organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, or embassies. These provide an opportunity to

Several recurring points unfolded Throughout the discussions and meetings: the urgent demand for innovative financing solutions, the chronic lack of financing in critical areas, the paramount role of partnerships, and the significance of localization and ownership. Furthermore,

linkages were built between the different SDGs.

During this year’s HLPF, the significant role of education on the road to sustainable development was recognized. Specifically, discussions on transforming education and promoting education for peace were explored. How can these discussions be translated into effective and concrete action? The following sections will investigate the detailed discussions, proposed innovative solutions, and strategies for implementing education as a key instrument for sustainable peace and, more generally, for achieving sustainable societies. In this article, we will analyze the Education and Peace nexus through the lenses of the HLPF 2024.

Peace education

On 11 July 2024, a special event on Transforming Education—convened by the Secretary-General, sought to stimulate greater action on education. According to António Guterres’s remarks, “War and violence have –sadly– become more widespread. And all the while, the global crisis in education that we came together to address at the Summit has shown little sign of abating.” (United Nations, 2024). While conflict increases, progress in education slackens. We are conscious that conflict disrupts education through the damage to schools, absence of teachers, fears of insecurity, or occupation of schools ([Justino, 2010](#))– now the question is: Does education impact conflict? And can education prevent violence and foster peace?

First, let’s delve into the meaning of “peace”, often mentioned by the international community, in the context of peace education. This notion seems to appear as an “essential collective aspiration” (Morales, 2021). And this is no matter the reasons behind the intentions to achieve it. However, while traditionally, it can be understood as the understanding and

reflection on violence and empowerment to act for peace (Harris, 2004), “peace” is a complex term to clearly define– and even more so when it is applied to education. For this reason, Kurian and Kester (2019) argue that instead of narrowly defining it, we should characterize it as a process, a philosophy, and a pedagogy. Kester (2009) defines it as a “dialogical experience conducted through participatory learning”. The principles of peace education maintain that integrating these processes and peace pedagogy into educational systems benefits communities as a whole, as learners become more conscientious and prone to act for the development and well-being of their environment (Galtung, 1983). Already in the 17th century, a Czech educator envisioned peace education as an approach to develop a common understanding of others and shared values to overcome hostilities. This universally shared knowledge’s ultimate goal was to live in harmony with the acceptance of the different cultures (Gavriel Salomon & Edward Cairns, 2009). Generally, from its beginning until now, the goal is simply to provide reflection on issues linked to violence and create community-relevant strategies to promote harmony, transformative learning

To simplify, peace can be divided into two strands: negative and positive peace. The former is simply understood as the absence of direct violence, whereas the latter is understood as a form of social justice that explicitly addresses invisible violence (Galtung 1983). Nonetheless, these two perceptions must be interpreted in a complementary form. In fact, Cremin (2015) argues that negative peace cannot be achieved with the presence of cultural and structural violence, whereas positive peace cannot be obtained without the elimination of direct violence in communities.

Apart from these general and abstract ideas of what peace education is, certain characteristics are important to note. First, a link to action is necessary, as simple education on peace wouldn’t be attractive

without it (Galtung, 1983). This education is not only knowledge but should encourage action. Peace education can lead to a controversial action as its goal is to change people's perception of conflict and violence. Secondly, for the youth to act for their community, it needs to come closer to their realities. The localization and community level are important factors to consider, with the inclusion of all people (Galtung, 1983). Kester (2009) suggests perceiving it as a space “where learners communally and cooperatively grapple with contemporary issues... related to local and global contexts” (p.2). This eliminates any rigid definition and suggests a contextualized notion oriented towards the local and community level. Even though the overarching goals remain globally similar, each form of violence requires a different approach and form of peace education (Gavriel Salomon and Edward Cairns, 2009). Therefore, instructors' local conditions, culture, issues, and creativity should inform education programs. For instance, in Japan, the “A-bomb education” to prevent the use of nuclear weapons appears relevant, reflecting its historical experiences. In contrast, countries like Brazil and Colombia have little interest in nuclear education; they are more concerned with issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, reconciliation, and rebuilding communities affected by violence.

