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# Supporting Peaceful Individuals, Groups, And Societies: Peace Psychology and Peace Education

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## Abstract

In 2020, individuals, societies, and the international community were presented with a myriad of challenges that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social bonds were stretched thin, racial inequity was brought to the forefront, and political polarization deepened. This context heightened the need for effective theoretical frameworks, strategies, and understandings of how to support positive and negative peace and build cultures of peace across varied contexts. In this special section, we present a compendium of articles highlighting various ways that psychologists support these efforts through peace education. The section developed in a pre-COVID context from Christie and Wagner's (Handbook

on peace education, 2010, Psychology Press) call in this journal for peace psychology to be central to peace education. Although the articles themselves do not directly address COVID-19, the racial pandemic, or political polarization, they offer insights into how the intersection of peace psychology and peace education can be used to promote harmonious relations and societies in a post-2020 world. In this introduction, we define peace education and its connections to peace psychology and then summarize each of the articles in the special section while drawing applications to the challenges that emerged in 2020. The rich and diverse articles in this section discuss innovative approaches to peace education that are designed to promote and maintain cultures of peace. This work must continue and accelerate, and more psychologists must invest in advancing such approaches to enhancing the quality of life of individuals and groups worldwide.

## Keywords

peace education, COVID-19, cultures of peace

The year 2020 was a tumultuous and challenging time for individuals, groups, and societies across the globe. The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the physical health of millions of people, with ramifications on food and housing security, mental health, politics, economies, and more. The pandemic also laid bare existing inequities as those from historically marginalized and oppressed groups suffered disproportionately (Laster Pirtle, 2020). These social dynamics fed into what some have termed a “racial pandemic” (Kendi, 2020) as protests against racial injustice swept across the world.

Amid growing this instability and multifaceted challenges, various organizations and scholars called for international co-operation and co-ordination (Brown & Susskind, 2020; UN News, 2020), while at national and local levels there were near-constant discussions of whether and how to protect vulnerable citizens and what communal actions were needed to address the various changes (see Castelnovo et al., 2020). Existing polarization in numerous societies also has become more prevalent in the face of politicized approaches to public health (de Figueiredo et al., 2020; Padilla & Hípola, 2020) and other social and economic issues. Furthermore, the increasing globalization over the last few decades has helped spur a rise in populism, authoritarian governments, and antidemocratic sentiment that all create problematic structural conditions for peace (e.g., Moghaddam, 2019a).

From a peace psychology lens, the impacts and complexities of COVID-19 and racial injustice in 2020 can be understood as possibly destabilizing forces promoting violence. This reverberation can be understood through Galtung’s conceptual framework on violence (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Often cited as a useful and comprehensive way to define violence—in order to better understand its impacts and possible pathways to peace—Galtung distinguished between three types of violence: Direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence—physical harm or destruction with intention underlying it—has been evident through increased interpersonal crime and violence in the United States (U.S.) urban contexts and other hotspots across the world (i.e., Colombia), heightened incidents of domestic abuse, clashes between protestors and police in responses to racial injustice, armed militias in the U.S. (e.g., Hilsenrath, 2020; Usher et al., 2020). Structural violence—which entails systems and social stratification that lead to the violation of rights and needs of individuals and groups—has clearly marked the unequal impacts of COVID-19 tied to inequities in healthcare, socioeconomic status and physical mobility, and gender inequalities (Almagro & Orane-Hutchinson, 2020; Millett et al., 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). Cultural violence—tied to the

norms, discourses, media, and other cultural artifacts that legitimize structural and direct violence—can be identified in the discussion of COVID-19 as a great equalizer, in the framing of “essential workers” and “essential businesses” and in the discourses about political actions in response (e.g., McClure et al., 2020).

Still, the year 2020 and the global challenges humanity has faced are not without moments of humanity, resilience, and efforts to promote and maintain peace. While these efforts happen across domains and disciplines, the work of psychologists has been particularly powerful: For example, promoting social distancing and healthy behaviors through frameworks of psychosocial interaction, helping individuals and communities cope with stress, anxiety, and loss, and studying impacts on well-being (see APA COVID-19 Information and Resources, n.d.). Within an understanding of the multiple ways that COVID-19, racial injustice, and political polarization promote violence, psychologists have been and will be central actors in promoting intrapersonal, interpersonal, and communal peace. One contribution into the future will be in addressing the divisions highlighted and perpetuated by COVID-19, and particularly supporting the mental and emotional well-being of individuals and groups who have had differential experiences of the pandemic. Professionals like peace educators and peace psychologists can assist in resolving these experiences and the societal divisions that have been deepened.

