



Youth worker as a peace educator

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1. PREFACE

Peace education is an important topic for everyone, especially young people living in an increasingly complex world. This guide is intended for anyone interested, especially youth workers who can strengthen young people's active role as peacebuilders in their work. It is a **concise and practical overview of the core principles and methods of peace education**.

This guide prepares youth workers to get started as peace educators. It includes a **self-assessment tool** and **real-life scenarios** to support learning and development.

Peace is built through actions, conversations, and a shared desire to understand one another better.

We hope this guide inspires and encourages you to integrate peace education into your work and daily life!



2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Description of the project

This guide was developed as part of the [Peace4Europe](#) project to support youth workers and organizations in applying peace education principles in their everyday work with young people. Peace4Europe is a three-year Erasmus+ cooperation partnership project (2023–2026) that brings together organizations from Finland, Austria, Hungary, and Estonia. The project responds to the urgent need for tools, support, and new approaches for youth workers to address the complex realities of war, insecurity, and polarization affecting young people across the continent.

The project aims to:

- Equip youth workers with practical tools to integrate peace education into their **daily practice** in non-formal learning environments.
- **Recognize and enhance** the role of youth workers as peace educators. Support **cross-national dialogue and cooperation** to adapt and implement peace education in youth work throughout Europe.

Key activities include:

- Developing and piloting a **dialogue workshop model** to explore how peace education and youth work can be meaningfully combined.
- Co-creating this **educational package** entitled Youth Worker as a Peace Educator, which will be openly available to youth professionals.
- **Supporting the professional development** of youth workers through collaboration, peer learning, and locally organized testing and dissemination.

The Peace4Europe project is coordinated by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk) and involves experienced partners such as the Peace Education Institute (FI), BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH (AT), Gyermek- és Ifjúsági Önkormányzati Társaság (HU), NGO Mondo (EE), and the Estonian Association of Youth Workers (EE). The project is co-funded by the European Union.

2.2. What is peace education (in a nutshell)?

Peace education – education about peace and for peace

Peace education ...

- ... is a multifaceted approach that aims to create peaceful societies.
- ... equips individuals with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to address conflict constructively.
- ... builds a culture where peace is valued and consistently pursued by using educational processes as tools.
- ... encompasses a range of strategies, from teaching about maintaining inner peace and empathy to challenging societal norms and promoting inclusion.

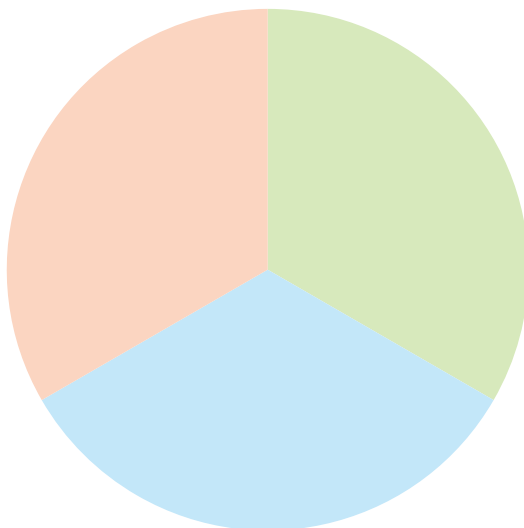
In practice, we explore together how people’s heads, hearts and hands work toward living sustainably and peacefully in different communities:

Knowledge (“head”)

understanding of the manifestations of violence and conflict; understanding the root causes of war; knowing alternatives to violence; knowing what culture of peace is; awareness of power structures and privileges.

Skills and actions (“hands”)

capacity for critical thinking, reflection and participation; empathy; cooperation skills; specific communication, cooperation and behavioral skills used in conflict situations; dialogical skills; negotiation skills; capacity to recognize hate speech and discrimination; skills to manage them; active and participatory citizenship.



Attitudes and values (“heart”)

commitment to justice; respect for others and oneself; appreciation of peace in its many forms; valuing non-violence; appreciation of justice, human rights and culture of peace.

In peace education, one of the most important international actors is UNESCO. In 1974, UNESCO developed the Recommendation on Education for Peace, which talks about understanding, cooperation, peace, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. It states that peace education aims to develop moral and social responsibility for all and to promote understanding across social and cultural boundaries.

In 2023, UNESCO updated the document highlighting the importance of teaching analytical and critical thinking, adaptation skills, respect for diversity, responsibility for sustainable development, and media literacy.

“Education must emphasize the importance of preventing and addressing wars, aggression, all forms of violence and human rights violations. Both individuals and communities must understand and accept their responsibility to maintain, promote and demand peace. Education must also contribute to the fight against racism, xenophobia and all acts and ideologies that incite hatred, intolerance, discrimination and violence.” (UNESCO, 2023)

Peace education teaches active peacebuilding

Peace education provides the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to resolve conflicts and maintain and build sustainable peace in society. It is achieved by focusing attention on the causes of violence and guiding people to resolve disputes and conflicts peacefully. Mediation and negotiation, the ability to perceive different perspectives, and empathy are key peace education skills. The goal is to equip learners with the ability and interest to create the conditions for long-term peace.

Peacebuilding cannot be left to state actors alone. Individuals and groups must be involved in planning and implementing peace. Also, it is necessary to have the courage to challenge norms and existing power structures. Recognizing the need for change and understanding one’s position and participation in maintaining unequal structures are prerequisites for sustainable and transformative peace education.

Peace education pedagogies

Peace education takes many forms depending on the context, the practitioner, and participants. Educational tools that support understanding and building sustainable peace are the core of this work. It can be carried out with individuals, groups, and sometimes with wider audiences, such as youth work departments or city councils. Working with all those groups is important as peacebuilding requires action at all levels.

Peace education does not have specific working methods reserved for it. Like peace research, which uses research traditions and methods from many disciplines, peace education draws on a wide range of educational and training methods. For example, peace education can include guided discussions, group work, media analysis, and the creation of safer spaces. Anyone who is working with people can be a peace educator if they are devoted to sustainable peace.

Although peace education can be carried out at the individual, group, and even global levels, we can all work on peace individually through developing inner peace. At the group level, we can learn communication skills to support cooperation and build peaceful relationships. Globally, we need to develop the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to contribute to sustainable peace worldwide.

Pedagogy of Hope

One of the most famous peace educators is Paulo Freire (1921–1997), whose pedagogical principle holds that the learner’s own agency and dialogue between people are at the heart of pedagogical processes. He believed that social awareness is important across all fields of education and that social problems could be solved through learning.

Freire advocated for dialogue between learners and educators. Freire and his successors believe that by being aware of the mechanisms of power and inequality, people can build a more peaceful society rather than reinforcing prevailing inequalities.

Freire also encouraged all educators to cultivate hope in their own thinking and work. He thought that promoting hope makes room for building a better future. Peace educators are encouraged to reflect on what encourages hope in themselves and in the groups they work with. Often the experience of working together for a meaningful goal can itself generate hope. The pedagogy of hope and the courage to dream of a peaceful world guide us toward a better future.