This community orientation helps build self-reliance and local defense in a world where intra-state conflicts are predominant. Peace education comprises three layers: the national level, which focuses on defense; the community level, which centers on building a culture of peace and resilience; and the individual level, which involves the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills (Galtung, 1983).

Finally, the last important point is the promotion of critical reflections about violence, peace, conflict, sustainability, and justice. The ideas and assumptions on peace must be challenged, with the aim of changing their frames of reference. Evidently, political considerations must be

included, as peace is a political notion and target. As peace education seeks transformative change, critical pedagogy must inform this educational approach—offering a lens through which learners will consider notions of violence and peace within settings that do not rely solely on teachers' beliefs and develop participative citizenship and a transformative agency (Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011; Freire, 1985; Reardon & Jenkins, 2015). This critical analytical lens is closely related to the previously mentioned local approach, as it connects transformative change and critical frameworks to a contextualized understanding of violence.

Ultimately, it's evident that traditional peace education can act as a neocolonial tool by imposing ethnocentric views of violence and peace (Hokowhitu & Page, 2011). Thus, it's crucial to reaffirm the fact that there is no single truth, justice, or peace but rather a need to embrace diverse perspectives.

Overall, peace education is the values, skills, and knowledge to live in harmony with others and with nature. These skills and attitudes help people prevent and resolve conflicts peacefully or create conditions. The idea is not to do peacekeeping or peacemaking but really peacebuilding—encouraging long-term and profound changes in communities that will support sustainable peace and development. A culture of peace should be nurtured (Harris, 2004).

Education for peace

Although peace education and education for peace are often used interchangeably, their approaches differ in subtle ways despite their similar aims and focus.

In peace education, the primary goals include nurturing a culture of peace by developing conflict resolution abilities, encouraging critical examination of peace and violence issues, and promoting tolerance and understanding of others and our environment. This approach can

incorporate topics such as social justice, environmental sustainability, global concerns, and human rights, along with workshops focused on mediation techniques and non-violent communication. It employs educational practices that challenge prevailing national norms and advocate for social transformation through active engagement. Additionally, it may involve implementing dedicated programs within school curricula that concentrate specifically on peace.

In contrast, education for peace, simply emphasizes the proactive role of education in creating the required conditions that sustain peace in society. The focus is not on specific programs for peace but rather on how educational systems and institutions can operate to contribute to non-violence. Therefore, it promotes holistic development that supports peace at all levels of society and empowers individuals to transform the root causes of conflict (Minch, 2019). This simply emphasizes the general role of education in developing social cohesion and mutual respect. Education for peace can be understood as peacebuilding through education (Clarke, 2015). It is an acknowledgment of how learning can be transformative for communities and how education in all its forms – in and out of school – shapes how youth see others and the world. In fact, peacebuilding values and interpersonal skills are unconsciously acquired through sports, music, or even science. However, this does not mean that any form of education automatically qualifies as "education for peace." While subjects like biology, accounting, or mathematics—which are not inherently linked to peacebuilding—can be adapted for peacebuilding purposes, they can also be exploited for harmful ends (Minch, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize disciplines that are inherently connected to peacebuilding and less likely to be misused. Nonetheless, other disciplines also have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding if applied with an understanding of the local context and delivered through quality education.

Thus, while peace education focuses on content specifically designed to promote and understand peace, education for peace emphasizes the broader, systemic aspects of education that indirectly contribute to building peaceful communities. Peace education is more targeted, addressing peace-related topics directly, whereas education for peace encompasses a wider scope, involving the entire educational system's role in fostering peace. Additionally, peace education can be implemented through specific programs, whereas education for peace requires systemic reforms to align the education system with non-violence objectives.

Ultimately, these two notions should not be seen as interchangeable but essentially complementary. Peace education equips individuals with the skills and knowledge required for peaceful communities, while education for peace supports and ensures that the wider educational system, formal and informal, sustains harmony—and in which peace education may be present.

