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A BROAD UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE AS A FOUNDATION FOR APPROACHING EDUCATION FOR PEACE

SZEROKIE ROZUMIENIE POKOJU JAKO PODSTAWA MYŚLENIA O EDUKACJI DLA POKOJU

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie najważniejszych konsekwencji szerokiego rozumienia pokoju dla myślenia o edukacji dla pokoju. W pierwszej części rozważań przypominam wąską definicję pokoju, mającą swoje korzenie w starożytności. Wskazuję na jej nieadekwatność w stosunku do złożonych procesów pokojowych i przypominam wybrane tradycje szerokiego rozumienia pokoju. Sygnalizuję też najważniejsze tendencje we współczesnej refleksji nad pokojem, uwypuklające polisemantyczność pojęcia „pokój" oraz wieloaspektowość i dynamikę procesów pokojowych. W drugiej części artykułu wymieniam i omawiam najważniejsze konsekwencje takiego szerokiego ujmowania pokoju dla myślenia o edukacji dla pokoju. Są to: konieczność docenienia roli edukacji w budowaniu pokoju i uznanie jej w tym kontekście za czynnik równie istotny, jak działania polityków i przywódców światowych, potrzeba myślenia o edukacji dla pokoju w trybie otwartym, zawsze niedokonanym i na stałe wpisanym w kształcenie człowieka oraz uznanie za podstawową misję edukacji dla pokoju rozwijanie w człowieku poczucia podmiotowości, osobistej odpowiedzialności za pokój i świadomości sprawstwa w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: pokój, edukacja dla pokoju, prawa człowieka, sprawiedliwość społeczna

Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the most important implications of a broad understanding of peace for the concept of peace education. In the first part of my reflections, I revisit the narrow definition of peace, rooted in antiquity, and argue that it is inadequate for addressing complex peace processes. I then highlight selected traditions that embrace a broad understanding of peace. Additionally, I point out the most important tendencies

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in contemporary reflection on peace, highlighting the polysemantic nature of the concept of "peace" and the multifaceted and dynamic nature of peace processes. In the second part of the article, I list and discuss the key implications of this broad understanding of peace for education for peace. These include: the need to value education's role in building peace and to recognize it as a factor equally important as the actions of politicians and world leaders; the need to approach education for peace in an open way, always incomplete and permanently embedded in human education; and the recognition that the fundamental mission of education for peace is to cultivate a sense of subjectivity, personal and collective responsibility for peace.

Keywords: peace, education for peace, human rights, social justice

Introduction

The war in Ukraine has sparked significant interest in the issue of education for peace. Conferences on the subject are being held, and more publications are being produced. These efforts involve not only educators but also representatives from other social sciences and humanities. Addressing the possibilities for peace-building through education and upbringing is considered today as an important, topical challenge, embedded in the problems of the contemporary world.

The fact that this increased wave of such thoughts has been triggered by the war beyond our eastern border is understandable. We are witnessing an armed conflict right next to us, and we are hosting large numbers of war refugees. Additionally, we carry the historical memory of wars in which Poland and Poles were direct victims, and we are determined not to see such reality repeated. These concerns raise questions about the possible response to war and the threat of its spread to wider regions of Europe or the world. It is not just about the actions of world leaders, or the stances and strategies of international alliances. We are also asking what an ordinary person, not involved in high-level politics or the military, can do in the face of a war happening so close to us. In February 2022, Poles gave a very clear answer to this question by organising grassroots and large-scale assistance for Ukrainian refugees. They offered meals and night shelters, opened their homes, shared both tangible and intangible goods, giving their time, care, and commitment. An ordinary person in the face of war can help those who are suffering in this war, who are its victims – this was the response of countless citizens in our country, taking concrete action towards the Ukrainians standing at our doors. Often, this action meant bringing peace, expressed in a very tangible way: offering a place (a flat, a house, a room as a space), where one can feel safe, be surrounded by care, find relief from suffering, feelings of alienation and loneliness, and opening up to dialogue and meeting other people.

The situation to which I refer is an example of the fact that peace should not be understood solely as the absence of war in the context of international (or possibly intra-state) armed conflict. Such a perception is overly simplistic and archaic,

rooted in ancient times, and fails to capture the complexity and dynamic nature of this process, occurring in various interrelated dimensions of human life – both individual and collective. Peace is expressed not only in the status of inter-state relations, but also in what transpires within and between people – in relationships, attitudes, applied competences, ways of overcoming difficulties, and resolving conflicts.