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3. PEACE EDUCATION COMPETENCIES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

This resource has been developed for youth workers, regardless of their professional or educational background. It is designed assuming that the users are familiar with non-formal learning and self-reflective practices, and that these principles are applied in their work.

This list of competence areas is meant to help youth workers reflect on their readiness to act as peace educators. The areas presented here should be taken as an example rather than a definitive framework for professional development. It is not intended to be a final or exhaustive list.

Youth workers are encouraged to use the material in the way that best supports their learning. The competence areas may guide discussions or collaborative reflections among colleagues. It can also serve as a framework for individual self-reflection on peace education.

The **green** set outlines the foundational competences needed when preparing peace education activities. The **pink** set highlights the competences required for the practical implementation of peace education. The **blue** set focuses on the youth workers themselves, offering guidance for assessing their readiness to take on the role of peace educators. The eight main competence areas are as follows:

- 1. Understanding contexts of peace and peace education**
- 2. Navigating cultural diversity, global perspectives, and inclusivity**
- 3. Information as a foundation for peace education**
- 4. Designing and facilitating learning in youth work settings**
- 5. Integrating peace education into everyday professional practice**
- 6. Promoting a peaceful way of being**
- 7. Cultivating inner peace and self-awareness**
- 8. Recognizing and addressing personal biases**

1. Understanding contexts of peace and peace education

The present influences how we perceive and experience peace. For educators, it is important to understand the context before taking action. This competence area focuses on building knowledge and awareness of peace and peace education, as well as critical thinking abilities to design meaningful educational activities.

Knowledge

- Knowing the different dimensions of peace (positive peace, negative peace, inner peace, global peace etc.).
- Understanding the meaning and objectives of peace education.
- Understanding how to implement peace education activities in youth work settings.

Skills

- Analyzing relevant content and material to prepare for peace education activities.
- Recognizing sensitive or context-specific information to plan and conduct peace education activities.
- Being able to talk about peace in a professional role and to facilitate discussions about peace.

Attitudes

- Willingness to deal with ambiguity.
- Openness to learn and grow; readiness to “unknow.”
- Capacity to reflect on different realities.
- Informed decision-making when planning educational activities.

2. Navigating cultural diversity, global perspectives, and inclusivity

Peace education takes place in complex spaces where young people bring diverse cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and expectations. Peace educators need to navigate these realities by not only understanding wider social, cultural, and global contexts but also by developing strategies to apply this knowledge effectively in practice. This competence area focuses on adapting to group dynamics, seeing different perspectives, and creating safe learning environments that make peace education accessible and meaningful for everyone.

Knowledge

- Having a basic understanding of key concepts and their content: culture, diversity, globalization, inclusion, peace, and human rights.
- Understanding specific information, such as participants' backgrounds, experiences, and the wider context, is crucial for setting an appropriate foundation for educational activities.

Skills

- Analyzing information to create a safe environment for peace education.
- Encouraging participants to take initiative and build resilience.

Attitudes

- Willingness to address and manage participants' expectations and needs.
- Openness to and respect for the diversity that exists within different groups.

3. Information as a foundation for peace education

Managing and understanding all the information related to peace education can be challenging. Ongoing conflicts, crises, and other threats to peace affect the lives of youth in different ways. Therefore, this competence area emphasizes analytical skills to help plan educational activities on a solid foundation. It also involves the ability to select appropriate methods and approaches for a specific target group.

Knowledge

- Knowing how to analyze different types of information and data (e.g., situations of peace or crisis, their effects, available resources, and challenges).
- Understanding how peace education as a pedagogical approach can be used to create learning opportunities for young people.
- Knowing how to turn complex data and theory into something accessible and meaningful for young people.
- Knowing how to distinguish accurate and reliable information from misinformation and fake news.

Skills

- Preparing educational materials based on reliable data and information.
- Choosing appropriate methods to address specific needs and goals.
- Making complex information practical and engaging.

Attitudes

- Openness to different learning approaches and interested in peace education.
- Openness to dealing with complexity and uncertainty.

4. Designing and facilitating learning in youth work settings

Since a key element of peace education lies in meaningful learning, this competence area focuses on the facilitation and design of educational activities that are inclusive, engaging, and reflective for all participants. It is important to create safe learning spaces that promote participation, dialogue, and collective knowledge-building, rooted in non-formal education.

Knowledge

- Knowing non-formal and informal learning principles.
- Using basic human rights as guiding values in education.
- Understanding group dynamics in youth work settings.
- Designing instructional materials for youth work settings.

Attitudes

- Readiness to carry out a value-driven practice.
- Willingness to face discrimination, such as racism.
- Openness to co-creation, constructive dialogue, and diversity in values and opinions.
- Commitment to listening to participants and embracing diversity in their needs, expectations, values, knowledge, and opinions.



5. Integrating peace education into everyday professional practice

Integrating peace education approaches into everyday youth work makes them sustainable. This competence area involves recognizing opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and understanding social structures. It helps professionals working with youth make peace education activities a continuous process.

Knowledge

- Recognizing how the values and principles of peace education align with non-formal learning and everyday youth work.
- Understanding of how social structures and present conflicts can influence peace education.
- Knowing how experimental learning supports peace education.

Skills

- Being able to recognize opportunities for dialogue and reflection in routine activities.
- Being flexible, ready to improvise, and willing to try new approaches in everyday activities.
- Developing strategies to integrate peace education into regular youth work.
- Communicating clearly with others about the goals and practices of peace education.
- Having transparent communication with the youth to engage them as partners.

Attitudes

- Maintaining a reflective approach in peace education practices.
- Ability to initiate new ideas and changes in daily practices.
- Openness to teamwork and sharing responsibilities.

6. Promoting a peaceful way of being

Promoting and practicing a peaceful way of being means approaching oneself and others with empathy, patience, and openness. This competence area highlights the importance of modeling peace through everyday interactions and empathetic, nonviolent communication with others.

Knowledge

- Understanding how communication and behavior patterns influence group dynamics and relationships.
- Being familiar with respectful conflict resolution approaches.
- Understanding nonviolent communication and its role in youth work and learning processes.

Skills

- Practicing active listening and responding with empathy to youths' perceptions and experiences.
- Using and promoting inclusive and respectful language in group interactions.
- Being able to handle tension and encourage constructive communication among young people in group settings.

Attitudes

- Nonjudgmental and respectful mindset toward young people's experiences and worldviews.
- Respect for diverse perspectives and openness to dialogue.
- Patience in working with groups at different stages of learning and promoting the same among youth.

7. Cultivating inner peace and self-awareness

Inner peace and self-awareness are the foundation for working with young people in an emotionally safe and nonreactive way. Understanding your own emotions and developing resilience strategies can help youth workers create compassionate, safer spaces for the target group while remaining reflective and grounded.