Global Citizenship Education

Global citizenship education (GCE) is another form of approach to peace through education that was discussed at the HLPF in a side event moderated by Liberato Bautista, President of CoNGO.

This event focused on the theme of *Unlearning Intolerance: Global Citizenship Education and SDG16*. Bautista highlighted the significance of acting at the local level to create global impact, coining the term "Glocal" to emphasize this interplay between local and global actions.

In the discussion, Felisa Tibbitts expanded on the idea of intolerance as part of a broader pattern of violence. She argued that in a world facing a convergence of challenges where the rule of law is under threat, it is crucial to transform education by integrating place-based local knowledge.

Tibbitts advocated for addressing immediate local issues and promoting transformative learning that can disrupt intolerance. This learning, she emphasized, must extend beyond schools to encompass society as a whole.

Laura Engel further underscored the importance of equipping students by fostering curiosity and a sense of agency while developing a strong knowledge base. Her approach aims to empower learners to explore and investigate their surroundings more effectively, aligning with the broader goals of GCE.

GCE emphasizes universal and cosmopolitan values, empathy building, and socio-emotional and sustainability education. From its name, it has a "global" perspective, where the goal is to expand the people's conception of belonging and humanity beyond the nation-state. For this reason, the "global" precedes the "citizenship". People would become active citizens committed to the ethics of global care (De Lissoy, 2010) and universal human rights. In a simplified approach, GCE calls for an expansion of the empathy circle (Singer, 1981). In its Maastricht global education declaration, the Council of Europe describes GCE as "Global education is education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the globalized world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity, and human rights for all" (p. 13) (2002).

However, this idea of a universality of values and shared global humanity assumes some concepts are taken for granted when they are firmly grounded in Western peace ideals (Cremin, 2015). The assumptions of democracy, citizenship, and globalization as peace values reinforce global inequities (Kester, 2022). When it aims to extend humanity beyond the nation-state, it uses the concept of citizenship in its name. Thus, GCE teachers should draw on decolonial thinking for a just and fit-for-context education. For a real GCE, the limits of dominant Western-centric approaches to

peacebuilding are regarded as rational. Thus, we should change discourse from the creation of *a* culture of peace to cultures of peace.

We need to redefine and rethink knowledge; what is it? And how can it be understood in relation to our personal practices, lived experiences, and the spaces we inhabit? Instead of seeing knowledge as a separate element from our lives, we should see it as interconnected and intertwined with everything we experience and do. For global social justice, it is also about cognitive justice (Andreotti, 2018). It's not just about changing the world socially or politically but also how we understand it. This supposes the recognition of diverse ways of knowing, experiencing, and interacting with our surroundings – including bodies, relationships, and experiences. This is just as important as intellectual knowledge. This post-critical approach, advanced by Kester (2022), suggests going beyond traditional criticism to explore a deeper connection between the body, politics, and nature. This encourages us to consider all aspects together instead of separating them. By removing the actual arbitrary divisions and decentering from the idea of human beings, nations, individuals, and minds as a species, we can more fully embrace global peace and citizenship.

Overall, GCE is an approach to opening new possibilities by seeing ourselves as part of a larger, interconnected whole where nature and living beings interact meaningfully. This, in turn, helps to build the social connections required to support cultures of peace.

Contexts and case selection

In Brazil, violence and conflict are deeply rooted in urban violence, social inequalities, and marginalization, particularly affecting poorer communities. Brazil is recognized as one of the most violent countries for young people aged 15 to 29 (Santos et al., 2023). Particularly, people at this age are more subject to physical and psychological

violence. The rate of violence for this age group is 2.07 times higher compared to the adult population. In 2019, 27% of young people said they had been victims of violence in the previous 12 months (Costa, 2023). Even more striking, in 2015, more young people died as victims of violence in Brazil than in Syria, a country in armed conflict (Youth for Road S). Osava (2013) qualifies this historical day-to-day massacre in Brazil as an “Invisible War” or “Invisible Slaughter”. This alarming reality is exacerbated by the presence of, among others, one of the largest organized crime groups, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), which plays a significant role in the drug trade— heavily contributing to widespread violence. The government has addressed these issues through various initiatives, including the Police Pacification Units (UPP), aimed at promoting peace, but with mixed success. The use of violence to reduce violence has, unsurprisingly, failed to produce the desired results. Instead, these pacification efforts have led to increased shootings and disruptions in education through school closures and widespread fear. The longstanding and ongoing gang control in the favelas—historically linked to the notion that these areas are the primary centers of organized crime, lacking legal and public services or state authority (Teixeira et al., 2015)—further complicates Brazil's already complex situation.