A broad understanding of peace – traditions and the present day

Such an approach to peace, which extends beyond the narrow perspective of war as an organised armed conflict, has a long tradition. Its historical foundations include the works of, among others, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Jan Amos Comenius and Immanuel Kant.

In his reflection on peace, Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the most eminent humanists of the Renaissance, emphasised the need to strive for an end to ongoing armed conflicts, but also to build sustainable conditions for peaceful coexistence that extend beyond the absence of war. He regarded fostering a culture of tolerance, creating a climate conducive to dialogue and rejecting violence as the most important elements in this context (Balcerowicz 2002).

Jan Amos Comenius understood peace as a situation in which people (or other creatures) can enjoy what they have in freedom and security, without pressure from others, and under the most favourable conditions of life. Therefore peacebuilding cannot be limited to counteracting armed conflicts. It must also be a process focused on fostering a sense of universal unity and community, highlighting the essential role of education in achieving this goal (Comenius 1964).

In his Treatise "On Perpetual Peace" (Kant 1995), Immanuel Kant outlines the so-called "preconditions" and "definite conditions" of peace. As "preconditions" he mentions the rejection of secret treaties, the observance of the principle of equality among all states and respect for their independence, the abolition of standing armies, the avoidance of external debts, the rejection of the right to intervene, and the cessation – during wartime – of all hostile actions that would undermine future peace. Their fulfilment of these preconditions leads only to the cessation of hostilities, which is not synonymous with peace. For peace to be considered as a permanent state, rather than a mere pause between wars, three "definitive conditions" need to be fulfilled. The first condition postulates the necessity of a republican regime in every state signatory to the peace treaty. The second condition lays down the foundation of international law and calls for establishment of a peaceful union between states (the creation of a federation of free states). The third condition addresses the need for interpersonal cooperation and coexistence between the citizens of all federated states (with universal hospitality highlighted). Each of these contexts for peace efforts demonstrates Kant's desire to transcend a narrow perception of peaceful human coexistence.

The legacy of the aforementioned philosophers initiated a broad definition of peace, which continues to form the foundations of scholarly reflection on the subject today. Nineteenth-century pacifist ideas, including those of Bertrand Russell, Albert Schweitzer and Mahatma Gandhi, and the post-World War II movement known as the Peace Research Movement[2], also contributes to this tradition. One of its representatives, Johan Galtung, the founder of the Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in Oslo, introduced the concept of negative peace and positive peace. According to Galtung, "negative peace" is merely "the absence of violence, the absence of war", while "positive peace" represents "the integration of mankind" (Galtung 1964, p. 12). He underlined that peace should be viewed as a process rather than a static condition. Two radically different situations – a world of universal and total war and a world of universal and total peace – merely mark the beginning and the end of this process. In between, many other stages can be distinguished, ranging from the elimination of wars to the elimination of personal (direct) and structural (indirect) violence from social relations, to the increasingly full satisfaction of human needs and the provision of conditions for the multi-faceted development for every individual. (Galtung 1996).

Contemporary reflection on peace, grounded in the aforementioned traditions, follows this orientation. This approach is exemplified by the work of the American scholar Rebecca L. Oxford, who defines peace as an active and dynamic process encompassing various areas of life: the inner life of the individual (intrapersonal or internal peace), interpersonal relations (interpersonal peace), intergroup relations (intergroup peace), international relations (international peace), and interactions between humans and the environment (ecological peace) (Oxford 2014). The omission of any of these areas hinders an understanding of the complexity of the peace process and, consequently, limits the potential for developing effective strategies for peacebuilding.

Many other contemporary scholars also conceptualise peace as a dynamic and complex process. This perspective is demonstrated, among others, by Christian Davenport, Eric Melander and Patric M. Regan, who propose the term of peace continuum as more useful for research than the traditional concept of absentia belli derived from ancient times (Davenport, Melander & Regan 2018). Johana Söderström of Uppsala University also emphasises the complex nature of peace (peace as a relational concept), focusing primarily on interactions between people

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2 The idea of this movement arose from the initiative of intellectuals and scholars as a response to the tragedy of war and, above all, to the involvement of science in the process of armaments, which was expressed primarily in the production of atomic weapons and their use in warfare. It was recognised that the building and consolidation of world peace could not proceed solely by means of political solutions (congresses, appeals, pacts); science should also be involved in this difficult process. Special institutes and scientific research societies should therefore be set up to undertake peace research in the broadest sense. The result of these demands was the establishment of such institutions first in the United States and then in Canada and Europe.

