

How Preschool Children Understand Peace?: an Analysis of Artistic and Verbal Narratives

Jak dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym rozumieją pokój? Analiza plastycznych i werbalnych narracji

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Abstract: For proper development, children need a sense of security, which is why education for peace is necessary in their social development. This should include shaping moral sensitivity and the ability to understand other people. In this regard, the primary importance of the dignity of each person should be emphasised. The research was conducted using a participatory method in a group of preschool children (aged 5–6), who made drawings and expressed their opinions on the given topic: “Your association with the word ‘peace’”. The research group consisted of 84 children, of whom about 25% identified “peace” with the absence of war. As a result of the analysis of children’s drawings and verbal narratives concerning the term “peace”, the following conceptual groups (qualitative codes) were identified: 1) peace as the absence of war, 2) as a relationship, 3) security, 4) action; 5) emotions, 6) value, 7) peace as a dream. The wide range of interpretations of the term “peace” means that children need appropriate emotional and cognitive support in developing their capacity for moral reflection and conscious choice of good, and above all, they need proper role models among adults and their peers.

Keywords: peace, children’s narratives, education for peace, artistic and verbal expression, moral development, preschool children

Abstrakt: Dziecko, aby prawidłowo się rozwijać, potrzebuje poczucia bezpieczeństwa, dlatego na jego drodze rozwoju społecznego konieczna jest edukacja do pokoju, która powinna obejmować kształtowanie wrażliwości moralnej oraz zdolności rozumienia drugiego człowieka. W tym aspekcie należy podkreślić pierwszorzędną rangę godności każdej osoby. Badania przeprowadzono według metody partycypacyjnej w grupie dzieci przedszkolnych (5–6 lat), które wykonywały rysunki i wypowiadały się na zadany temat: „Twoje skojarzenie ze słowem «pokój»”. Grupa badawcza liczyła 84 dzieci, z których około 25% utożsamiało „pokój” z brakiem wojny. W wyniku przeprowadzonej analizy dziecięcych narracji rysunkowych i werbalnych dotyczących terminu „pokój” stwierdzono występowanie następujących grup pojęciowych (kodów jakościowych): 1) pokój jako brak wojny, 2) jako relacja, 3) bezpieczeństwo, 4) działanie; 5) emocje, 6) wartość, 7) pokój jako marzenie. Duża rozpiętość interpretacji terminu „pokój” oznacza, że dzieci na drodze rozwoju zdolności do refleksji moralnej i świadomego wyboru dobra potrzebują odpowiedniego wsparcia emocjonalnego i poznawczego, a nade wszystko prawidłowych wzorców wśród dorosłych oraz w środowisku rówieśniczym.

Słowa kluczowe: pokój, narracje dziecięce, edukacja dla pokoju, ekspresja plastyczna i werbalna, rozwój moralny, konstruowanie pojęć, dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the last century, Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor, educator and pedagogue, appealed: “I ask you, my dear children, who are capable of anything, to join me in building peace in the world” (Mazzarini 2022). Another significant statement of hers was also

recorded: “Peace is a task that must be worked on every day, starting with children” (Metodo Montessori Scuola 2025). These words have lost none of their original relevance.

During the OMEP World Assembly and Conference (2025) in Bologna, attended by over 700 people from around the world, some significant words were spoken: „No child is resilient to war. Resilience is not the silence after the bombing. Children are not strong because they stay quiet. Resilience is not what a child can endure alone. A child’s resilience means having a loving adult by their side. It means having the right to play, to feel safe, to be seen and heard” (OMEP Europe 2025).

In order to guarantee children the right to peace, it is necessary to take joint, decisive action to protect peace and human dignity. Upbringing and education are key factors in this process—what we shape in children today through values, attitudes, and educational experiences will be reflected tomorrow in the quality of social life (United Nations 1989, art. 29).

In the context of the political situation, the effects of which are increasingly evident in the everyday lives of young children, education for peace is a key challenge for contemporary pedagogy. In kindergartens, children’s themed games often refer to motifs of war, fighting, escape, and attack, especially among children from Ukraine. It is becoming commonplace to build objects resembling weapons from blocks: pistols, rifles, drones, grenades, and flamethrowers. This phenomenon requires teachers to intervene consciously and skillfully so that spontaneous play can become a starting point for constructive peace education. In the Polish context, however, the double meaning of the word ‘peace,’ which in colloquial language refers to both physical space (equivalent of the English word ‘room’) and the social value associated with the absence of violence and interpersonal harmony, makes it difficult to implement such measures.