Nonetheless, Brazil offers compelling examples of informal, community-based approaches to peace education. This study will present the contributions of Brazilian civil society to these efforts, as highlighted in a side event at the HLPF organized by the Brazilian Consulate in New York. This event showcased how education for peace is being applied in grassroots settings to empower communities and reduce violence. A manifesto authored by Nobel Peace Prize laureates and published in *Le Monde* on 2 July 1997, asserts that education is the only effective means to combat violence with nonviolence.

In Colombia, more than 50 years of armed conflict involving paramilitaries and drug cartels have left a profound impact on the country's social scenery. The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was a notable step toward ending the conflict, but it simply led to the fragmentation of organized crime, with the emergence of other rearmed insurgents (InSight Crime, 2024). Consequently, remote communities are neglected and remain in conflict cycles. In an NRC article Colombians testify how they are “unjustly deprived of fundamental rights such as accessing education, freely navigating their villages, and cultivating their crops” (NRC, 2023).

As of November 2022, 100,000 people remained in forced confinement (NRC, 2022). To put this in perspective, in 2022, over 6 million people—approximately 12% of Colombia's population—lived in areas controlled by active armed groups (NRC, 2022). In this challenging environment, formal peace education has been crucial in Colombia, with school programs focusing on teaching reconciliation and coexistence and empowering youth to contribute to lasting peace. In January 2016, the UN Security Council adopted [resolution 2261](#), establishing an observer mission to monitor the bilateral cessation of hostilities. Additionally, negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) were resumed in November 2022, after being halted in 2019, with a societal participation mechanism launched in the peace process. This elusive peace underscores the limitations of state-led negotiations and highlights the need for innovative, localized approaches to peace.

Amid a learning crisis in 2023, the Colombian government supported the Safe Schools Declaration to mitigate the conflict's impact on education (UNICEF, 2023). In that year, 1.3 million young children lacked access to early education, 60% of third graders did not meet expected competencies, and approximately 2.64 million young people aged 15 to 28 were

neither studying nor working in the second quarter of 2023. Furthermore, Colombia's struggle to protect children from exploitation by armed groups is evident, with 38% of children in indigenous areas being recruited into the Cauca Department (UNICEF, 2023).

Both Brazil and Colombia have experienced significant violent crime, partly due to the influence of criminal organizations. These countries were selected as case studies because of their shared challenges of violence and criminality, as both navigate complex social landscapes shaped by organized crime and drug trafficking. In Colombia, the focus is on formal peace education within the school system, aligned with the ongoing peace process. In contrast, Brazil provides a valuable example of informal, community-driven education for peace, with civil society playing a significant role, as highlighted during the HLPF side event organized by the Brazilian Consulate in New York. The differences in their educational approaches offer diverse solutions to addressing violence. By examining these two cases, the study emphasizes the various ways education can be utilized to combat violence and promote peace in different contexts.

Peace education – Colombia

Assuredly, peace education is key in peace processes such as in Colombia— a country undergoing significant changes in its efforts to reconstruct itself after 2016. Among other initiatives, the Colombian government, during the peace talks that culminated in the 2016 agreement, created a peace and citizenship education course called Cátedra de la Paz. This aims to cultivate a conflict resolution, dialogue, and peace culture, promote peaceful relationships among young people, and encourage active community engagement. The central objective is to create a reflexive and critical space to learn and have a dialogue on the culture of peace, sustainable development,

and respectful coexistence (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015). Thus, the goal is to contribute to the general well-being and the improvement of the quality of life for Colombian society– through education.