While this special section was developed during a pre-COVID-19 world, the underlying purpose is even more relevant now: That is, to highlight how psychologists are contributing to and furthering the work of promoting harmony, ending the conflict, and fostering cultures of peace through engagement with peace education. COVID-19 has impacted us all and changed societies across the globe. But these dynamics are not new; rather they have built on preexisting inequities, injustices, systems, norms, and interpersonal dynamics that feed into multiple forms of violence (McClure et al., 2020; Pirtle, 2020). To this end, promoting intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup peace through education have become even more critical as we face these crises and what will undoubtedly be its lasting reverberations. Relatedly, psychologists can promote through education more democratic societies, which have been linked to a more peaceful world (e.g., Moghaddam, 2019a, 2019b). The articles in this special section do not directly address building democracy, COVID-19, the racial pandemic, or the political polarization found in many countries worldwide. They can provide, however, lessons, takeaways, and efforts by psychologists to support and develop initiatives and programs to address both negative and positive peace in response to direct, cultural, and structural forms of violence.

## Peace Education and Peace Psychology

Much as an in-depth understanding of COVID-19, racial injustice, and political polarization and their impacts on society and individuals during 2020 requires a historical contextualization, understanding the potential of peace education to promote psychosocial well-being at individual and collective levels also requires rooting in its historical and theoretical foundations. Grounded in the post-World War era, peace education, and peace psychology have been integrally intertwined in their development as areas of inquiry and practice. Both emerged from concerns and efforts to push back on fears of renewed warfare and nuclear annihilation and have continued into today to have complementary goals and scopes.

Peace education involves formal and informal instruction (including socialization) to foster people’s desire for peace, provide tools for conflict prevention and resolution and de-escalation, and build skills

for critical analysis of structures, cultures, and contexts that produce and perpetuate violence (Harris & Synott, 2002). Most societies value peace, freedom, justice, and equality (Bar-Tal, 2002) and peace education is a mode of attaining these values and transforming society (Ardizzone, 2001; UNESCO, 1995).

From a historical perspective, peace education draws from various theories in different domains. Harris (2004) traced the evolution of peace education through centuries of human civilization. First, most world religions (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Taoism) historically stressed the importance of adopting compassionate and pacifist values to avoid the consequences of conflict. Second, during the 20th century, the world experienced the consequences of direct violence and warfare and subsequently recognized the need to create and maintain peaceful and nonviolent societies. For example, in the aftermath of World War I and II, school curricula in Western countries like Europe and the U.S. incorporated the study of international relations and foreign countries, while simultaneously attempting the abandonment of authoritarian pedagogies. Third, the 1960s marked the beginning of serious intellectual inquiry in the discipline of peace research and the emergence of peace educators (e.g., Brock-Utne, Reardon, Harris, and Friere) who discussed the interplay between direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969, 1990) and its repercussions for different identities and cultures (Harris, 2004). As an alternative perspective similarly rooted in human history, Page (2004) argued that the philosophical foundations of peace education were linked to the ethics of virtue, consequentialism, esthetics, conservative politics, and care. As a result, peace education draws from different theories and significant events in human history.

Guided by various theories of peace education, peace educators have created many types of programs (Kester, 2008). For instance, the *Integral Model of Peace Education* (Brenes, 2004) is a person-centered conceptual framework that emphasizes human rights, the importance of community learning, and the interplay between the self, others, and nature. The *Learning to Abolish War Model* (Reardon & Cabezudo, 2002), in contrast, focuses on violence as the primary threat to cultures of peace and trains individuals on how to educate people about nonviolence and behaviors for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

The structure of peace education programs is vital for educators to succeed in teaching peace, nonviolence, and conflict prevention and resolution (Galtung, 2008). Peace educators strive to inculcate peaceful values and nonviolent modes of communication in their teaching environments and education systems (Bar-Tal, 2002). As Bar-Tal (2002) argued, education systems have the authority, legitimacy, means, and conditions to incorporate peace education into their structures. Indeed, UNESCO (1995) made a number of assertions to guide educators, administrators, and policy-makers in shaping curricula, resources, training, and socialization (i.e., engaging with family, media, etc.) to promote peace. These guidelines have been incorporated into peace education programs globally, in a context and culture-specific manner.