As A. Piejka (2019) writes, education provides opportunities and possibilities for building peace, but requires a reflective and scientifically based approach. Planning for peace education involves consciously shaping an educational environment in which the values of peace, empathy, and dialogue are an integral part of everyday activities in kindergarten. Planning understood in this way combines theory with practice—it is the foundation for building a culture of peace from the earliest stages of education.

In this article, we present the results of research based on a participatory approach, where we give children a voice and accept their autonomous narratives; moreover, conducting research with children creates space for them to learn and reflect.

1. THE TERM “PEACE” FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Understanding how children form concepts determines how they participate in everyday life, engage in play, resolve conflicts, and cooperate. Peace is an ambiguous concept that is difficult to explain, and adopting a specific definition of it has implications for pedagogical practice.

In educational psychology and pedagogy, the concept of “peace” refers to the emotional, axiological, and social spheres. The classic, simple understanding of peace is the absence of violence and war. In pedagogy, ‘peace’ has become part of intercultural and moral education (Lewowicki 2000; 2013), which includes: values, relationships, and the educational process. Education for peace aims to prepare individuals to live responsibly in a culturally diverse world by fostering dialogue, cooperation, tolerance, and empathy.

Today, more than ever, peace is a political category, although, as Wojnar (2000a) writes, it is primarily a spiritual and moral value, rooted in culture, art, and human experience. Therefore, education for peace should include the development of moral sensitivity as well as the ability to experience beauty and to understand other people.

A similar line of thinking is presented by Piejka (2015; 2023), who writes that peace is a long-term and dynamic process, rooted in everyday life, culture, art, and ethics. He repeatedly emphasizes in his publications that the modern world requires education to create a culture of peace, i.e., a way of thinking and living in which individuals are able to build relationships based on respect and solidarity. The goal of education should be to teach coexistence, not just to convey the knowledge that violence is wrong (Piejka 2019).

From the point of view of pedagogy, it is extremely important to refer to the psychological understanding of the concept of ‘peace,’ as it is the foundation for shaping pedagogical reflection on education for peace, enabling understanding of the internal mechanisms that determine pro-social, empathetic, and constructive attitudes in interpersonal relationships (Kozielecki 2000). In this sense, peace education, in order to effectively achieve its educational

goals, must be based on the findings of developmental and social psychology, which allow us to understand the dynamics of human behavior in the context of violence, conflict, and reconciliation. The interdisciplinary connection between the two fields therefore not only provides a theoretical foundation for the idea of peace, but also enables the practical development of educational strategies conducive to its realization. Without the support of psychology, pedagogy loses its ability to fully explain and design educational activities, because it is psychology that reveals the internal determinants of human behavior, motivation, and interpersonal relationships (Łobocki 2000, 278–279).

As Leszcz-Krysiak and Wardal (2024) point out, from the perspective of research on children's understanding of the concept of 'peace,' it is important to note that in Polish we are dealing with homonymy—the word '*pokój*' has two completely different meanings that are not logically related to each other. On the one hand, 'peace' refers to physical space, i.e., a room in a building where people sleep, rest, work, or spend time. On the other hand, it means a state of non-conflict, harmony, and agreement between people, i.e., a situation where there is no war, dispute, or violence. This linguistic duality of meaning significantly hinders our understanding of how children understand the concept of 'peace' in a social and moral sense. This makes it all the more important to talk to children about 'peace' in the sense of a value—as a state of coexistence based on respect, empathy, and mutual understanding—so that they can gradually construct in their minds the concept of peace in its true, humanistic dimension.

2. ASSUMPTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a participatory method, which assumes that children are active participants and co-creators of knowledge. The aim was to give children a voice and enable them to express their own perspectives, experiences, and meanings in a way that was natural for them. This form of research allowed us to establish a good relationship with the children, where they could co-decide on the course of the study. The researcher acts as a partner rather than an expert 'questioner.' This provided an opportunity to better understand the world from the child's perspective and strengthened their subjectivity (Zalewska-Królak 2025). Drawing accompanied by conversation was adopted as the technique.