(Söderström 2021). Similarly, the Polish researcher Konrad Rejman reflects on peace with a particular focus on interpersonal relations. He writes:

> [...] I perceive peace as a state of reality and interpersonal relations in which human beings can focus above all on the realisation of their creative potential, because no one threatens the continuity of their subjectivity and identity, and the threat of non-existence is not a tool for achieving political goals and enforcing obedience, as is the case, for example, in war. On the other hand, when we can co-create social and political reality on the basis of cooperation and dialogue rather than violence and coercion, then we can speak of peace. In times of peace understood in this way, violence is replaced by creative and not destructive actions (Rejman 2022, p. 2).

Rejman points out that peace is a polysemantic concept, there is no single binding definition of it and the authors address those aspects that are particularly relevant in the specific context of their deliberations (Rejman 2022).

The complexity of the processes involved in the peaceful coexistence of people is also illustrated by the definition of a culture of peace adopted by UNESCO in the 1990s. According to this definition, a culture of peace is *a culture of coexistence and sharing with the Others, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, tolerance and solidarity; a culture that rejects violence, seeks to prevent conflicts at their source and to resolve problems through dialogue and negotiation; a culture that ensures full rights for all and the possibility of full participation in the endogenous development of society* (Mayor 2001, p. 468) Referring to this definition, Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO from 1987 to 1999, who was deeply involved in the process of fostering a culture of peace in the world[3], stresses:

> The goal of peace is a long-term objective that presupposes the establishment of a close link between peace, development, justice and democracy: how can one fail to see that such a dynamic is impossible without the development of education for all, without the promotion of human rights, tolerance, cultural pluralism and dialogue between all actors in society? Without a real commitment by all to peace? Without the release of energy and reflections of the heart? (Mayor 2001, p. 468)

This approach clearly distances itself from narrow theories of peace, hat limit the concept to the dichotomy of war as armed conflict(s) versus peace as the absence of such conflict(s). Instead, it attempts to highlight the universal responsibility for

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3 After leaving his position as Director-General of UNESCO, F. Mayor founded the Fundación Cultura de Paz in Spain. The organisation still exists today, undertaking numerous initiatives to promote a culture of peace.

across various areas of social life. In the definition cited, the very concept of *culture* "returns" the peacebuilding process to ordinary people. It is no longer just politicians and civic leaders who are seen as peacemakers and who can and should do as much as possible in this regard. Jan Szczepański underlined that culture can be viewed as a set of values created by humans and everything that is meaningful to them, to which they give meaning through their activity (Szczepański 1970). A *culture* of peace is defined precisely in terms of the processes and activities that occur within and between people, which are relevant and valuable from the perspective of a peace order. It is both the culture externalized in the objectified products of human activity and the "culture within people", manifested in their attitudes and actions towards others and in their approach to civic duties. Developing (or destroying) a culture of peace is therefore dependent on all those who make up society and actively participate in it. This idea connects to centuries-old traditions of European humanism, which emphasises the belief that individuals can develop through constant engagement with the values of the cultural universe. In this way, a "culture in the human being" is created, which results from the individual's encounter with the objectified world of values, experiencing it and internalising it. Human beings therefore grow through culture, but culture also develops through human creative activity.

Peace is, therefore, an ambiguous concept and there is still no consensus on how to clarify it in a broad, positive context. Contemporary scholars who address this issue highlight different themes and emphasise various aspects, yet they agree on a few fundamental points. These are as follows:

- Peace cannot be understood solely as the absence of war (in the sense of international and intra-state armed conflicts. Such a definition does not capture the complexity, multifaceted and dynamic nature of this phenomenon.
- Peace in the broad, "positive" sense (to use the terminology introduced by J. Galtung) is dependent on a very wide variety of factors, not only on international relations. In this context, the researchers pay particular attention to the following issues: the different types of violence that occur in interpersonal relations and the need to eliminate them, respect for the freedoms and rights of each person and different social groups (e.g. religious, sexual, age minorities) the dissemination of values such as respect and tolerance of difference, respect for the common good and the community, conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation, the quality of human life and opportunities for human development, civic engagement and activism.

Education for peace as a consequence of comprehensive approach to peace

The examples highlighted, illustrating a broad understanding of peace and a culture of peace, offer concrete implications for how we think about education for peace. In the following section, I will focus on those that I consider to be the most important.