Knowledge

- Understanding how personal well-being influences group dynamics and educational settings.
- Being aware of the link between self-awareness and professional practice.
- Being aware of resilience strategies.

Skills

- Practicing self-reflection and emotional regulation.
- Identifying personal triggers and managing reactions.
- Being able to remain calm and collected in emotionally charged situations.
- Being able to set boundaries.

Attitudes

- Willingness to learn about one's own emotional well-being.
- Readiness for self-reflection.
- Openness to acknowledge personal vulnerabilities and areas of improvement.

8. Recognizing and addressing personal biases

In peace education, commitment to equity is vital as everyone inevitably brings perspectives shaped by their culture, identity, and social position. This competence area encourages developing awareness of these influences, critically reflecting on assumptions, privileges, and unconscious biases. Recognizing how they affect youth work and relationships with young people is necessary. Building this competence improves integrity and creates safer, more inclusive learning environments that value diverse experiences and ensure equity.

Knowledge

- Understanding privilege, social norms, and inequalities.
- Being aware of how unconscious bias influences perceptions and decision-making.
- Recognizing how historical and political contexts shape power dynamics.
- Understanding the impact of structural inequalities on learning environments.
- Knowing inclusive learning practices, intersectionality, and intercultural communication.

Skills

- Recognizing personal bias and the bias of others.
- Being able to expose covert (hidden or unconscious) biases.
- Intervening in discrimination to maintain a safe learning environment.

Attitudes

- Willingness to critically reflect on one's own bias.
- Patience in engaging with difficult conversations, such as those about equity and privilege.
- Respect for perspectives and experiences that challenge one's own worldview.
- Willingness to acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility for biased actions and assumptions in work situations.

4. SELF-ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION TOOLS

4.1. Self-assessment tool

Here you have the opportunity to reflect on yourself and consider to what extent you feel competent in the different areas. We also provide you with a tool to help plan your own learning path and develop your competences in peace education.

1. Understanding contexts of peace and peace education

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I know what peace means and the differences between its dimensions.				
I am clear about the aims of peace education.				
I know how to find reliable information.				
I know how to avoid misinformation and fake news.				
I can analyze relevant content and materials.				
I can recognize sensitive or context-specific information.				
I can use different data effectively when planning educational activities.				
I can question and reflect on information before applying it in practice.				
I am willing to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty.				
I am open to learning and growing, ready to “unknow” in order to gain new knowledge.				
I value connecting with others to gain deeper insights into specific issues.				
I am ready to reflect on different realities and perspectives.				
I make informed decisions when planning educational activities.				
I recognize the need for personal development and I am motivated to use tools to do that.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

2. Navigating cultural diversity, global perspectives, and inclusivity

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand key concepts such as culture, diversity, inclusion, peace, and globalization.				
I can identify how participants’ backgrounds and lived experiences influence group dynamics.				
I am aware of wider social, political, and cultural contexts that might shape young people’s perspectives.				
I understand how global issues connect to local realities in youth work settings.				
I know what factors can make an educational space inclusive or exclusive.				
I can integrate multiple perspectives into educational activities and discussions.				
I can support young people in expressing their identities and experiences safely.				
I can adapt methods to meet the needs of multicultural or diverse groups.				
I am willing to engage with participants’ expectations and needs, even if they differ from my own.				
I understand what makes a learning environment safe and accessible for a diverse group of participants.				
I know the principles of inclusive learning, intercultural communication, and intersectionality.				
I am open to perspectives that challenge my worldviews or assumptions.				
I am ready to continuously learn about the contexts, cultures, and communities I work with.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

3. Utilizing information as a foundation for peace education

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand how to analyze different types of information and data relevant to peace education.				
I know how to distinguish reliable information from misinformation or fake news.				
I understand how to translate complex concepts and data into accessible content for young people.				
I can prepare educational materials based on accurate, evidence-based information.				
I can select methods that align with the needs, context, and goals of a specific group.				
I can turn complex data into simple, engaging learning activities.				
I can explain sensitive or difficult information in a responsible, supportive way.				
I am open to working with complex or uncertain information.				
I value accuracy and responsibility when using information with young people.				
I am ready to reflect on how the information I use influences young people's learning processes.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

4. Designing and facilitating learning in youth work settings

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand the principles of non-formal and informal learning.				
I understand group dynamics and how they influence learning in youth work settings.				
I know how to design learning processes that support participation, dialogue, and reflection.				
I can facilitate inclusive and participatory learning processes.				
I can create materials, tools, and activities tailored to the goals of peace education.				
I can monitor and evaluate peace education activities using appropriate tools.				
I can adjust facilitation approaches when unexpected challenges or group dynamics arise.				
I am committed to value-driven practice in youth work.				
I am open to co-creation, collective learning, and dialogue among participants.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

5. Integrating peace education into everyday professional practice

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand how the values and principles of peace education connect with non-formal learning and everyday youth work.				
I am aware of how social structures and ongoing conflicts can influence the learning processes in peace education.				
I can recognize opportunities for dialogue and reflection within routine youth work activities.				
I can develop strategies to integrate peace education into regular youth work settings.				
I can maintain transparent communication with young people and involve them as partners in the process.				
I can clearly communicate the objectives and practices of peace education with colleagues.				
I maintain a reflective approach toward my peace education practice.				
I am willing to collaborate on a team and share responsibilities to sustainably integrate peace education.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

6. Promoting a peaceful way of being

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand how communication and behavior patterns influence group dynamics and relationships.				
I am familiar with respectful approaches to conflict resolution.				
I understand the principles of nonviolent communication and its role in youth work and learning processes.				
I practice active listening and respond with empathy to young people's perceptions and experiences.				
I can use and promote inclusive and respectful language in group interactions.				
I can manage tension within a group and foster constructive communication among young people.				
I can intervene in situations involving discrimination to maintain a safe and inclusive learning environment.				
I maintain a nonjudgmental and respectful attitude toward young people's experiences and worldviews.				
I respect diverse perspectives and remain open to dialogue.				
I practice patience when working with groups at different stages of learning and promote it among young people.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

7. Cultivating inner peace and self-awareness

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand how my personal well-being influences group dynamics and learning environments.				
I am aware of how self-awareness contributes to my professional practice.				
I am aware of different strategies that support personal resilience.				
I can practice self-reflection and regulate my emotions in professional situations.				
I can identify my personal triggers and manage my reactions constructively.				
I can remain calm and collected in emotionally charged situations, including conflicts.				
I can set and maintain healthy boundaries in my professional practice.				
I am willing to learn about my own emotional well-being.				
I am ready to engage in ongoing self-reflection.				
I am open to acknowledging my own vulnerabilities and areas for growth.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

8. Recognizing and addressing personal biases

	1 – I want to improve	2	3	4 – I feel confident
I understand how privilege, social norms, and indirect mechanisms of exclusion can operate in youth work settings.				
I am aware of how unconscious biases can influence perceptions and decision-making.				
I am aware of how structural inequalities affect learning environments and participation.				
I can recognize my own biases and those of others.				
I can identify and address covert or unconscious biases when they appear.				
I am willing to critically reflect on my assumptions, opinions, and cultural lens.				
I respect perspectives and lived experiences that differ from or challenge my own worldview.				
I am willing to acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility for biased actions or assumptions in my work.				