It is also worth noting that conducting participatory research with children has great educational potential, because when, for example, we ask a child questions about peace, its significance, and how they understand it, we observe the child becoming engaged and curious. This awakens the child's inquisitive nature, encouraging them to ask questions, which in turn leads to an understanding of things, phenomena and processes occurring in the world (Bruner 1965). Thus, it fulfills a dual role—this approach not only allows us to capture children's authentic way of thinking, but also promotes their engagement and reflection. Thanks to this, the participatory method becomes a tool not only for research, but also for education and empowerment, enabling children to actively co-create meanings of socially relevant concepts – such as 'peace,' 'justice,' or 'cooperation.'

As many researchers emphasize, the convergence of two perspectives of the mosaic strategy—methodological, referring to the way research is conducted, and methodical, understood as a way of teaching—reveals significant cognitive and didactic potential and opens up multifaceted possibilities for application (Nowak-Łojewska 2021).

It should be emphasised that, due to their often limited vocabulary, children express their experiences and thoughts through drawing. This is why psychologists and educational researchers are keen to make use of this tool. The multifaceted nature of this research method is outlined below.

I. Justification for choosing drawing as a research method

The decision to use projective drawing in research involving children is based on several key methodological and psychological considerations:

- Overcoming verbal and cognitive barriers – children, particularly those of pre-school and early school age, often lack the necessary vocabulary or insight into their own emotional states to talk about their fears, desires or conflicts. Drawing provides them with an alternative, non-verbal means of communication.
- Naturalness and a lack of anxiety – drawing is a spontaneous and natural form of play for children. An assessment using this method reduces levels of stress and anxiety (which are common in standard interviews or questionnaire-based tests), thereby increasing the accuracy of the assessment.

- The multidimensional nature of the data – the analysis covers not only the content of the drawing itself (who or what is depicted), but also formal aspects: pencil pressure, spatial arrangement (topography), the size of elements, the colours used, and the child's behaviour whilst drawing (hesitations, erasures, verbal comments).

II. Reference to projective testing theory

Drawing research is deeply rooted in two main schools of thought in psychology:

- The psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approach – as the foundation of projective techniques. It is based on the concept and defence mechanism known as projection. It is assumed that a drawing is a form of symbolic expression of unconscious conflicts. The researcher (diagnostician) acts as an interpreter of symbols. This approach gives rise to such classic assumptions as the idea that the figure drawn first or largest is the person most important to the child, and that omitting the hands of a figure may indicate a sense of helplessness.
- Developmental and cognitive psychology – before a drawing is analyzed from an emotional perspective, the methodology requires an assessment from a developmental perspective. Theories such as the stages of drawing development (e.g., G.H. Luquet, V. Lowenfeld) described by Gil-Ruiz, Martinez-Verez, Ospina Toro, and Castañeda Marulanda (2025) and theories of cognitive development elaborated by J. Piaget are key here (Wadsworth 1996). The researcher must determine whether the lack of proportion or distortion in the figures stems from emotional issues (regression) or is simply typical of a particular stage in the development of the child's nervous system and fine motor skills (e.g., the 'cephalopod' phase in drawings by 3- to 4-year-olds).

III. Reference to research and clinical practice

In psychological and educational practice, drawing is rarely used as the sole assessment tool. The most commonly used tools in practice:

- Family Drawing Test – used to assess intra-family relationships, a child's sense of belonging, and their place within the family system (Corman 1970; Braun-Galkowska 1992).

- The Draw-A-Person (DAP) test, developed by Karen Machover in 1949, is used to assess a person's self-image, gender identity, and level of intellectual development (*Machover Draw-a-Person Test (DAP Test)* 2018).
- The Tree Test (by Charles Koch) – regarded as a projection of personality structure (the roots represent the subconscious, the trunk represents the strength of the ego, and the crown represents one's relationship with the world). Today, this test is viewed critically due to certain methodological shortcomings (Stemplewska-Żakowicz 2012).

Limitations: Contemporary research methodology takes a very critical view of drawing tests. Their reliability (the consistency of results) and validity (whether they measure what they are intended to measure) are considered low when used as stand-alone standardised tests. The meaning of a single symbol (e.g. the use of black) may stem from depression, but it may equally well result from the fact that the child simply liked that crayon.

