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ACADEMIC EDUCATION FOR PEACE

Role and opportunities for practical implementation

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Introduction

The current international situation necessitates a redefined political philosophy, one that fosters a new consciousness, dispositions, attitudes, and behaviours aligned with the principle that peace must be primarily achieved through non-violent means. The continual cultivation of this mindset and the reinforcement of corresponding dispositions must be integral components of peace education and societal socialization. This is not a new category. In the past, this topic was addressed by various philosophical, pedagogical, religious, and social movements. However, nowadays, education for peace takes on a different dimension and a distinctive significance tailored to contemporary challenges.

Peace education transcends mere moral obligation; it emerges as a vital necessity dictated by the structure of international relations and the enduring humanitarian crisis spanning decades. Current challenges are global in nature. Never before have we experienced such a clear interdependence of societies worldwide as in the last two to three years: the Russian aggression in Ukraine or the conflict in the Middle East are characteristic actions of states ruled by an increasingly tightening dictatorship and are manifestations of a broader, noticeable trend worldwide – the development of autocracy.

The ramifications of warfare require no elaborate argumentation. The traumas of war impact both present-day individuals and future generations. The enduring legacy of the Second World War continues to shape upbringing and familial dynamics in numerous Polish households.

In the founding act of UNESCO, the following provision was included: “Wars begin in the minds of human beings; therefore, in the minds of human

beings must the defences of peace be constructed” (UNESCO Convention of 1945). Just two years ago, in a context of relative peace, education and upbringing for peace were considered secondary. However, there is now an urgent imperative to prioritize intensified education for peace and reinstate its rightful place in socio-economic life, workplaces, and civic activities, as well as in Polish education and science, including at the higher education level.

Loreta Navarro-Castro and Jasmin Nario-Galace, in their book “Education for Peace: A Pathway to a Culture of Peace” (2010), summarize the model of understanding education for peace outlined by international UN agendas into five fundamental areas of peace care:

- 1 Ensuring personal order based on self-respect, love, hope, and a variety of personal and material resources.
- 2 Fostering peace in interpersonal relationships through respect for others, justice, tolerance, and cooperation.
- 3 Promoting social peace among different groups, including national, religious, and professional communities.
- 4 Advocating for global peace, acknowledging the rights of states to self-determination, and promoting harmony among nations.
- 5 Addressing the need for peace between humanity and the natural environment is achieved through actions such as sustainable development, respect for nature, and reduced consumption.

These five areas constitute a model of peaceful relations. Disruption in any one of them can lead to negative consequences in the subsequent areas.

The implementation of this model is based on three pillars: knowledge, skills, and attitude.

Knowledge encompasses awareness of one’s own needs and comprehension of the nature of conflicts and peace processes, with a particular emphasis on non-violent conflict resolution methods. It requires an understanding of social and group dynamics, familiarity with rights and the corresponding responsibilities, recognition of cultural heritage, as well as knowledge of the various types and mechanisms of prejudice development.

Skills are linked to various aspects of communication, including active listening, articulating one’s opinions and emotions, paraphrasing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, assertiveness, collaborating with others, critical thinking, recognizing and critically analysing prejudices and stereotypes, managing emotions, problem-solving, generating alternative solutions, adapting to a changing world, participating in social life, displaying friendly and peaceful behaviours, and de-escalating conflicts.

Attitude primarily entails cultivating a positive self-image, fostering respect for others, promoting tolerance and acceptance of differences among individuals and entire social groups, upholding the rights of both children and

adults, and embracing a sense of responsibility towards them. It involves being conscious of personal beliefs, advocating for gender equality, fostering empathy, valuing reconciliation, promoting solidarity, embracing social responsibility, and advocating for equality and justice. Additionally, it involves finding joy and affirmation in these principles.

Within an academic setting, the process of disseminating knowledge and cultivating attitudes, skills, and behaviours that support peace education can unfold across multiple levels and in a variety of contexts.