It is necessary to value the work of peace education, to recognise it as an equally important factor in building and strengthening peace as the actions of world politicians and leaders

One of the pioneers of the idea of education for peace, Maria Montessori, emphasised:

> Education, in the usual sense, plays no role in the process of solving important social problems and is considered a matter of no consequence concerning humanity as a whole. In short, it is attributed a very limited importance, but if a genuine education for peace is to emerge, education must be universally recognised as a fundamental and necessary factor, a starting point, an issue of crucial importance for all people (Montessori 2021, p. 51).

Regarding "usual understanding" of the role of education in peacebuilding, the words of the Italian thinker and activist should be considered still relevant. The effects of educational work are not as spectacular or easily perceptible as, for example, the consequences of political agreements to end hostilities, or international treaties to stop violence. Peace education activities are long-term efforts, carried out on a daily basis, focusing on individuals and to small groups (preschool communities, school classes, etc.), and the changes occurring in specific people and in interpersonal relationships. These effects are therefore harder to see, understand and appreciate. However, as the Italian educator stressed, they are just as important as the ongoing efforts of politicians and world leaders. Neither of these two pathways to building and strengthening peace should be neglected, or, more so, invalidated.

Regarding Polish peace researchers, it is worth noting that the link between the two mentioned pro-peace strategies was already pointed out in the 1970s by Joachim Kondziela. In his book *Badania nad pokojem. Teoria i jej zastosowanie* [Peace Research. Theory and its application] (whose message extended beyond the then dominant perspective of the "socialist struggle for peace") he emphasised:

> In contemporary peace research, its strong connection with education is emphasised; peace pedagogy has even been distinguished as a separate department within this discipline of knowledge. (...) There is undoubtedly a feedback loop between education for peace and peace policy, with education being the greater premise. Peace policy presupposes the transformation of social structures, which will be impossible unless one revises certain contents of consciousness

(structures of consciousness as social structures!), shaped by inherited extreme models, above all the "friend – enemy model" (Kondziela 1974, pp. 151-152).

In Polish pedagogy, similar approaches were advocated by Bogdan Suchodolski and Irena Wojnar. They called for a continuous, comprehensive education of the individual that, in the intellectual, emotional and moral sense cultivates pro-peace attitudes. They also highlighted the interconnectedness between macro and micro peace efforts. B. Suchodolski wrote:

> Inevitably, tasks directed more towards the objective world turn into second tasks directed towards the consciousness of human individuals. Conversely, activities directed towards the formation of human consciousness and attitudes become, at some point, activities directed towards objective reality (Suchodolski 1983, p. 14).

In his reflections on peace, Suchodolski was closely aligned with the legacy of Jan Amos Comenius. Drawing on this legacy, he emphasised the complementarity of building "order in the world" and "order in the human heart", and in connection with this, the role of education, which cannot be overestimated.

As a student of B. Suchodolski, I. Wojnar also emphasised the dialectical relationship between political and educational activities. An important point of reference for her was the concept of a culture of peace promoted by UNESCO. This concept situates the foundations of peace in people, in interpersonal relationships, in civic engagement and activity and this obliges us to recognise the huge role of education in shaping a culture of peace. I Wojnar considered the shaping of a culture of peace as one of the most important educational obligations that humankind faces (Wojnar 2000) and it undoubtedly remains so to this day.

A broad understanding of peace leads us
to consider education for peace in the open, always imperfect mode

If education for peace is to be more than just a reactive action taken in response to an already existing situation of unrest or conflict, and if it is to genuinely equip people to resolve conflicts through means other than those based on force, aggression and violence, it must be a continuous process. Acquiring competencies, qualities and attitudes that can be considered supportive of peace building (e.g. critical and creative thinking, respect for difference, moral imagination, empathy, ability to engage in dialogue, willingness to commit to community goals) is not a matter of the moment; it requires time and commitment, as well as ongoing revision of existing knowledge in the light of new experiences and challenges.