Different from classic formal education, this program is designed to be contextualized to better address each community and classroom's needs. Therefore, instead of a unique Cátedra de la Paz, there ought to be several localized versions. However, the course is nonetheless mandatory, only the implementation remains significantly unrestricted across each educational establishment. Schools and teachers have the internal capacity to evaluate their practices and exact curriculum. This allows teachers to choose between focusing on dialogue promotion and conflict resolution– in communities facing violence– or on historical memory and the origins and consequences of armed conflicts– in communities rebuilding themselves. In fact, the Ley 1732 only prescribes certain areas that should be part of the program, including, among others; ethics, human values, environmental education, history, and social sciences (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015). It encompasses a wide range of possible alternatives ranging from environmental sustainability, citizenship competencies, historical memory, and conflict resolution. This also gives the flexibility to address immediate needs in case a massacre that needs to be discussed happens. Nevertheless, in the event of this practice becoming frequent, it can lead to the negative consequence of digging a hole in the program performance, not having time to build strategies that aim the long term– and thus not addressing the root causes; cultural and structural violence (Morales, 2019; Galtung 1990).

Similarly, Morales (2021) emphasizes the significance of land and nature in critical peace pedagogies in the case of Colombia. Considering its context, he describes those concepts as a foundation of the Colombian sustainable future. A territorial lens to peace education incorporates the geographical

conditions of each community into their discourse on the conflict (Echavarría & Cremin, 2019). Accordingly, every critical peace perspective, ranging from feminist approaches to decolonizing, can be of value, as they offer conceptual tools to investigate the structural and cultural violence suffered in Colombia (Morales, 2021). These critical lenses further feature the necessity of viewing peace as a critical, contextualized, and dialogical pursuit (Morales, 2021).

In this sense, although teachers rely on a wide range of pedagogical strategies to respond to local contexts, there seems to be a lack of 1) active roles for the students and 2) critical approaches from teachers toward the narratives of peace and violence (Morales, 2021). For the first one, this is critical as students are the first recipients of the program– and thus should be considered. Second, the lack of critical approaches and failure to adequately contextualize implementation within local lived experiences risks perpetuating violence. According to Morales, this comes unexpectedly as it is linked to the lack of governmental and institutional support. In fact, teachers have not been trained in any way to contextualize the implementation of a vague program on peace. Moreover, the wide flexibility given has certainly confused the teachers regarding how it should be practically implemented. Should it be a stand-alone course? Or an integrated one? What are the course objectives? Should we use case studies? Or games? Or maybe even art and technology? This lack of contextualization of how Cátedra de la Paz should be enacted in the communities has led to uncertainty and inconsistency in its application (Morales, 2021). Some studies even found that although some institutions claimed to be implementing the program, they just used existing courses and renamed them (Ortega, 2019). Thus, there is a need for capacity building and professional development with relevant support for teachers (Morales & Gebre, 2021). As a consequence, implementation varies widely within schools, with educators interpreting the national mandate in various ways across

localities (Bellino, et al. 2022). As a consequence, the course can often be marginalized within schools, which might diminish how important it seems to students (Bellino et al., 2022). Nonetheless, some frequent strategies can be noted; the focus on peaceful resolution of conflicts, addressing diversity and plurality, incorporating human rights and justice education (Morales, 2019), and connecting to local contexts (Vargas, 2023).

The sustainability of the results of the Cátedra de la Paz remains uncertain. Morales (2021) highlights the lack of institutional support in a literature review. According to Morales, this could stem from a disagreement on what peace means and how it could be achieved. This lack of governmental investment drives the sustainability of the program to depend on local attempts and initiatives excessively. If Cátedra de la Paz initial purpose was to promote contextualized peace processes, national support to train educators, provide resources, and evaluate its implementation is required for stronger effects in the long term. In fact, Cátedra de la Paz depends on individual and local commitments rather than sustained national support (Morales, 2021). Other challenges are the absence of articulation between the different stakeholders inside the schools and the missing resources. The issues stem from local governments and the Colombian Ministry of Education to adequately train and guide. Indeed, the overburden implementation strategy on teachers leads to rely mostly on the teacher's knowledge (Vélez, 2019). This downplays not only the students but also the local perspectives on violence and peace. It aligns with the call for the lack of emphasis on the criticality of Díaz et al. (2016) and Giordano et al. (2016). The literature shows that only a few schools have worked on situating the narratives of peace and violence in their contexts. Most of them simply used proposed definitions by the United Nations, for example (Morales, 2021).