The educational dimension as the space for academic education for peace

The most direct solution in the academic education offer is the organization of study programs that are inherently related to peace and conflicts, such as programs in political science and international relations, where there are subjects directly addressing the issues conducive to education for peace. Additionally, in other courses, topics related to human rights studies are included, aiding in understanding the significance of respecting human rights and freedoms within the framework of peacebuilding. Across various academic disciplines, one can encounter courses that impart knowledge, foster skills, and cultivate attitudes that reinforce the process of education for peace.

At the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, there are university-wide subjects in the fields of humanities and social sciences, which correspond to the knowledge characteristics of the second degree of the National Qualifications Framework (knowledge in context – conditions and consequences). These are university-wide subjects for students in bachelor's and master's degree programs:

P6S_WK – *[the student] demonstrates an advanced understanding of the fundamental dilemmas of contemporary civilization.*

Meanwhile, at the second-degree level, this translates into the effect as follows: P7S_WK – *[the student] demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the fundamental dilemmas of contemporary civilization.*

Additionally, university-wide subjects conducted in English align with the skill characteristics of the second degree of the National Qualifications Framework (communication skills in a foreign language, knowledge dissemination):

- University-wide subject for students in bachelor's and master's degree programs:

P7S_UK – *can communicate with the environment using specialized terminology; can participate in debates – present and evaluate various opinions and positions and discuss them; can use a foreign language at the*

B2 level according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

- University-wide subject for students at the second-degree level:
P7S_UK – can communicate on specialized topics with diverse audiences; can conduct a debate; can use a foreign language at the B2+ level according to the CEFR and specialized terminology.

These subjects fulfil the requirement of the Regulation on Studies (Journal of Laws 2021.661, as amended), where among the mandatory elements of the study program in paragraph 3(1), it is specified that

the number of ECTS points that a student must obtain within classes in the field of humanities or social sciences shall not be less than 5 ECTS points – in the case of study programs assigned to disciplines within fields other than humanities or social sciences, respectively.

The structure of certain study programs incorporates elements of knowledge from other scientific fields, alleviating the necessity for students enrolled in these courses to utilize the university-wide offerings, although they still have this option available. Within study programs in the humanities and social sciences, modules covering the aforementioned content (e.g., pedagogy, psychology, and sociology) are included. However, special attention must be given to study programs outside of these areas, where students are mandated to engage with content from the humanities and social sciences. At Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, the university-wide course offerings include subjects conducive to the implementation of content relevant to peace education. Additionally, a subject titled “Study Culture” has been introduced for all students, focusing on effective communication skills and the constructive expression of thoughts, feelings, and needs. This course emphasizes the importance of listening to others and understanding their perspectives.

Outside of formal academic programs, additional training opportunities are provided to both students and staff, encompassing areas such as mediation, negotiation, and diplomacy. These sessions aim to instil effective conflict resolution skills, empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity. Within pedagogy study programs and programs preparing students for the teaching profession, curricula incorporate elements of education for peace. This equips future teachers and educators with the necessary tools to impart these values to their students. Students are taught conflict resolution strategies grounded in respect and understanding, as well as techniques for managing stress and negative emotions in a healthy manner to prevent aggression. They also learn how to teach these skills to children. Furthermore, multicultural education is emphasized to foster an understanding of cultural differences, respect for diversity, and readiness for dialogical interactions with individuals from other cultures. The primary goal of these courses is to cultivate positive

attitudes towards other cultures and foster openness to individuals from diverse backgrounds. An integral component of these classes is anti-violence education, which promotes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values aimed at preventing conflicts and violence at both interpersonal and intergroup levels, including the international sphere. Particularly within programs preparing students for the teaching profession, the emphasis is placed on anti-violence measures within schools and among culturally diverse groups.