Reflective comments: (including relevant examples, evidence, and learning outcomes):

Questions for further reflection and areas for development:

4.2 Reflection tool

Next, we invite you to engage in a guided reflection. Use the questions below as a starting point and take notes using the method that works best for you. They are meant to inspire you, help you notice key insights, and capture your most important takeaways connected to the competence areas. Your notes can be written, drawn, photographed, or recorded as a voice message—whatever you prefer. Use the template however it best supports you.

Which competence elements do you already feel confident in?

- What is your evidence for this? (What makes you feel that you are good at it?)
- What moment in your daily practice best demonstrates this?

Which areas do you feel you need more time to develop and learn?

- How do these areas show up in your daily practice with young people?
- How does applying these competences encourage the participation of young people and the wider community?

What moment in your practice made you struggle with this competence and what did you learn from the experience?

- What steps can you take to develop further?
- Which of your other competences could support you in improving?
- What is your motivation to learn and grow in these areas?
- What is a realistic learning goal for you that you can set?
- How will you know that you are making progress in this area?

Who else, besides yourself, could support you in your learning?

- What resources could help you develop in this area?



5. STORY COLLECTION – GUIDE ON HOW PEACE EDUCATION CAN BE APPLIED IN PRACTICE

5.1. Introduction to the guid

Goal

The purpose of peace education is to have more peace and less violence. Peace education offers knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed for peacebuilding. When we apply peace education to youth work, we teach ourselves and others how to maintain peace, restore it, and build sustainable peace. Peace education can be applied in most educational and recreational settings.

Preparing to address different topics through peace education activities can be challenging. With this guide, we offer a starting point for youth workers and educators to begin peace education. The guide introduces different **dimensions of peace**, as understanding its many aspects is important when planning and implementing peace education. If we are aware of what we are striving for, it is much easier to plan and carry out activities and talk about peace. Peace manifests itself and is experienced at the **individual**, interpersonal, and global levels.

The stories here are most focused on interpersonal peace and peace in communities because these are the topics closest to youth workers' professional lives. While the guide provides youth workers with knowledge and skills to build and maintain peace at personal and interpersonal levels, we keep in mind that people's lives are also affected by global crises. Various crises affect us all, and the causes and consequences of these tensions affect those who work with young people as well. We are constantly reminded that we need to care for the planet, the aftermath of wars, and cooperate with diverse groups. At the same time, it is necessary to take care of ourselves so we can lead fulfilling lives despite instability and uncertainty.

The guide presents **different scenarios** where peace education methods were practiced. The scenarios are collected from youth work settings where challenging moments were experienced, and a peace education approach was applied. The stories are grouped into topics by different dimensions of peace. Each story is presented first, followed by a reflective summary and questions.

Dimensions of peace	Stories in the guide
Inner peace	Story 1: Inner peace at the office Story 2: Peace between colleagues through inner peace
Interpersonal peace, peace in a community, peace in society	Story 3: Human rights and inclusion challenges Story 4: Talking about physical violence Story 5: Bridging differences through dialogue Story 6: Love your neighbor Story 7: Peace education without organizational support
Global peace	Story 8: Talking about world politics

Glossary

In the glossary, key terms are explained to make the following chapter and stories easier to understand. These terms are fundamental for understanding and reflecting on peace. Positive, negative, inner, interpersonal, and global peace are dimensions of peace explained in greater detail in the next chapter. This glossary is a place to revisit when some terms need clarification.

Negative peace describes a state or situation in which there is no direct violence. Direct violence can be understood as physical or psychological acts of aggression directed toward an individual or group.

Positive peace refers to the absence of indirect, cultural, and structural violence in the lives of people and communities as a whole. Positive peace describes not only the absence of indirect violence but also the presence of social justice. Indirect violence means systematic ways of discrimination and its normalization in society. Positive peace is characterized by the continuing presence of an equitable and just social order.

Inner peace means experienced, personal peace.

Interpersonal peace means peace that is felt and seen among individuals, in communities, and in societies. This level of peace happens between “I” and “the other” or “us” and “the others.”

Global peace means peace between countries, regions and continents, as well as peace between humankind and nature.

5.2. Dimensions of peace

Most of us have an idea of what peace is. When we talk about peace with others, we often find that it means different things to different people. For one, peace is an inner experience of harmony and harmony with the global ecosystem; for another, it is a life

free of conflict and injustice. For a third, it is the absence of armed violence. For some, it is the realization of all of these at once. One may even have multiple interpretations of peace to use depending on the situation and context.

Peace is a complex concept with different interpretations depending on the person, context, time, and place. It is simultaneously the ability of an individual to live an internally balanced life and to live in a fair, nondiscriminatory society without direct violence. In peace research and professional peacebuilding, peace is often divided into **negative peace** and **positive peace**. Both categories are positive in the sense that more peace is almost always better. Nevertheless, concepts of negative and positive peace refer to different qualities of peace.

Neither complete positive nor negative peace has been achieved anywhere. Peace is more like a spectrum than an absolute state. What we are striving for is more peace and less violence. These concepts of positive and negative peace are useful for planning peace education activities or evaluating how much and what kind of peace there is in some cases. How we conceptualize peace strongly influences how we work toward it in practice.

The concepts were proposed by the Norwegian peace researcher **Johan Galtung**, one of the founders of the discipline of peace studies. Galtung sought to systematize the concept of peace and to highlight the conditions necessary for peace to be possible. Galtung's definition of positive peace strongly influences peace education, as it aims to build peaceful and sustainable communities through education. Peace must be planned and built consciously, as it does not happen without active human effort.

Peace exists at different levels simultaneously. At the level of living in harmony with the Earth and its ecosystem, or individually experiencing inner peace, all levels of peace are important. Different levels also influence one another. For example, if somebody lives in a society with positive peace, they are more likely to experience inner peace. Furthermore, vice versa, if more people worked for and achieved inner peace, there would be more positive peace in society.



Self-reflection questions:

- How do you feel after writing your statement?
- Was it easy or hard to compile your ideas?
- How does your concept of peace relate to the different definitions of peace presented in the guide?
- Did your understanding of peace change or develop further?
- If you shared with colleagues, did you find common or differing points in the statements?

1) Inner peace

Inner peace means **experienced, personal peace**. When we experience inner peace, we can interact with the world and its people more constructively than when we are out of balance. Finding inner peace is a lifelong journey. Challenging times, crises, and other experiences can shake our inner peace and influence our well-being.

Our environment affects our inner peace; if there is violence around us, it is more difficult to experience inner peace. Sometimes, the most effective and sustainable way to build inner peace is to influence our environment to be more peaceful.