It is impossible to list, at any given moment, all relevant factors that may contribute to the escalation of tensions and disagreements between people in

the near future, both on a micro and macro-social scale. Some factors fade away while others emerge, and this is an unstoppable process. Its inevitability is determined by the constant change, movement and transformation inherent in human history. For this reason, lasting and undisturbed peace seems unattainable. Human life is characterised by movement, the co-occurrence of different, often contradictory emotions, the emergence of new challenges, struggling with the limits of causation, with strength and weakness. It is also a constant encounter with difference and otherness in its various manifestations and forms, which can be both fascinating and difficult to understand and accept. Tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts, ambivalent emotions and tendencies are intrinsic to human existence, they are an essential part of it and it is hard to imagine that at some point they will cease to exist. Cultural creators – philosophers, writers, filmmakers, poets – have repeatedly demonstrated that successful attempts to eradicate these aspects entirely could lead to utopias that cancel out the very essence of life – movement, change, creation resulting from anxieties, ambivalences, tensions and conflicts we experience. This threat is perfectly reflected in the words of Bertrand Russell, who wrote:

> Impulse is an expression of life, and as long as it exists there is hope that it will turn towards life instead of death, but the absence of any impulse means death itself, and from death no new life will be born (Russell, following: Kuderowicz 1995, p. 56)

Peacebuilding and peace-strengthening cannot, therefore, presuppose the total exclusion of problems, tensions and conflicts. These elements need not be seen as entirely undesirable or inherently "hostile" to peace, rather, they can serve as foundation for creative transformations and new solutions, that surpass those previously found inadequate. As such, peacebuilding activities must be permanently integrated into the very essence of education as a process, which aims to prepare people for life. This idea was aptly expressed by Bogusław Śliwerski when he wrote:

> True, full, authentic peace education is not some activity or process that can be planned, implemented, mastered with all possible determinants, subjected to control, evaluated according to a model and proclaimed the final result in terms of undeniable success or failure, because it is never completed. Sooner, though always too late in relation to the temptation of immediate (counter) action, we will recognise the fact of its symptoms than the "ripe fruit" (Śliwerski 2016, p. 24).

Fundamental to the peace education work is the development of the human being's sense
of subjectivity, responsibility for peace and awareness of causation in this regard

There is much that can be discussed regarding the tasks and challenges faced by peace education and, as I have indicated, the subject will always remain open. However, when we consider the fundamental issues that determine the very essence of peace education, it is important to emphasise that its primary mission is to cultivate in individuals a sense of personal responsibility for peacebuilding and a sense of real causation in this regard. It is the foundation for the commitment of people who see peace as their cause and as something that realistically depends on them.

Education should therefore be a space where the individual can experience peace as a right to which they are entitled and as a value directly connected to their lives. It should also be a place where they can identify opportunities for both individual and collective peacebuilding action. In this context, it is fundamental for individuals to see themselves as active and capable agents, entitled to certain rights and is able to fulfil one's social and civic obligations.

The importance of this skill persists throughout an individual's life, due to the constant process of change taking place both within themselves and their environment. These changes confront individuals with the need to constantly redefine themselves and their place in the world. The development of subjective attitudes is particularly important for those individuals and entire social groups who, for various reasons (e.g. disability, cultural difference, gender, poverty, lack of education, etc.), experience direct and structural violence; are marginalised or even excluded from social life. This situation very often leads to feelings of isolation and objectification, along with diminished belief in their ability to shape their own destiny and have any influence on the environment.

The Brazilian philosopher and educational activist Paolo Freire emphasised that by influencing the sense of individual subjectivity, education becomes a liberating process, revealing opportunities for liberation from various forms of violence and demonstrating the possibilities for thinking and acting in terms of alternatives and changes (Freire 2014). Without the ability to perceive ourselves in this way, it is difficult to take personal responsibility for what happens in our surroundings, and sometimes, even for our own lives. Peace education, therefore, should cultivate in people:

> dissent to the existing world in the name of ideas and principles recognized by them, do not accept false justifications of the status quo – ideologies, prepare for social change without war, force and violence, build concern and creative dissent to the world of the existing structures, imposed roles, dogmas, stereotypes – this is a postulate of social creativity, „self-realization through

changes outside of one's own Self", building motivation to start from scratch (Kwieciński 1992, p. 21).

Summary

The situation I referred to at the beginning of these reflections – the war in Ukraine and the involvement of Poles in providing assistance to war refugees – serves as an example of ordinary people taking actions to influence, even in a small way, what is happening in their vicinity. It illustrates how small, grassroots citizen initiatives can grow into a huge wave of assistance to thousands of people in need. It challenges the schematic thinking that ordinary people are powerless in the face of decisions made by dictators and influential policymakers. Instead, it highlights real civic responsibility in opposing war through acts of aid and relief to those who are suffering.

Developing such sensitivity, responsibility, and a sense of causation is one of the fundamental tasks of education for peace. This task responds not only to armed international conflicts and their consequences but also acknowledges that violence and suffering are universal phenomena affecting various areas of human life.

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