The study program also integrates elements of anti-discrimination education, global education, civic education, and environmental education. Anti-discrimination education entails deliberate actions aimed at enhancing knowledge and skills and influencing attitudes to combat discrimination and prejudice-motivated violence while promoting equality and diversity (Web 1, n.d.). These principles are embedded across all university activities. Global education focuses on illustrating the interconnectedness between individuals and phenomena worldwide. Lectures addressing these topics demonstrate how individual decisions in everyday life can impact phenomena in distant parts of the world, including the environment, human rights, and the economy. Civic education, as defined by the European Union, aims to prepare individuals for active participation in social life by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to contribute significantly to the development and well-being of society. This objective is primarily realized through university-wide subjects, which address global education issues and sustainable development. Environmental education, aimed at fostering a society that values caring for the natural environment, is primarily integrated into the environmental protection study program. However, elements of environmental education are also incorporated into subject blocks across other fields of study, and they are also proposed as separate subjects for student choice.

Conducting scientific research

A crucial aspect of education for peace for students involves engaging in scientific research. Depending on the field of study, research topics may encompass a range of issues revolving around this theme. For instance, in political science, research may delve into the root causes of conflicts, their origins, and potential preventive strategies. In psychology, studies may examine the mechanisms underlying human behaviour in situations of danger or conflict. Scientific research can be conducted through external projects or within internal resources, such as scientific circles or thesis work. It is essential for lecturers and supervisors to guide students and facilitate research topics that foster the cultivation of peaceful attitudes.

Studying conflicts from diverse perspectives offers a comprehensive understanding and potential solutions. Conflict analysis can encompass psychology, sociology, economics, and environmental science, enabling a multidimensional approach to resolving issues.

Academic education for peace aims to equip students with the skills necessary to engage in conflict resolution, promote peace, and counteract violence at both local and international levels. Fostering a society grounded in peaceful values and mutual understanding is imperative. Furthermore, academic education can foster an appreciation for different cultures and nations, contributing to the cultivation of peaceful international relations.

Internships and volunteering

Study programs can facilitate participation in volunteering or internships with social organizations dedicated to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Encouraging students to engage in professional internships or volunteer work with organizations involved in mediation, humanitarian efforts, or other peace-related fields is essential. These opportunities may be integrated into the study program, particularly in disciplines such as special education, pedagogy, family studies, and social work. Additionally, students can pursue internships outside their designated study program. The Career Office at UKSW coordinates internships across various sectors and locations, providing students with opportunities to advance their engagement in peace education.

Supporting student and social activities

Student councils and students engaged in scientific circles actively promote peace through organizing conferences, seminars, and collaborative events with external partners. These activities prioritize assisting those in need, as demonstrated by the immediate response to the conflict in Ukraine. UKSW students and staff swiftly mobilized to provide aid, including operating information points for Ukrainian residents and organizing food drives and fundraising efforts. Additionally, initiatives such as holiday events for the children of Ukrainian soldiers, organized in collaboration with the Bielany District, underscore the commitment to supporting marginalized individuals. Furthermore, student-led efforts extend to various marginalized groups, including prisoners, the elderly, and people with disabilities, demonstrating the tangible impact of these initiatives. Scientific discussions on socially relevant topics also contribute to fostering peaceful attitudes. For instance, the Faculty Debates provide a platform to address significant social issues, with recent debates focusing on the war in Ukraine and life during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, conferences organized by student scientific circles play a vital role in promoting peace, offering opportunities for peaceful discourse on various topics. Notably, the annual conference on children's rights organized by the Law Students' Scientific Circle serves as an example of the impactful discussions facilitated by student-led initiatives.