Peace education programs worldwide have been undertaken with implementation and evaluation support from psychologists. Particularly when focused on youth, such initiatives appear to have a positive impact on youth (Salomon, 2006). For example, in one project, Biton and Salomon (2006) conducted a year-long peace education program called *Pathways into Reconciliation* for 565 Jewish Israeli and Palestinian adolescents. Relying on a quasiexperiment design and employing pre- and postintervention measures, Biton and Salomon (2006) found that as a result of participating in the

program both the Israeli and Palestinian youth emphasized co-operation, harmony, and peaceful aspects of peace, did not suggest war as a mode of attaining peace, and did not manifest greater hatred toward members of the other group. Other similar peace education projects have been undertaken, evaluated, and developed with psychologists as key actors across the world, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g., Clarke-Habibi, 2018), Northern Ireland (e.g., Gallagher, 2010), and Colombia (e.g., Diazgranados et al., 2014).

The work of psychologists to support these efforts is often based in shared goals to promote individual and collective psychosocial well-being. Congruent with peace education, peace psychology focuses on “understanding and promoting cognitions, emotions, and actions that prevent and reduce the incidence and prevalence of violent episodes and mitigate the insidious form of violence” (Christie & Wagner, 2010, p. 64). Both peace education and peace psychology are grounded in preventing violence in all its multiple forms, including direct, cultural, and structural dimensions (Galtung, 1990). Furthermore, both involve understanding and promoting prosocial outcomes for individuals, group cohesion and harmony, and democracy and human rights in societies across the world (Christie, 2006; Harris & Morrison, 2013).

Yet, peace education and peace psychology are fields that defy simple definition, which also has meant that their relationship has not always been clearly articulated. In peace education, there have been common unifying threads across various theories, curricula, training philosophies and paradigms, and application, but the field also has encompassed a wide diversity of topics, educational settings, and critical orientations. At times, these are challenged, seem disparate, and may be linked to contested political discourses and movements (Bajaj, 2015; Cremin, 2016; Zembylas et al., 2016). Similarly, peace psychology often covers a wide range of issues spanning clinical settings, global affairs, ethnopolitical conflict, political ideologies, structures, and philosophies, empirical research, and theory that address internal psychological processes, human rights, interpersonal dynamics, and structural challenges (Christie et al., 2008).

Further complicating the relationship between peace education and peace psychology, only a few publications have appeared that explicitly link these two fields directly (Christie & Wagner, 2010). In *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology*, there have been examples of articles that prominently featured peace education or that were focused on its implementation or evaluation, but these articles have been relatively few and not part of any broader articulation of psychology and peace education (e.g., Nelson & Milburn, 1999; Salomon, 2006, 2011). The journal also has included a few articles linking peace and civic education in theorizing about how to promote peaceful individuals and societies (Fischer & Hanke, 2009; McEvoy-Levy, 2017).

## Overview of the Special Section

This special section was undertaken with the goal of strengthening and demonstrating the varied connections between peace psychology and peace education by highlighting a diverse variety of work that psychologists undertake in supporting, developing, implementing, and evaluating peace education. It was envisioned as a systematic response to Christie and Wagner (2010) call for the field of psychology to be placed at the core of peace education.

The section covers a host of strategies that peace psychologists take to combatting violence and promoting peace through their approach to their roles as clinicians, educators, and researchers, interventions they are involved in developing and evaluating, and the theoretical frameworks they

employ. All of the articles are linked to Galtung's conceptualization of peace as a tripartite concept encompassing negative and positive elements in responses to structural, cultural, and direct violence. While the authors do not directly address COVID-19, the racial pandemic, or political polarization, they offer insights into how the intersection of peace psychology and peace education can be used to promote harmonious relations and societies in a post-2020 world. The articles represent a compendium of the intersection of psychology and peace education. This publication is a direct result of the work and investment of our authors, the commitment and guidance of Dr. Fathali Moghaddam, the journal Editor, and the time and thoughtfulness of our reviewers; all of whom we wish to thank for their efforts and support.