Inner peace is harder to reach when we are stressed, worried, or angry, and it can be irritating just to think about it. It might even feel difficult to take care of oneself. Experiencing inner peace does not rely solely on cognitive and intellectual knowledge; it is a personal experience. Our bodies and minds react to stress and crises, even when we might not notice.

Peace education can teach us how to restore, maintain, and build inner peace. Cultivating inner peace can be seen as a discussion with oneself. We can learn to recognize what we need to feel safe, how we react to stress or crises, and what helps us feel more at peace. When life changes, this exploration of the self should not stop.

To restore, maintain, and build inner peace, we can also plan activities that make us feel more peaceful. By incorporating those situations and activities into our daily lives, we can experience this more often.

At the same time, we have to consider other people's needs and our own commitments. We can change our own behavior, but we cannot really do that for other people. Still, we can influence our own attitudes toward their behavior and how we react to it.

2) Interpersonal peace, peace in a community, and society

The second dimension of peace is interpersonal peace. This kind of peace is present **among individuals, in communities, and in societies**. This level of peace happens between “I” and “the other” or “us” and “the others.”

To build peace between people, we can communicate peacefully, diminish discrimination, and promote equality and equity. Building sustainable peace between people requires the ability to navigate through conflicts. Peace does not mean we will never have conflicts, but it means we solve them without violence and make agreements that support sustainable peace in the long run.

Keeping, maintaining, and building peace between people also includes self-reflection, which makes us more aware of our own perspective and position in relation to others. By recognizing our own background, privileges, prejudices, and other assumptions, we are better able to see the norms, structural inequalities, and discrimination in our society. Only by being aware of the inequalities and discrimination around us can we prevent them from worsening. Working for more positive peace in a society is not always easy. Building peace usually means something changes, and the process of transformation can be challenging.

Strategies for establishing safer, inclusive spaces

To increase interpersonal peace, it is necessary to have respectful communication in safer spaces. A safer space is a supportive environment that encourages respect, a willingness to learn, and physical and mental safety. Although a space or situation cannot always be safe for everyone in absolute terms, we can still strive to make it better. Therefore, a safer space is a relative term, and making communication in such spaces safer is a collective, ongoing process. Without these, we are unable to address difficult or sensitive issues.

Here are some strategies for safer spaces:

- Special attention should be given to youth from marginalized groups. Everyone should feel comfortable being who they are without fear of discrimination.
- It is important to stay critical of power structures and their impact.
- Prioritize clear communication to make hidden values explicit.
- Create safer space guidelines that are especially emphasized during gatherings. Note that these guidelines are never complete but need constant evaluation and reflection. Safer spaces guidelines are not just words on paper; they need to be put into practice through our actions and behavior.

- Maintain respectful language and dialogue as much as possible. Respectful dialogue is a thoughtful, reflective conversation aimed at understanding one another. By combining active listening with an understanding of diversity, we can more effectively communicate across differences and boundaries.

Group exercise: Who gets the orange?

Conflicts and disagreements can be solved in several different ways. However, finding a solution that suits everyone involved can be tricky. Everyone must be heard—all involved in the conflict must be allowed to share their thoughts and feelings with the others, and everyone must listen and process what they hear. When parties understand each other and feel empathy, the risk of violence decreases. The more clearly the real objectives of each side are understood, the more space there is for solutions.

The root of many conflicts lies in mutually incompatible goals. In the conflict of this exercise, both sides want an orange. Nevertheless, it turns out they want different parts of it, and to solve the conflict, they must communicate what they need the orange for.

In this exercise, two groups negotiate and collaborate to find a mutually beneficial solution. The goal is to demonstrate how understanding underlying interests can lead to cooperative outcomes.

In conflict situations, questioning and listening are crucial and should aim to clarify what the other party wants and needs. There is an important difference between the two. When we have heard what the other party needs and expressed our needs, it is much more realistic to find solutions that benefit both parties.

Exercise guidelines:

1. Divide participants into two groups.
2. Each group is given a different need for the orange: one group needs the orange for its juice to make a drink, and the other group needs the orange for its peel to make a cake.
3. Do not tell the groups that the other group needs a different part of the orange.
4. Tell the groups that unfortunately there is just one orange.
5. The groups must discuss and negotiate. Their objective is to find a solution together to the problem of having just one orange.
6. Guide the groups. If they need support, guide them to ask each other why they need the orange and to listen to each other's goals.

This exercise demonstrates how to move from a competitive mindset to a collaborative approach.

A conflict situation usually leads to one of four types of outcomes:

1. One group wins, and the other loses.
2. Groups resolve the conflict by both groups compromising.
3. Both groups withdraw from the conflict, or both lose.
4. Groups work together to find a win-win situation.

The goal of conflict resolution is to establish a situation in which both sides benefit.

Group reflection questions:

- How did it feel to be part of a conflict? Was there good communication within the group and between the groups?
- It is important to acknowledge the emotions we feel in a conflict situation. Did anyone become stressed, competitive, or even angry, or did anyone find the negotiation relaxing or funny?
- In what spirit did the two parties in each pair communicate? Did they ask questions, make offers, or make demands? Did the groups try to understand each other's aims?
- What can we learn from this exercise, and in what kind of situations could we use the wisdom gained?

3) Global peace

From a wider perspective, peace also has global and ecological dimensions. As youth workers and educators, we are part of an interconnected system in which issues such as the environment, global cooperation, inequalities, and injustice affect us all. This understanding reminds us that even small actions can influence people's lives.

Different conflicts happening around the world have far-reaching consequences. Violence impacts not only those directly involved but also families and communities for generations. It is therefore no surprise that the effects of violent conflicts often appear in youth work, shaping behaviors, beliefs, fears, and feelings.

Individual or group exercise: Quotes about peace

Read the quotes below and reflect, alone or with a partner, on how the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Arias Sánchez, and Barack Obama define peace. Are they talking about positive peace, negative peace, or both? What dimensions of peace are they referring to in your opinion (inner peace, interpersonal peace, or global peace)? If needed, you can look up more information about the peace workers mentioned above online.

“Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. ... Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free. True peace with oneself and with the world around us can only be achieved through the development of mental peace. ... Without inner peace, no matter how comfortable your life is materially, you may still be worried, disturbed or unhappy. ... Peace starts with each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities.”