For a study to be methodologically sound, drawings are primarily used today as:

- Ice-breaker – a tool for “breaking the ice”, used to establish rapport with the child before the actual assessment.
- The starting point for the interview – it is not the drawing itself that holds the greatest methodological value, but the interview with the child about that drawing. Questions such as: ‘*Who is that?*’, ‘*How does that person feel right now?*’, ‘*Where are they going?*’ allow the child to give a narrative to their projections.
- The drawing component of the test battery is regarded as a complementary (qualitative) method, used in conjunction with clinical observations, interviews with parents and standardised questionnaires (e.g. the CBCL – Child Behavior Checklist), to enable a multidimensional analysis within a single diagnostic process (Mansolf et al. 2022).

It is worth emphasising that drawing is regarded primarily as a qualitative method and a form of interview, rather than a rigorous psychometric test (Stemplewska-Żakowicz 2023; Paluchowski 2007; Hornowska 2025).

This study examined children's subjective conceptions of 'peace,' as expressed through drawings and verbal statements. The research question was formulated as follows: "How do children conceptualise peace?," and therefore the aim of the study was to attempt to identify how children understand the concept of peace' and how they express this understanding through artistic expression (drawing) and oral narratives.

The research was conducted over two months in 2025 in three preschools in the Silesian Province, involving 84 children aged 5-6 years. The children drew in small groups of 5-6 children on the topic: "Draw peace. What is peace? What is it like when there is peace?" In the presence of their teacher, immediately after finishing their drawings, the children discussed their drawings with the researchers.

For research purposes, the research problem was formulated in the form of questions: (1) What visual elements related to peace appear in children's drawings? (2) How do children verbally justify their visualizations?

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

In the context of interpreting empirical data, it should be emphasized that six months before the actual research was conducted, the children participated in a series of educational classes on peace. The educational activities were varied, such as: creating mind maps on the topic of 'peace,' role-playing scenarios entitled "How someone can take peace away from us," and discussions about what it means to "resolve conflicts peacefully." One of the facilities also held a symbolic Peace March around the kindergarten, in which children participated with handmade symbols of peace and banners. These activities encouraged reflection on the meaning of the concept of 'peace' and drew attention to how we experience 'peace' in everyday social situations.

The aim of these activities was not only to introduce children to the topics of 'peace,' moral values, and interpersonal relationships, but also to broaden the semantic scope of the concept of 'peace.' As already mentioned, the word 'peace' has a double meaning in Polish, which makes it much more difficult for children to construct its mental equivalent and understand the axiological dimension of this value.

In an earlier pilot study conducted as part of other research on peace (Leszcz-Krysiak and Wardal 2024), extremely different results were obtained in two Catholic kindergartens (33 respondents) and a public kindergarten (18 respondents). Children from the public kindergarten understood the concept of peace only at a concrete-visual level as a room, a bedroom, or a playroom. In contrast, 70% of children from Catholic preschools demonstrated an understanding of the concepts of ‘peace’ and ‘world peace’ in two semantic spheres: as calmness and as a state of peace, non-violence, and good relations between people.

In preschools where no classes on ‘peace’ were conducted, 100% of children identified it with physical space (e.g., ‘child’s room,’ ‘where one sleeps’). The situation was different in Catholic preschools, where children often prayed for peace and associated it with social and emotional values such as harmony, friendship, the absence of war, and love (expressed in phrases such as ‘something like friendship,’ ‘so that they don’t fight,’ ‘so that there is harmony’).

Therefore, the study focused on children who had participated in classes on peace. From a pedagogical perspective, this type of research has great cognitive value for children, as they construct the meaning of the concept of ‘peace’ through joint activities such as drawing and conversation. The researcher does not so much ‘teach’ peace directly as create conditions for experiencing and naming it (Tomasello 2003). Therefore, the role of the researcher in this process is to accompany the children, not to ‘steer’ or ‘direct’ them.

In order to organize the qualitative data based on the analysis of the illustrations and conversations with children about what they had drawn, a table of qualitative codes was developed. In order to interpret the research results, recurring themes and meanings were identified and the basis for formulating thematic categories was created (Fleck-Bangert 2001; Chermet-Carroy 2005; Wallon, Cambier, and Engelhart 1993; Kalbarczyk 2010). As Fleck-Bangert (2001) notes, children’s drawings are a form of expression for emotions and experiences that they are not yet able to put into words. Through colour, shape, and composition, children communicate their experiences, needs and perception of the world. As Wallon, Cambier, and Engelhart (1993) emphasize, drawing reflects a child’s emotional and cognitive development, and its analysis allows us to recognize internal states and relationships with the environment. In this context, as Kalbarczyk (2010) also notes, the artistic creativity of

young children is an important tool for understanding their world of feelings and experiences. Table 1 presents grouped semantic codes for the concept of ‘peace.’