Nonetheless, Cátedra de la Paz is considered by teachers and students as a

beneficial and inevitable initiative to advance peace and more active communities (Morales, 2021). It legitimizes education as a national strategy in the Colombian peace process. Furthermore, it positively affected school communities and promoted positive changes, including improved conflict resolution skills (Fernández & Punto, 2017), promoted active citizenship among students (Díaz et al., 2016), positive coexistence between students (Martínez, 2017), increased collaboration with peers (Vélez, 2019), and greater integration of rural populations (Monsalve, 2017). In addition, students residing in regions with a higher impact of conflict often perceive the course as more immediately applicable to their everyday lives and communities (Bellino, et al. 2022).

Furthermore, several strategies are recommended for positively implementing the program. First, the whole school community, including students, administrators, and families, should be involved (Vargas, 2023). Second, it should be integrated across multiple subject areas rather than as an isolated topic (Salamanca et al. 2016). Then, focusing on a sustained implementation, aiming for long-term results (Morales, 2019). Moreover, the content should be tailored to specific age groups (Salamanca, et al. 2016). Finally, teachers should be given adequate support and training (Vargas, 2023).

Overall, integrating processes of peace into educational institutions is beneficial for society (Kurian & Kester, 2019), as learners become more prone to act for their communities and environments after being made more conscious of collective responsibility, the value of dialogue, and the principles of nonviolence (Galtung, 1983). Nonetheless, while implementation challenges have limited its effectiveness, Cátedra de la Paz has the potential to positively influence youth attitudes related to violence. Institutional support, resources, and coherence are required to realize these positive and sustainable results. While

contextualized implementation is a well-intentioned approach, it needs to be balanced. Apart from these grounded and critical perspectives, centralized support over time should be secured. Ultimately, the perceived significance of the course is frequently influenced by the ability of educators to relate the material to the local contexts and experiences of the students (Morales, 2019).

This underlines the fact that just having education and, in this case, peace education is not enough. When there is a lack of quality in education, the results remain unsatisfactory and do not reach the desired target. In a study in 2020 (Chaves, et al., 2020) the reasons why youth drop out of school were investigated. They analyzed the trajectories of adolescents into organized crime and violence in Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. While these studies cannot be generalized, this reveals a certain clue on the impact of education on youth involvement in violence and crime. According to their findings, Economic hardship isn't the main reason these youth leave school; rather, they are "pushed out" by a cycle of stigmatization, segregation, punishment, and exclusion. The term "dropout" is problematic because it places the blame solely on the student, whereas "push out" more accurately reflects the exclusionary practices that lead to disengagement. Social relationships are key in this process, especially with teachers, but rigid exclusionary policies often constrain teachers. The study emphasizes that the school system, not the youth, is responsible for this rejection, particularly for those involved in crime. This study exemplifies how just having an education is not enough. Not only do students need to have an education, but they also need to have a *quality* education. The term quality should be understood as an education that fosters critical thinking and creativity of every learner. An education where a student is supported and not excluded, where every student is valued for their own qualities and capacities. Every learner should feel he is someone in something.

Transforming education

In this sense, on 11 July 2024, a special event on Transforming Education—convened by the Secretary-General—sought to stimulate greater action on education. In this discussion, the speakers noted several points addressing the urgent need to transform education.

The central themes emphasized the need to rethink the concept of "learning," incorporate green technology into education, improve access to schools in rural areas, enhance critical thinking, and move away from methods that rely heavily on grades, exams, and rote memorization. A global revolution in education is necessary.