Student exchange, presence of international students

The opportunity to form friendships with individuals from diverse backgrounds is integral to peace education. International exchanges provide occasions for conscious reflection and the reassessment of one's own attitudes and values. Through such experiences, students expand their worldview, enhance self-awareness, and develop a greater understanding of the needs of others. Facilitating friendships between individuals of different nationalities is a crucial aspect of peacebuilding. Despite existing agreements with foreign partners, there is limited interest among UKSW students in participating in temporary study-abroad programs. Individual discussions and numerous informational meetings are necessary to encourage UKSW students to pursue studies at partner institutions abroad. However, it is noteworthy that UKSW students are enthusiastic about mentoring incoming students. They serve as tutors, offering individual support to visiting students and organizing cultural events to showcase cuisines and customs from around the world. Collaborative efforts between foreign and Polish students aim to foster an inclusive environment. Foreign students actively participate in sports events, engage in academic circles, and contribute to student self-government initiatives.

Pedagogical and psychological support for students and staff

An integral aspect of peace education within academic settings is the operation of the psychological counselling centre. The collaborative presence of a pedagogue, psychologist, and clergy member is of paramount importance, ensuring availability to students, doctoral candidates, and staff during designated hours. The on-call specialists are easily accessible, providing assistance both in-person and online to address the everyday existential challenges of those seeking support. A noticeable rise in the number of individuals seeking professional help has been observed in the aftermath of the pandemic. While often a conversation proves sufficient, there are instances where more specialized treatment, such as psychiatric care, may be required.

Organizational solutions strengthening peaceful attitudes

At the university, conflicts among both students and staff are resolved with respect and understanding. To foster such an environment, procedures have been revised, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a welcoming atmosphere for every member of the academic community. A policy has been implemented to promote a congenial work and study environment while preventing any detrimental behaviours. This policy aims to enhance the cohesion of staff teams and foster positive relationships among academic teachers,

non-academic staff, doctoral students, and students. Central to this policy is the recognition that a friendly university environment cannot be achieved solely through the expansion of research and teaching infrastructure; it also necessitates the cultivation and reinforcement of healthy relationships among staff, doctoral students, and students, who collectively form the university community.

The university serves as a space where aspiring scholars interact with individuals possessing substantial knowledge and experience, who evaluate their progress. Every interaction and assessment should be conducted with a spirit of dialogue and respect. The university environment thrives on the collaborative efforts of individuals with diverse characteristics, abilities, and beliefs. The pursuit of truth often involves lively discussions and debates, extending to the process of achieving organizational excellence, where diverse management styles, teaching methods, and differing visions for the university's development may collide. In such instances, tensions and interpersonal conflicts may arise. It is the responsibility of university authorities to ensure that such divergences, controversies, or disputes do not escalate into unrest or hostility that could violate the personal rights of members of the university community. To address this, teaching workshops are organized, particularly targeting novice lecturers. Newly appointed academic teachers are provided with a mentor assigned by the dean of the faculty, who offers support, guidance, and assistance in navigating teaching responsibilities and resolving any challenges with colleagues or students. Furthermore, training in essential peace skills, including communication, conflict resolution, personal conflict management, promotion of positive attitudes, and dialogue, is offered to all students, doctoral candidates, and staff, regardless of their tenure. These training sessions are highly sought after, aiming to reduce the reliance on external authorities, such as courts, to resolve disputes within the university community. Moreover, the appointment of a Student Rights Ombudsman, in collaboration with the Student Council, facilitates the resolution of emerging issues involving students. This initiative is particularly valuable, as dialogue with the Student Rights Ombudsman, who is also a student, often leads to the amicable resolution of many issues.

Conclusion

Academic education for peace endeavours to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in conflict resolution, promote peace, and mitigate violence at both local and international levels. Central to this objective is the cultivation of a society grounded in peace values and mutual understanding. Education for peace seeks to foster a harmonious society where conflicts are addressed constructively, and relationships are built on principles of understanding and respect. It is important to educate future

professionals and leaders who will play pivotal roles in resolving global challenges through peaceful means.

This endeavour is a long-term process that necessitates the collective engagement of the entire academic community. Working towards peace is an ongoing endeavour, and each individual's actions have a cumulative impact. Even small contributions by individuals can lead to significant progress on a global scale.

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