Table 1. Quality codes in the analysis of children’s drawing and verbal narratives concerning the concept of ‘peace’

No.	Main code	Subcategories/keywords	Description of the meaning
1.	Peace as the absence of war	there are no bombs, no shooting, no war	Peace understood in the classical, adult sense – as the absence of armed conflict.
2.	Peace as a relationship	friendship, family, love, being together, helping, not arguing	Peace understood as good interpersonal relations and harmony in the social environment.
3.	Peace as safety	home, roof, shelter, no violence, feeling safe	Peace as a state in which there are no threats – physical or emotional
4.	Peace as an activity	give something, share, do not fight, care for others, cooperate, assist others	Peace as an everyday activity, resulting from choices and behaviours
5.	Peace as an emotion	heart, happiness, peace, joy, smile, it’s nice, love	Peace as an internal, emotional experience
6.	Peace as a value	Earth, world, planet, people, all together	Peace as a universal value involving all of humanity
7.	Peace as a dream	so that no one dies, so that everyone loves each other, a perfect world	Children’s visions of an ideal world

Source: own research

Approximately 25% of children associate ‘peace’ with the absence of war, which is a characteristic way in which preschool children understand social phenomena. The children drew people with Polish flags, depicted characters without weapons, a clear sky, and filled the space around them with hearts and flowers (Figures 1–2). Their verbal narratives include statements such as: “There are no bombs,” “no one dies,” “there are no guns” – seeing the world without threat, and thus in terms of so-called negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence (Galtung 1975). This understanding of ‘peace’ is based on perceiving good and evil through external consequences rather than motives or values, which corresponds to the early stage of Kohlberg’s moral development (*Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* 2000). Children are just beginning to form cognitive and emotional interpretations based on their observations of the adult world and media messages.



Fig. 1. Drawing by 5-year-old Ola ('There is no war, the country is free')



Fig. 2. Drawing by 5-year-old Aniela ('Peace in the world, it's safe to play')

For children who took part in classes about peace, the closest understanding of 'peace' is that of a relationship based on harmony with other people, because peace and harmony in their surroundings give children a sense of security. That is why children's artworks depicted people engaged in shared activities, family members participating in activities together, and holding hands was also a common motif. It is also worth noting that the dominant colours in these drawings are yellow, red, green, and blue, and the analysed works radiate warmth. Children understand very well that peace does not exist in isolation, but rather in relation to other people, i.e. through closeness and bonds. The works depicted people in mutual relationships reflecting the fulfillment of mutual needs: sharing toys, helping each other, playing together (Figs. 2, 3, 4). In their descriptions of their illustrations, the children emphasised that the most important thing is "not to argue" and "to help each other." The children's works featured people with disabilities and children who were being helped by others. The children's artwork and their lively comments about it reveal, in a striking manner, the process of social learning of values (Erikson 2000) and the importance of fostering emotional sensitivity and empathy from an early age (Koźmińska and Ostaszewska 2007).



Fig. 3. Illustration by 6-year-old Ernie ('Children play quietly while their dad works').



Fig. 4. Drawing by 6-year-old Jaś. ('You can fish, it's safe.')

The home occupied a very important place in the children's drawings, as it was depicted as a place that protects them, where they are safe, free from violence and surrounded by love. The home appeared as a symbol of security and stability. The young participants in the study depicted the interior of a house where children played together and their father worked. When describing their drawings, they said that it was their home and that they had their own space there, with toys and books. Several children associated 'room' with peace and quiet. One girl said: "It's my room because it's peaceful there."

In their drawings and statements, the children emphasised the importance of cooperation and play. While drawing children playing, they said that "children play, they don't have conflicts, they share their toys." Peace appeared in these narratives as a state associated with play, enjoyment, and spending time with family, including going for walks together. This more mature understanding of 'peace' as a process suggests that peace depends on individual actions, and it must be actively maintained, or, as the children explained, "you shouldn't fight," "you should share your toys," "you need to cooperate." This understanding has important implications for the children's sense of agency in creating and maintaining peaceful relationships around them.