One critical aspect of transforming education discussed was the development of a curriculum that is fit for purpose, preparing students for employment while also protecting the environment, preventing future conflicts, and integrating indigenous knowledge. This curriculum should expose learners to technology that fosters connection rather than division. For instance, during the HLPF meeting, the example of Jamaica was highlighted, where online free learning is available to all students. Additionally, there must be greater access to non-formal learning opportunities, not just formal education.

To achieve these goals, speakers emphasized the need for institutionalized mechanisms that amplify our voices when we demand change rather than suppress them. A peaceful, fair, and sustainable future is impossible without ensuring that everyone has access to quality education. However, simply providing access to education is not enough. We need to provide access to education of the highest relevance and quality—inclusive, equitable, and designed to build interpersonal skills for creating peaceful societies.

Education, therefore, serves as a catalyst for sustainable development. We must

implement a system that better measures where skills mismatches occur and link educational systems more effectively with the labor market. Individual frustration over skills mismatches can lead to a disincentive for education at both the individual and family levels. The UN should actively promote the skills that the market needs while ensuring that educational opportunities align with individual aspirations, engaging all stakeholders in the process. The labor market is not static; it is dynamic and ever-changing. Institutions must be equipped not only to meet current needs but also to anticipate future demands.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that individuals have different motivations and potentials. Therefore, we need institutional mechanisms that guide them effectively, using digital technology as a sustainable and efficient means to build these systems. Teachers must be more than just recipients of educational directives; they should be integral participants in the dialogue, respected as "wisdom workers."

Finally, we need more flexible educational systems that can adapt to society's dynamic changes. These systems must be responsive and capable of evolving with the shifting needs of both the labor market and the learners themselves.

Education for peace – Brazil

The Brazilian case demonstrated below is the perfect example of the significance of local and community-level action in addressing peace through education.

On 12 July, at an HLPF side event organized by the Brazilian consulate in New York, different concrete and practical examples of how education for peace happens, in reality, were conveyed.

The first role model is the one of Nova Acropolis, presented by Melissa Andrade Costa. Nova Acropolis is an international organization – spread across the world – promoting philosophy, culture, and volunteering through an ideal of international fraternal values – based on human dignity. In this case, applied philosophy is used to promote peace. In fact, philosophy is understood by Professor Melissa as the art of living according to the laws of the universe explored through different traditions. This means understanding the underlying causes of life. Peace is contemplated as a concept, an ideal, a way of being centered by reaching a balance that brings us peace. As highlighted by the Professor, we tend to think about peace as a political concept. While this is also true, we should think about it more often from this other perspective.

Through philosophy, we action change of oneself. As noted in the discussion, it's "easy" to envision change from a policy perspective but much more challenging to initiate change from within. It is uncommon to link policy and inner life. Indeed, there is a huge gap between inner life and public policy. Applied philosophy's goal is to change an attitude, which is required to bring peace. Our own inner life leads to policies that lack insights. In the end, when we do policy, we forget about the most essential part of the puzzle, that is us as human beings. In a study shared during the meeting, Nova Acropolis proved that by using this applied philosophy methodology, people could listen to understand, be respectful, and respect life. All those skills are required to promote peace. In this sense, the concept of peace can be understood politically and as an internal and essential component of every human being. Thus, a bridge between public policy and the inner dimension of human beings needs to be built. Philosophy could provide a deeper perspective, contributing to a more human and inclusive policy.

Through the illustration of Nova Acropolis's power, Melissa calls for unity in a

fragmenting world that requires higher purposes and values. Nova Acropolis highlights the need to shift from an external, technocratic paradigm to a more profound and humane view.

This approach, rooted in philosophy, embraced by Nova Acropolis, is a powerful model for fostering peace. By cultivating inner ethics and values, Nova Acropolis nurtures individuals capable of contributing positively to their communities by first being made aware of their own inner life. Education for peace, demonstrated in this case, is not merely about teaching conflict resolution or promoting mediation and diplomatic dialogue; it is about transforming the individual from within. An inner transformation that leads to a more enduring form of peace—one that is reflected in our actions, relationships, and, ultimately, in the policies that govern societies.