– Dalai Lama, 1989

“The ‘turn the other cheek’ philosophy and the ‘love your enemies’ philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict, a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, ... I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. ... True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power. ... It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflicter of it. ... Nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life.”
– Martin Luther King, Jr., 1958

“Peace is a never-ending process. ... It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation or enforced by the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together. ... We seek not peace alone, not peace to be followed some day by political progress, but peace and democracy, together, an end to the shedding of human blood, which is inseparable from an end to the suppression of human rights. We believe that justice and peace can only thrive together. ... Peace can only be achieved through dialogue and understanding; tolerance and forgiveness; freedom and democracy.”
– Oscar Arias Sánchez, former president of Costa Rica, 1987

“Still, we are at war, and I’m responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land. Some will kill, and some will be killed. ... In today’s wars, many more civilians are killed than soldiers; the seeds of future conflict are sown, economies are wrecked, civil societies torn asunder, refugees amassed, children scarred ... So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving peace. ... Three ways that we can build a just and lasting peace. First, we must develop alternatives to violence that are tough enough to actually change behavior. [Second], only a just peace based on the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting. Third, a just peace includes not only civil and political rights — it must encompass economic security and opportunity. For true peace is not just freedom from fear, but freedom from want. The nonviolence practiced by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance.”
– Barack Obama, 2009

5.3. Story collection

Please read eight imaginary cases in which youth workers face challenges maintaining peace amid the daily hustle and bustle of youth work. In each story, youth workers are applying peace educational approaches to the issues. After each story, there is an exercise where you can identify what the challenges were and what kind of peace educational interventions were used to maintain and build sustainable peace. There are also our suggestions for answers after each question. These are not necessarily the only correct answers, but are added to support your reflection.

Stories about inner peace

Story 1: Inner peace at the office

Story 2: Peace between colleagues through inner peace

Stories about interpersonal peace, peace in a community, and peace in society

Story 3: Human rights and inclusion challenges

Story 4: Talking about physical violence

Story 5: Bridging differences through dialogue

Story 6: Love your neighbor

Story 7: Peace education without organizational support

Stories about global peace

Story 8: Talking about world politics

Story 1: Inner peace at the office

Situation and challenge: Anna is a youth worker in a youth center and is currently at work. During breaks, she always opens the news app almost automatically, without even thinking about it. After the workday, she feels quite tired. She starts wondering how she can sustain her energy and stay focused throughout the day, and she talks about it with a friend. She says that it is possible that constant stimulation makes her too alert and then tired. Anna then becomes more aware of her level of alertness and notices how checking the news during breaks leaves her anxious and unfocused.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Anna tries the next day not to use her phone during one break and instead sits down, looks out the window, stretches a little, and lets her thoughts wander. She connects with her physical body and inner feelings. Anna even takes a moment to reflect and realizes she is truly worried about the current state of the world. At the same time, she is content to participate in building a better future at work, thanks to working with the next generation. Tuning in with her thoughts, emotions, and physical body for a brief moment worked better than scrolling on her phone at every break.

Outcome: Nervousness, anxiety, and overstimulation do influence our communication, listening ability, and decision-making. It is possible to regulate our nervous system and emotional state. At times, this can be necessary for our mental and physical health.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Cultivating inner peace and regulating stimulation.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Regulating stimulation, such as not watching news clips during working hours.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Limiting stimulation can improve our mental and physical wellbeing and bring inner peace.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: It can be difficult to change routines.

Story 2: Peace between colleagues through inner peace

Situation and challenge: Youth workers gather for their weekly meeting. Alex comes in late, as is often the case. The others have to start the meeting without him because they only have 45 minutes. Alex comes in, interrupts the meeting by explaining he was late due to a traffic jam, apologizes, and then starts talking about his life for a few minutes.

When they can finally resume the meeting and start discussing plans for the coming weeks, Alex gives a five-minute speech. He criticizes the plans, saying that the whole planning system is not working and that, at his previous job, this was done much more effectively.

Paul, another youth worker, is beginning to feel frustrated but tries to suppress his discontent. It is hard because, according to Alex, the youth center seems to be doing noth-

ing right. Nevertheless, the youth workers are passionate and give their best. Paul is hoping and expecting that someone else will give feedback to Alex, who seems to be disrupting the meetings.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: After the meeting, Paul decides they cannot continue with this meeting style and starts reflecting on how to change the situation. Paul connects with his emotions and feels truly frustrated. Paul saw that he was supporting the destructive meeting pattern because he did not voice his feelings and was trying to hide his frustration. He understands that the meetings should have more structure and predictability.

Outcome: Paul decides to talk to the manager to say that the current meeting style is causing some irritation and to suggest some changes. The manager concludes that developing a constructive, healthy meeting culture together will be put on the common agenda of the weekly meeting. The manager also decides to add more structure to the weekly meetings to ensure greater predictability.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Peace in a community and the lack of it, consideration of feelings, communication, peacebuilding within the community, and social norms. Seeing that unresolved issues between colleagues undermine cooperation, a dilemma arises: whose responsibility is it to develop a working culture in the workplace?

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Connecting with emotions; considering when, if, and how to raise the issue, taking responsibility for one's own behavior.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Reflection and discussion are useful methods for developing healthy, supportive spaces.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Trust issues, following the norms, and suppressing emotions.

Story 3: Human rights and inclusion challenges

Situation and challenge: During a group learning activity focused on human rights and inclusion, 17-year-old Robin expressed strong negative views toward the LGBTQI community. The activity encouraged open dialogue and sharing personal beliefs. Robin openly questioned why LGBTQI rights should be protected, claiming they went against her personal and cultural values. Her statements created tension in the group, especially among peers who identified as LGBTQI or as allies.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Rather than shutting down the discussion, the facilitator guided the group through a respectful conversation, using peace education methods such as active listening and perspective-taking. The following day, a group conversation was organized to explore the impact of language, stereotypes, and inclusive communication.

Outcome: Robin was encouraged to reflect on the meaning of dignity, equality, and coexistence. While her views may not change, she remained engaged and listened to others' stories and experiences. The activity became a powerful learning moment, not just for her but for the whole group. It showed the importance of creating safe spaces for difficult conversations in youth work.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Diversity and inclusion, human rights, freedom of expression, and the lack of information that leads to social stigma, intolerance, or prejudice.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Dialogue, pedagogical leadership, responsibility, and the decision to tackle the issue when the leader was present in the group.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: A youth worker-led discussion provided a nonjudgmental space for reflection, speaking, and listening. Restorative practices help build empathy and mutual understanding in peer conflicts.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Initial resistance from the offending youth ("It was just a joke"), peer pressure to remain silent, and a fear of conflict escalation.

Story 4: Talking about physical violence

Situation and challenge: A youth worker, Laura, hears a discussion at a youth house that was not meant for her ears: a few young people who frequent the local youth center are talking about physical violence in a glorifying and excited manner. It sounds like they are planning to organize a group fight at the local sports field. They are planning who to invite and when it should happen.

Laura would like to pretend that she did not hear that conversation because she is feeling quite tired. Still, she knows that she has to react because, as a youth worker she has a responsibility to stop violence.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Laura decides to talk to the young people directly, walk toward the group, and tell them she heard about their plans to organize a group fight. She tries to keep calm and talk respectfully during discussions with them. Laura might feel upset, but during the discussion she tries to stay patient and understand the young people.