The first few articles offer reviews of related psychological literatures to draw lessons for reflecting on research, practice, and future directions for peace education. Nelson's (2021) "Identifying Determinants of Individual Peacefulness: A Psychological Foundation for Peace Education" presents a review of the processes and factors related to developing an individual orientation toward peace. The article is broadly grounded in Mischel's Cognitive Social Learning Theory (1973) and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), while drawing on empirical research examining specific person factors (e.g., problem-solving ability, conflict resolution competencies, and perspective-taking tendency) that affect peacefulness in individuals' intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup experiences. Nelson also argues that peace education programs should focus on facilitating peacefulness as part of these experiences. This review highlights a number of psychological factors and dynamics that peace educators should consider in developing and implementing programming to promote personal peacefulness, which may be a particularly worthy and challenging endeavor given the rise in mental health issues during 2020.

In the second article entitled, "How Do Peace Psychologists Address the Violent Assaults on Black People's Lives? A Review of Studies Published in the *Peace and Conflict Journal*," Thompson and Wells (2021) evaluate articles appearing in the last 10 years of this journal. Their focus is on work that featured African descended individuals or targets of other people's perceptions to determine if or how racism was addressed in the studies. Based on their findings, Thompson and Wells also recommend how to stimulate further research on diverse indicators of racism to improve peace education practices. To this end, their article provides a reflective critique of previous work in this journal with an applied emphasis on how racism can be more directly engaged with in future work at the intersection of psychology and peace education.

The next few articles in this special section describe psychologists' efforts developing, implementing, and evaluating peace education in different contexts across the world. In the article, "Scaffolding for Peacebuilding Dialogues: A Relational Perspective of Peace Education in Countries Sociopolitical Violence," Giovanni (2021) outlines a methodology based in dialogue to break down psychosocial barriers that promote violence and polarization in contexts of sociopolitical violence. The article builds a rich theoretical background drawing on social constructivist perspectives, then discusses a concrete intervention that was used with various groups in Colombia. The methodology is a skeletal framework that can be applied and developed in other settings to promote peace by opening up participants to alternative perspectives and worldviews. While Giovanni draws on the experience of using this methodology in the context of the Colombian conflict, the practice offers potential for psychologists working to bridge the increasing divide over issues of race and policing.

The next article, “Learning Peace: Adolescent Colombian’s Interpretations and Responses to Peace Education Curriculum,” is also linked to the Colombian context to provide insight into the ways that young people experience peace education programming. Velez (2021) reports the results on a qualitative study based in psychological theories on development and meaning-making to examine how adolescents in Colombia responded to official government peace education programming. The findings revealed that peace education may be congruent with young individuals’ development and psychological processing when it is praxis-oriented, attentive to their local contexts, and able to be incorporated with their identities and envisioned trajectories. The article ends with broader calls to incorporate youth voices into peace education programming, as well as to consider the developmental and social contexts to promote their engagement in building cultures of peace. For peace education policy and programming in the context of the COVID-19 and racial pandemics, and political polarization, these lessons point toward the need to center the perspectives and development of young people.

In “Sport for Social Change: An Action Oriented Peace Education Curriculum” Gerstein et al. (2021) present an overview of a peace education program called *Sport for Social Change*. This “train-the-trainer” program was implemented with youth and sports professionals in India, Tajikistan, and Jordan as a strategy to enhance conflict prevention and resolution skills through sporting activities. The article not only grounds the psychological basis of *Sport for Social Change* in the contact hypothesis and theory of intergroup contact, but also provides concrete details on curriculum, instructional strategies, challenges, and outcomes, all of which a team of psychologists helped support. The authors end with a call for peace psychologists with cross-cultural competencies to seek out collaborations with individuals designing and implementing similar types of sports programs to harness their knowledge of the psychosocial dynamics and skills involved in promoting positive peace. The importance of collaboration across disciplines, peace educators, and countries has taken on added importance given the context of the COVID-19 and racial pandemics, and political polarization. Sports offers a poignant vehicle to level “the playing field” and bridge individuals with diverse backgrounds and values by engaging them in activities they all enjoy and can serve as the foundation of the building and maintaining common ground.