For many children, 'peace' is associated with emotions such as love, friendship, joy, and inner experiences, which they expressed by drawing one or more hearts. Hearts were often depicted next to people or trees. These works also frequently featured rainbows, which the

children described as beautiful because they appear after a storm and are colourful and cheerful. These drawings contained characters who were smiling and happy. Among the most common elements in the drawings were the sun, the house, the heart, and the Earth – as symbols constituting a visual language in which peace is understood as goodness, tranquillity, and love.

Twenty children painted the globe, greenery, rainbows, and birds on their artwork – they interpreted this as a space where it is safe, where you can play, go for a walk, and where there are no aeroplanes flying. They also mentioned clean soil. Two of the drawings featured the words “peace for everyone,” which demonstrates the development of children’s abstract reasoning skills and their perception of peace as a value that is important to everyone.

In five cases, children described peace as a large fairy-tale, ideal world where no one gets sick or dies. In their drawings, they depicted a colourful world of dreams, where everything they like could be found.

There were also highly realistic drawings reflecting the children’s needs, such as the drawing by a 6-year-old girl, who painted a colourful picture containing things and activities that can be done when there is peace. She spoke about this drawing in a very mature way, understanding what peace gives people: “The world is peaceful, there is no war. We can have food, fun and time together; we can go wherever we want and speak our own language” (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Picture by 6-year-old Marysia (“a peace is a happy world”)

Source: Own research

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND PEACE EDUCATION

To sum up, children's artistic and verbal narratives on the subject of peace show that 'peace' is understood in a multidimensional way – from relationships and emotions, through actions and security, to a universal value.

The results of the study lead to several reflections on education for 'peace.' The first is that education must be based on the everyday experiences of young children, because children construct concepts in relation to their environment. A social environment in which 'peace' is discussed helps children to create meanings and mental representations about it. Interaction with adults and peers who give meaning to this concept through language, emotion and everyday experiences helps children to create cognitive and emotional representations of the concept of 'peace' (Wygotski 1987; Bruner 1974; 1978). The analysed illustrations showed how the concept of 'peace' is formed gradually, has a socio-cultural character, and is linked to children's experiences.

Preschool children interpret the world primarily through emotional and visual experiences. Therefore, symbols and images that enable children to embody the concept of 'peace' are an important element in creating this concept. This is not primarily about symbols such as doves – like those promoted by the World Peace Council and created by the communist authorities of the Soviet Union in the 1950s – but about striving to deepen interpersonal relationships. Therefore, activities focusing on the value of cooperation, non-violent communication, expressing emotions in a way that is acceptable to others, and appropriately selected reading material about friendship and empathy can play an important role – all this makes 'peace' an element of everyday life rather than just an abstract idea, and teaches that 'peace' begins here and now in peer relationships. This approach reflects the thinking of Janusz Korczak, who emphasised that education must be based on love, understanding and trust in the child. In the spirit of Korczak's thinking, education for peace is a process of the child's internal maturation in an atmosphere of respect and dialogue, rather than a set of imposed moral norms (Korczak 1939).

Pedagogy is based on values, so it cannot be axiologically neutral, because it refers to a specific ideal of humanity. As Maria Montessori (2004) notes, “peace is not a state that can be imposed, but a value that must be nurtured – it begins in the soul of a child.” Preschool education, in which children learn cooperation, emotional self-regulation and conflict resolution, is therefore the first link in peace education. Emotional and motivational influences play an important role in this process, supporting the development of pro-social and peaceful attitudes.

Throughout its history, Poland has been particularly hard-hit by the suffering caused by successive uprisings and wars, extermination and persecution. It could be said that every Polish family has suffered and cherishes the memory of their ancestors who fell victim to the ravages of war. Although more than 80 years have passed since the formal end of the Second World War, armed conflicts and tragedies continue to unfold in various countries around the world.

The 21st century has already claimed many lives in armed conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, the Middle East, Lebanon, and Palestine. Perhaps, caught up in the rhythm of everyday life, we think that this does not concern us, because it is far away. However, we must remember that in modern times, armed conflicts tend to escalate; therefore, we should be guided by the conviction that peace is not a given once and for all but requires daily nurturing.