Laura does not judge the young people but speaks to them with respect, supporting their own reflection process. She discusses the dangers of such activity, as well as reminds and educates the young people about the illegality of physical violence. Laura also tells them that if they continue planning such activities, she will have to inform the police. After the discussion, Laura tells her team what happened and how she reacted, and they plan together how to prevent this violent activity.

Outcome: When Laura spoke with the group of young people, she learned they felt bored and that she needed to plan and organize activities that felt meaningful to them. Laura promises to support an alternative activity with local young people that does not involve violence. They agree to meet the following Monday, and the youth workers start planning a short presentation on possible funding for youth initiatives.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Not taking violence seriously, not seeing the dangers of physical violence, and seeing violence as entertainment.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Having respect and empathy toward young people.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Young people sometimes need to understand the risks and consequences of violence. Youth workers can support their reflection process while still feeling equally respected.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The youth worker needed courage to approach the young people directly. They needed to act quickly, without much preparation.

Story 5: Bridging differences through dialogue

Situation and challenge: In a multicultural urban youth center, tensions have been rising between different ethnic groups of teenagers due to misunderstandings and stereotypical thinking. Youth workers notice that some groups are starting to avoid others and stop speaking when anyone from the other group approaches.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Mark decides to organize a workshop focused on dialogue and nonviolent communication. The youth workers decide to plan the workshop with young people. Together, they conclude that few young people will attend voluntarily if the workshop is called “Dialogue and nonviolent communication” because it sounds foreign and boring. Mark says the topic of discussion must be something young people are passionate about, but the workshop methods should also teach dialogue and nonviolent communication. The youth workers decide that the workshop will be about perfumes because almost everybody at the youth center is interested in

that. Participants can try perfumes, and there will be a guided discussion of tastes, preferences, and cultural connotations. Youth workers will teach dialogical communication methods and facilitate discussions to support empathy and mutual learning between the groups.

Outcome: Through guided reflective exercises and discussion about shared interests, participants gradually opened up about their experiences, fears, and assumptions. By the end of the workshop, several participants reported feeling more empathetic toward others.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Prejudice, lack of communication, and identity-based conflict.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Integrating peace themes into activities that youth already enjoy. Dialogue and empathy-building, story circles, active listening exercises, and nonviolent communication.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The methods provided safer spaces for self-expression and mutual understanding in a culturally diverse group.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Resistance and mistrust among participants; emotional vulnerability.

Story 6: Love your neighbor

Situation and challenge: A loud verbal argument erupted between two teenage boys in front of the youth center. A neighbor intervened aggressively, blaming the youth center for encouraging “troublemakers.” The conflict quickly escalated on social media with calls for stricter regulation of youth spaces. Many misconceptions about youth were shared on social media.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Within one week of the argument, youth workers and youth at the center organized three discussion events on how youth centers can effectively engage with local communities during conflict. They organized three small events instead of one so that everyone who wanted to participate could.

At the same time, youth workers discussed what their role is in public disputes involving adults and youth. They decided to organize a mediation session and hosted a public dialogue to rebuild trust. They also organized a youth-led information session for the local community.

Youth workers and young people sought ways to use social media for peacebuilding rather than to escalate arguments. They started posting a series of short interviews with local young people about their favorite places in the city where they feel optimistic, hopeful, and at peace.

Outcome: The activities organized by the youth center helped bring the youth and adults together. By communicating with one another, the different sides found understanding. These events included the neighbor and two teenage boys with whom the argument started, and in the end, the discussions organized by the youth center helped ease tensions. On a larger scale, the whole community got to know one another better, and previous misconceptions that opposing groups had about each other were cleared up. As a result, the trust in young people and the youth center returned.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Escalation of conflict, peaceful coexistence, civic responsibility.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Community-based conflict resolution, conflict de-escalation, mediation, and restorative justice.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The argument needed to be de-escalated, and mediation was needed. To prevent future arguments, trust needed to be built—the youth center aimed to build trust through communication and challenging misconceptions.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Distrust from community members, media misrepresentation, and pressure to “discipline” youth rather than educate.



Story 7: Peace education without organizational support

Situation and challenge: Sasha wants to introduce peace education into daily youth work practice, such as celebrating the International Day of Peace, or engaging in activities related to conflict management and values. He faces indifference or resistance from colleagues and management.

Management labels such initiatives as “too political” or irrelevant and shows little interest. Sasha feels isolated but still sees the topic as vital. This creates internal conflict between personal values and institutional limitations.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Sasha understands that peace education is connected to different values, and it can seem too political to some people. At the same time, Sasha is aware that it is impossible to be free of values in youth work, since everyone has them, whether they acknowledge them or not.

Sasha started to think about how to stay true to his values within a rigid system. He suggested at the next meeting with his manager that he could practice peace education without explicitly calling it that, using small steps. The manager agreed after hearing Sasha’s argumentation for the importance of peace education and his motivation to promote it. The manager allowed Sasha to spend approximately 30 minutes each week developing and testing ways to apply peace education to youth work. They also agreed that at the end of the first six-month period, Sasha would present some results to the rest of the team during a weekly meeting. Sasha would not advertise peace education; instead, he would quietly apply it to his regular work.

Sasha began reframing regular meetings and programs to include peace education elements such as empathy, conflict resolution, and inclusion. Soon, he started planning a Peace Day initiative, co-designed with youth.

Outcome: While being aware of the obstacles, Sasha finds subtle ways to weave peace education into daily activities and support youth through value-based work.

Sasha’s colleagues and superiors saw that it was possible to apply peace educational approaches to regular youth work activities. Sasha received permission to continue with peace education, and some of his colleagues began applying some elements to their work with young people.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Agency, values, professional courage, ethics, boundaries, safety, and making change from within the system.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The youth worker's right and responsibility to raise social and value-based topics. Creating safe spaces for adults and colleagues as well. Encourage youth agency.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The chosen methods did not require structural change or top-down approval and offered the youth worker a realistic and nonconfrontational way forward.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The system might not yet be ready to implement peace education. Mental strain: feeling like you must "fight" for values. Doubt and insecurity—fear of being "too political." Subtle or silent resistance from colleagues or management.

Story 8: Talking about world politics

Situation and challenge: During an Erasmus+ youth exchange focused on democracy and human rights, a workshop on forms of political participation was held. In a small group discussion, tensions emerged between a Georgian and an Irish participant. It was an informal group discussion within a thematic workshop where only the topic was given to the participants, and it was an unstructured dialogue with no professional to guide the process. The Georgian participant shared experiences of protesting against government corruption and advocating for EU integration. In contrast, the Irish participant, lacking knowledge of Georgia's political climate, questioned why citizens would not simply vote out their current government. This comment unintentionally dismissed the Georgian participant's lived experience, prompting a defensive, emotionally charged

response. The conversation got heated due to cultural misunderstandings and differing political contexts.