Another practical example of education for peace in Brazil is Ipearte, presented by its founder, Katia Lazera, at the HLPF. It is a center in Marituba welcoming children and their families. It provides a safe space for activities, education, music, arts, classical ballet, sports, and workshops for adults. Its goal is to educate people by cultivating human virtues and ethics. It also cultivates volunteer work as a social contribution. Therefore, it is committed to transforming human beings through social responsibility, education, and ethics. Committed to developing and transforming human beings through education, art, and social responsibility, IPEARTE's global objectives are the SDGs. Students learn inclusivity and unity in this center through dance, music, or sports classes. Furthermore, students at university receive a more significant grant if they help children in the activities at the center. Additionally, they provide courses for professionally oriented adults.

Ipearte is an exciting example of the importance of community-level and ownership projects. Recently, sports were included in the center, as it was noticed how the Brazilian community valued sports,

especially soccer. Including soccer in the center piqued the interest of many more young volunteers who were ready to get involved.

Additionally, sustainability and development were positive consequences of Ipearte for the Brazilian community. Today, people in Marituba have public transportation and public light. The small town is unrecognizable. In addition to education, activities, and volunteering, Ipearte further enhances its impact by drawing its workforce and resources, including groceries, from local businesses in Marituba. The program has become a reference in the municipality by welcoming children and being a catalyst for local development, engaging in dialogue with other local institutions.

The results are clear and pragmatic, demonstrating the crucial role that informal education plays in promoting peace. Before Ipearte settled down in Marituba, the community was led by the Commando Vermelho, one of the most critical drug gangs in the country. Thus, heavy insecurity floated around Marituba. Now, the gang has withdrawn and even started to protect this community, as their children themselves are part of the Ipearte Center.

Overall, these two cases selected—discussed at the HLPF—demonstrate how the alignment of personal growth and higher ideals can be a force for lasting peace in a fragmented world. Moreover, education contributes to the promotion of peace by offering young people alternatives for social interactions and perspectives beyond the violence they are exposed to daily.

Conclusion

In summary, the 12th session of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) emphasized the critical need for transformative educational approaches to tackle urgent global challenges such as poverty, hunger, climate

action, and peace. António Guterres's focus on reimagining education highlights its crucial role in preventing conflict and promoting peace.

In these discussions, it was recognized that education is a form of wealth that cannot be taken away. Unlike material resources that can be exploited or depleted, knowledge and intellectual capacity provide a crucial layer of protection, strengthening communities and reducing their vulnerability during crises (Galtung 1983). This intangible spiritual richness fortifies individual communities and contributes to the resilience of nations as a whole. Investing in education is a long-term strategy that ensures the transfer of knowledge and skills across generations, fostering self-reliance and sustainable development.

The economic implications of education were also a significant focus at the HLPF, particularly during the meeting on Transforming Education. The high cost of depriving children of education—illustrated by the \$12 billion annual loss due to inefficiencies in Africa's education system—emphasizes the need to view education as an investment rather than an expense. Effective collaboration between education experts and financial ministries is essential for integrating educational priorities into broader economic planning.

Investing in education can have multiplier effects, such as reducing poverty, addressing fundamental social issues, increasing productivity, and fostering greater environmental awareness. It also enables adopting sustainable practices and promotes peace and justice through equitable and inclusive education. We must approach education differently, recognizing its value in imparting knowledge, empowering individuals, and driving meaningful change.

The discussions at the HLPF highlighted that resolving global challenges cannot rely solely on financial resources; they require new perspectives that resonate with the

human spirit. Educational institutions, whether formal or informal, act as vital hubs for dialogue and connection, fostering a shared sense of purpose. Investing in education unlocks numerous benefits, including poverty reduction, social progress, increased productivity, environmental stewardship, and promoting peace and justice through inclusive education. Ultimately, education's value lies in imparting knowledge, empowering individuals, and driving meaningful change across societies. By embracing diverse perspectives and tailoring educational strategies to local needs, we can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts and work towards achieving sustainable and equitable development goals.

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