That is why peace education is becoming not so much a choice as a necessity. The quality of this education will determine the future of our world, social relations and the way conflicts are resolved in a few years’ time.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that in the current core curriculum for preschool education, in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education (2017), as well as in the preschool education programmes analysed by the authors (Kwaśniewska and Żaba-Żabińska 2017; Kordos 2018; Wasilewska 2021; Żaba-Żabińska, Majewska, and Paździo 2021; Żaba-Żabińska 2022; 2023a; 2023b), there are numerous references to peace education and content explicitly aimed at shaping peaceful attitudes. These issues are indirectly addressed in the content and objectives relating to cooperation, empathy, conflict resolution, building social relationships, and the concepts of good and evil. It seems that this is the correct practice, as children ‘soak up’ the atmosphere of peace through daily interactions, the emotional climate

and educational practices. However, the question may arise as to whether these practices are sufficient. Perhaps it is necessary to include peace education in the core curriculum in a more systematic and conscious way, so that it becomes an integral and visible part of the preschool education process. Educating for peace during ongoing armed conflicts is a great challenge for educators; they need methods and tools to talk about such difficult and sensitive topics.

Research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012 as part of the Education for Peace (EFP) programme among teachers who had experienced the 1992–1995 war showed that they are not merely implementers of the programme but carry within themselves the trauma and identity of the conflict (Clarke-Habibi 2018). Their own emotional and moral development is essential for effective peace education. Currently, Polish teachers, like their Bosnian counterparts, are involved in the process of intercultural education and prejudice prevention. Kindergarten is becoming a meeting place for children of different nationalities, which requires empathy and dialogue pedagogy. As experience in Bosnia shows, a lack of reflection on the future perpetuates divisions, and the effects of peace education depend on the culture of the environment in which the child is raised and on the level of educational awareness of parents and siblings, as well as the personal role models of significant individuals.

Krystyna Kamińska (2019) highlights the problem of serious tensions in schools attended by children from different backgrounds, including migrant families. The differences dividing children and young people, and unresolved problems, can escalate into aggressive behaviour or lead to withdrawal and isolation. In both cases, this will contribute to the formation of separate groups, often antagonistic towards one another, which may result in socialisation problems later in adult life. The author advocates for the establishment of the role of a cultural assistant, whose task would be to support immigrant children in adapting to their new circumstances and environment, particularly with regard to language and cultural barriers, as well as to facilitate communication with teachers and parents. The expected outcome is the children's personal development and their long-term upbringing in a spirit of peace.

A study by Clarke and Habibi (2018, 281) found that lasting peace begins in nurseries and classrooms – in the relationships, language, and attitudes of teachers. It also shows that peace education is a process of healing society, not just teaching about peace.

Education for peace cannot be purely theoretical; it requires reflection on the suffering caused not only by war, but also by violence and all forms of social inequality and discrimination. Therefore, the words of Irena Wojnar (2000a) should be considered very accurate, as she emphasises that the culture of peace does not express a ready-made ‘programme for the struggle for peace’, but is a constructive category that generates the need for creation and creativity (Wojnar 2000b). At the same time, teachers, as mediators of values, are particularly responsible today for creating a space of emotional security for children. According to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, a lack of adequate emotional and cognitive support in the upbringing process significantly hinders children’s ability to construct an abstract understanding of values and the axiological dimension of reality, which in turn limits their capacity for moral reflection and the conscious choice of good (*Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* 2000). The inclusion of drawing and verbal narratives in educational practice promotes the development of peaceful skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching children about peace should be based on their everyday experiences, as children need a specific point of reference in order to grasp a given concept.

The influence of the peer environment is particularly important in consolidating the cognitive and emotional representation of the concept of ‘peace,’ which is why it is not possible to develop a ready-made ‘template’ for striving for peace, but rather it is a process that requires the constant creation and improvement of models of behaviour.

The findings clearly demonstrate that children’s drawings reflect their understanding of peace. This understanding is expressed in the following ways:

- The heart is a symbol of joy, friendship and love.
- A home where the father works at his desk and the children play peacefully and harmoniously is a symbol of stability and security.
- A child who drew his room explained that it was peaceful.
- A rainbow after a storm – it was frightening and dangerous, but now it is colourful and joyful because the danger has passed.

Throughout their development, children need moral guidance and support from their parents, guardians, and teachers to strengthen their desire to intentionally pursue peace and goodness. The first school for children in this regard is the relationship between their parents and the way they respond to differences of opinion or resolve conflicts.

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