Informal discussions do allow space for personal opinions and learning from other participants' lived experiences, which encourages youth to connect through shared values and explore diverse realities. Nevertheless, the facilitator's absence during the group discussion proved to be a drawback. Without a professional to guide the conversation, manage emotional dynamics, and provide context, the discussion became unbalanced and unproductive. This highlighted that even informal methods require structured support when dealing with sensitive, politically charged topics.

Peace educational approach to the challenge: Youth workers took responsibility for the situation. They quickly realized they had passed over the preparation phase almost entirely, jumped straight to discussions of sensitive topics, and decided to skip facilitation.

They organized a debriefing meeting for all of the participants. The objective of the meeting was to find ways to continue working in groups after an argument. Youth workers told participants they should have prepared them better for group work and that they should have stayed in the groups to observe and facilitate the discussions.

Then they discussed the reasons the argument might have heated up and encouraged them to address these topics now so that future discussions would be more peaceful. They talked about assumptions based on one's own national context and lived experience—it is understandable to become emotionally defensive if one has a personal connection to conflict. Youth workers and participants also made rules for safer spaces for the rest of the youth exchange.

Outcome: The experience taught participants the importance of empathy and active listening. They also learned that we have different perspectives, and being aware of this is critical when discussing sensitive topics. Even though the discussion brought learning experiences to both participants and leaders, they all wished that the argument had not happened. Leaders understood that when discussing political issues, a facilitator must be present. They also learned to first agree on safe space rules and discuss respectful communication before starting group discussions about sensitive topics.

Please reflect alone or with a colleague:

What core issues can you identify in this case that are connected to peace and peace education?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Cross-cultural dialogue and misunderstandings stemming from differences in lived experiences and social/political differences across countries.

What peace education methods were used?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: Taking responsibility for your actions and accepting the consequences; planning safe spaces by making rules for discussions.

Why are these methods suitable for this context?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: The situation had to be de-escalated by responsible youth workers.

What challenges came up?

Your answer: _____

Our answer: challenges in respectful dialogue on sensitive topics.

5.4. How to talk about war and politics with young people?

Discussing world politics with young people is a hard task. When the world is experiencing violent events, such as war, youth work can help build a sense of security and continuity in everyday life. When the political situation changes, daily routines are important.

Ethical and moral debates are always part of discussions about war. Understandably, it is often difficult for a young person to understand how wars are possible in the first place. It is very unfortunate that humankind still cannot resolve disagreements without violence. Conflicts could be handled respectfully and through dialogue. Wise conflict resolution can lead to positive change rather than escalating tensions. It is important to remember that while there is evil in the world, there are always good intentions and deeds as well.

Youth workers can have varying opinions on whether or not to discuss violence and wars with young people. In the middle of an acute crisis, an adult may feel a strong need to address the topic with youth. It is important to remember that people of diverse backgrounds may need different things. Some young people may want to talk about war, while others may need peace, tranquility, and everyday routines more than ever. When a crisis is acute, the best approach is to follow daily routines as much as possible. For an adult, this can feel frustrating because we may feel the need to take action. Adults should assess when the right moment is to address issues. On the other hand, active avoidance can make the subject even more challenging to handle. The time to address the crisis may come when a sense of security has been achieved—everyday life, with its studies and activities, can continue even in a changed situation.

If and when the time comes to discuss wars or other crises, it is essential to remind ourselves and others that we all have different perspectives. We all live in the same world, but because of our different identities, backgrounds, experiences, and social environments, we do not experience it the same way.

When discussing war, it is important to remind young people that it is primarily a matter between states. War between states does not permit discrimination against other people based on identity. Discrimination always includes exclusion, which is likely to have a negative impact on sustainable peace in a community.

When it comes to knowledge about violence and war, we are all incomplete. Conflicts are complex, and there is not always an obvious, simple reason why war breaks out. Youth workers do not need to be experts on war and conflict to discuss how wars influence us at the local level. They should focus on responding to the concerns and doubts raised by the youth rather than discussing the details of the conflict.

It is also perfectly acceptable to show that adults do not always know how to feel, even during times of conflict and crisis. At the same time, a youth worker is always that safe adult who can talk to young people and is a professional. A youth worker could say, for instance: “I do not know the answer to this question now, and I do not really know what I should think or do about this conflict. Nevertheless, I am worried and trying to take care of myself and others during this crisis as best as I can. Alternatively, perhaps we could reflect together on the answers and look for information?”

When youth workers discuss war and conflict with young people, it is wise to consider that these discussions can affect young people’s emotions and feelings of security. As youth workers, we can support young people’s well-being by taking into account five perspectives on war and conflict:

1. Emotions

Global political crises and wars can provoke a range of emotions and reactions. Emotions are allowed and should be explored. Regardless, these feelings cannot be used to justify violent actions.

It is necessary to understand how to let go of negative emotions. For example, different physical exercises and activities can help youth let go of their feelings and ground themselves. In addition, reflecting on what brings joy, hope, and well-being, and continuing to do so through turbulent times. Working with emotions is an important task throughout our lives, and they are always present, whether we acknowledge them or not.

2. Safety and security

Safety and security are basic human needs. Discussing disturbing issues can cause feelings of insecurity and fear. When discussing wars, we should return to everyday routines afterward to regain a sense of security. It is not healthy to be immersed in feelings of fear or anxiety for an extended period of time.

3. Knowledge and information

Knowledge and information about war and peace are essential for everyone, enabling us to form opinions and values. Different sources of information on crises may provide very different views on the same topic. For this reason, a critical approach to media and information is needed. Youth workers can encounter young people who have already experienced war, and so the information is layered with their own experiences. Raising awareness about peacebuilding can foster hope for a better future. Through the media, we all hear more about wars than about peace. Still, when we understand many layers of peace, we see that there is much more peace than war.

4. Hope

The pedagogy of hope and the courage to dream of a peaceful world guides us toward a better future. The pedagogy of hope means we can cultivate hope in ourselves and others, even when we feel frustrated by ongoing crises. Although it is normal to feel hopeless during conflicts, we can seek out people and environments that make us feel more optimistic. Hope might require knowing what triggers hopefulness and hopelessness to work toward achieving balance. We should strive toward hope, but at the same time be aware of what is going on in the world. Turning away and shutting down might feel good in the short term; however, this alienates a person from reality. Hope and hopelessness can be seen as the two ends of the emotional spectrum, and in a single day, we can be on either extreme.

6. NOTES

Competence areas on peace education for youth workers

The project consortium has been working together to create the text of each specific competence area and its elements. Furthermore, we have consulted specific educational manuals on youth work and human rights education (e.g., Compass) as a reference point for aligning with youth work practice. We also had a closer look at specific materials to identify the gap between existing literature and the need for a competence list for youth workers (CoE, 2024; UNICEF, 2019; Fras & Schweitzer, 2016; UNICEF, 2016; British Council, 2017).

Resource pack

If you are interested in working on your inner peace, dismantling discrimination, and building safer spaces, you can read and hear more about peace education in the “Peace education in times of crises” online course.

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