

Educating for Peace

**"Since wars begin in the minds of men,
it is in the minds of men that the defenses
of peace must be constructed"**

(UNESCO Constitution, 1945).

More than ever, peace is to be made. Between people, between nations, between humans and the planet. Recent events have shown that social peace, international security and environmental balance are fragile. Recent events in Ukraine have shown that it is not enough to invoke peace to maintain it; it is often necessary to defend it.

However, it seems simplistic to restrict peace to the absence of conflict or to an interval between two wars. As the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza put it: "peace is not the absence of war, but a virtue based on strength of character." When you think about it, the values of peace have very little to do with those of non-war. The essayist Pierre Calamé makes this point in the preface to the book *Education and Peace*: All too often, peoples who win wars lose the peace that follows, because the values necessary to win wars—simplification, obedience to orders, clarity of distinction between friends and enemies, etc.—have nothing to do with the values needed to build a lasting peace—the ability to admit and understand complexity, the ability to cooperate with the other, critical thinking, a sense of compromise, and a keen sense of the world's simultaneous unity and diversity.¹

For the pedagogue Maria Montessori, peace is a science, a culture, a state of mind: "In peacebuilding, there is no small thing and no small scale: what is played out between women and men, between children and adults, between children themselves, at the level of families, classes, and neighbourhoods, is also found at the level of relationships between nations." For her, everything is played out in education,

and the first real defence against war are human beings themselves, which is reminiscent of the UNESCO motto. In her eyes, peace as a discipline is the most noble of all. Peace can be taught and learned: "Everyone talks about peace, but no one educates for peace. In this world, they educate for competition, and competition is the beginning of any war. When we educate to cooperate and be in solidarity with one another, that day we will be educating for peace."

The fundamental role of school in building peace is undeniable. How, then, can we educate for lasting peace? Certain aptitudes, attitudes, knowledge, and values allow us to live in harmony with ourselves and others. Global citizenship, cultural tolerance, dialogue, listening, consultation, and non-violent conflict resolution are among them. School must develop such skills in students, just as it must allow students to apply these skills in their daily lives. In this sense, school has the duty to support the practice of democratic and pluralist citizenship, just as it has the responsibility to educate for peace and intellectual self-defence against aggression of all kinds. This important contribution to life in society is as remarkable as it is welcome.

¹ Readers interested in the subject may wish to refer to the book *Education and Peace*, a collection of Maria Montessori's speeches, from which the quotes in this article are taken. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator, is world-renowned for the educational method that bears her name: Montessori Pedagogy. She was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize (in 1949, 1950 and 1951), but never won it.



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