John (2021) also relies on psychological theory and the work of psychology in presenting an overview and analysis of an international peace education program in the article, “Supporting trauma recovery, healing and peacebuilding with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP).” AVP is a peace education program found in prisons, educational institutions, and community settings in more than 50 countries. The effectiveness of the program is discussed, as is the contributions AVP offers in dealing with systemic problems such as gender-based violence. John also highlights AVP’s role in postconflict, transitional, and developing contexts. As racial injustice and the effects of COVID-19 are rampant in prisons, AVP can provide peace educators with a viable model and program to potentially address these pandemics in such a setting.

In the next article, Stewart et al. (2021) reflect on how psychologists have been deeply involved in developing, implementing, and assessing a peace education program. In “Examining Conflict Mediation to Prevent Violence Through Multisector Partnerships,” the authors describe Aim4Peace, a multicomponent violence prevention initiative that focuses on conflict mediation and resolution. The article details the execution of this program in various locales in Kansas City, Missouri, in close collaboration with behavioral-community psychologists. The analyses of implementation data demonstrate engagement of community members in diverse ways, de-escalation of interpersonal



conflicts, and effectively bridging various socioecological contexts. The authors acknowledge that more work needs to be done to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention's impact, but also use the data provided to advocate for participatory and multisector approaches to community peace education. As community violence has increased in some urban centers during 2020, such an approach—in conjunction with structural changes to address rising inequality—becomes even more poignant.

We end the special section with a reflective piece that offers a critical analysis of how peace education and its underlying goals can be integrated into the day-to-day work, organization, and training of psychology students. In the article, “The Multicultural Peace and Justice Collaborative: Critical Peace Education in a Research Training Environment,” McConnell et al. (2021) introduce a new model of critical peace education grounded in a research training environment at a Christian university. Guided by principled egalitarianism, the authors facilitate action-oriented scholarship and research among their team members that emphasizes how research, theory, and practice intersect with peace, social justice, and multiculturalism. The article also includes examples and implications of the collaborative model for education, training, and research. These examples and implications are intended to inspire other psychologists to consider launching similar multicultural peace and justice collaboratives into the foundation of their day-to-day work, relationships, partnerships, and mentoring. As stated earlier, the importance of collaboration has been elevated to a new level as a result of COVID-19, the racial pandemic, and political polarization being experienced worldwide.

## Conclusion

We began this project to highlight the increasing connections between peace psychologists and peace education initiatives around the globe. During the process, the world was transformed. The special section is now being published in a historical moment that is challenging, shifting, and highlighting deep inequities, and structural and cultural violence in local, national, and global communities. But as has been noted by scholars, the media, and activists, this transformation has involved the uncovering and reckoning of unjust systems of violence that have been overlooked, ignored, or intentionally manipulated (e.g., Kendi, 2020; Millett et al., 2020). The ruptures brought forth by 2020 also offer an opportunity: A chance to examine how violence has pervaded our cultures, systems, and interpersonal relations, as well as how we educate and operate to build peaceful, harmonious, and just societies. This opportunity for change and reflection on building cultures of peace also requires a refocusing on how to promote stable, participatory, and robust democracies, which became increasingly difficult prior to 2020 as polarization, populism, and authoritarianism were on the rise worldwide (Moghaddam, 2019a).

As we publish this special section, we believe that the COVID-19 and racial injustice pandemics, and the political polarization in societies have further deepened the need for psychologists to commit themselves to building and maintaining peace. We need innovative approaches to conflict mediation, pedagogy and human development, de-escalation, global violence, ending longstanding protracted conflicts, and additional situations where peace education can help promote the advancement of cultures of peace. Furthermore, in order to tap into the potential of genuinely democratic processes to promote peace, peace psychologists must work on creating effective education strategies and programs that help engage citizens—and particularly youth—in facilitating peace (Moghaddam, 2016). The rich and diverse examples in this special section offer possible pathways and a foundation, but the work must continue and develop, and a much larger cadre of peace educators and peace psychologists must invest in advancing this fundamental factor to enhance human's quality of life worldwide.

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