

Inclusive Peace Education in Present Times: Intercultural Perspectives towards Sustainable Futures

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The Living Peace Project as a Model of Inclusive Education

Intervention

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude for the selection of my abstract and for the opportunity to be here today within this international academic context.

Today, I would like to present a peace education project that I have been coordinating for several years on behalf of the NGO AMU – *Azione per un Mondo Unito* (ETS) in partnership with New Humanity (NGO). Living Peace International is a pedagogical innovation project that has spread to at least 136 countries across five continents.

The project was founded in 2011 in Egypt, amidst a climate of profound social and political ferment—the Arab Spring—by **Carlos Palma**, a Uruguayan teacher living in Cairo at the time, with years of experience in the Middle East and its conflicts. In a region marked by religious divisions and suffering, Palma sought a simple tool to teach his students a culture of peace—not as an abstract concept, but as a concrete proposal for a daily lifestyle.

By emerging during the Arab Spring, the Living Peace project intercepted a deep demand for agency and participation. This momentum, which the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi interpreted as the awakening of Muslim subjectivity against authoritarian structures, is translated here into an educational methodology capable of transforming that drive for change into a concrete and daily civic commitment to peace (Mernissi, 1992).

As a religious member of the Focolare Movement, the founder was well acquainted with the 1997 "Dice of Love," a tool inspired by the points of Chiara Lubich's (founder of the Focolare Movement) "Art of Loving." On the faces of this dice, there are no numbers, but rather phrases inviting one to live daily life with respect and love. The intuition to transform these points into an actual die is attributed to Roseli Weber, a specialized pedagogue who worked with children facing psychological distress. While there are no written records from her, we have the tangible results of her impact. Using the Dice of Love, she was struck by the positive echoes from students and families who appreciated this original intuition, and especially by the many beautiful experiences that unfolded in daily life, even within the domestic environment (Axer, 2017).

Living Peace transformed this intuition into the 'Dice of Peace', a practical tool for daily commitments that fosters inner harmony and improves interpersonal and environmental relationships. Its proven success in Egyptian schools—notably in enhancing school climate and reducing bullying—quickly garnered global recognition.

Currently, Living Peace International comprises a network of at least 110 partner organizations worldwide, with over two million participants across various continents in public and private schools, youth centers, universities, prisons, psychiatric clinics, and nursing homes. It has become a benchmark for Global Citizenship Education, aligned with the principles promoted by UNESCO

and the objectives of SDG 4. Indeed, while UNESCO provides the political and theoretical framework for peace and global citizenship education through the 2030 Agenda, Living Peace provides the pedagogical and practical method to ensure those values do not remain mere rhetoric but become daily actions. This applies primarily to educational contexts but also extends to sectors such as anthropology, psychiatry, architecture, and theology.

The pedagogy is simple yet effective: it involves rolling "the die (...) a ludic element of surprise, recognized as one of the principles underlying motivating learning: one 'discovers' which maxim appears each time the die is cast. However, alongside this ludic dimension, there is a significant pedagogical depth, starting from the content of the maxims and the processes activated through the use of the die" (Siniscalco, 2026).

In many respects, the pedagogy of the Dice of Peace is rooted in the approach of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), the "father of modern pedagogy." Pestalozzi initiated a fundamental socio-pedagogical shift, promoting a transition from authoritarian education to a model based on love and the integral development of the person. There is a clear common thread between his vision and that of Living Peace: both place the values of love and reciprocity at the center of learning. Pestalozzi believed that the child's direct experience was a necessary condition for learning, offering a 360-degree formation of the individual through three elements: **Head** (cognitive area), **Heart** (moral and affective area), and **Hand** (practical area). As a pioneer of modern pedagogy, Pestalozzi emphasized the decisive role of the relational and material context, identifying the learning environment as the fundamental catalyst for the student's integral development.

This is where the Living Peace Dice of Peace is situated: an effective and concrete tool that transforms the abstract concept of peace into a daily action of implementation. As Pestalozzian pedagogy teaches, it is only by experiencing peace that one can fully understand it (Pestalozzi, 2023). Starting from this necessity to "experience," the Living Peace project has progressively evolved into a structured educational path based on two methodological characteristics that operationally articulate the union between "Heart" and "Hand":

1. **The Culture of Giving:** The idea that peace is born from reciprocity, a dynamic that finds immediate tangibility in the rolling of the die and the concrete living out of the daily phrases.
2. **Service Learning** (Fiorin, 2015): In this phase, active and global citizenship is materialized through respect and solidarity, creating the foundation for active and aware citizens. This service methodology is based on the "**6x1 – 6 steps for 1 goal**" strategy, an approach adopted from the Youth for Unity Movement. These six stages allow for the identification of a real problem within one's social context and taking concrete action to solve it, thereby becoming protagonists of change. Through this path, young people—guided by adult educators—can engage in small-scale projects, acquire skills, and simultaneously spread a culture of peace that concerns not only human relationships but extends to respect for the Earth as our "common home."

The synthesis of this formative process is achieved in the recognition of the world as a common good, transforming respect for living beings into a commitment to peace for future generations. This vision aligns fully with what has been defined as "**Integral Ecology**," the core concept of Pope

Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015). In this perspective, it is not just "ecology" in the strict environmental sense, but a unified worldview where everything—from the education of the individual to the care of the planet—is profoundly connected.

Edgar Morin, the philosopher of "complexity," argues that one cannot fully understand the environment without understanding society, and vice versa. He proposes a "planetary humanism," where humanity recognizes itself as a single community bound to planet Earth. Morin developed the concept of "**Earth Homeland**", explaining the awareness of global interdependence. For the first time in history, a sociologist explains the correlation between nuclear, ecological, and viral threats that could endanger all of humanity. His is a "systemic" approach: it is impossible to separate social problems from economic or ecological ones. Morin moves beyond the approach of the human being as the "owner" of nature, defining us instead as social actors who are integral parts of a global ecosystem. He suggests a "metamorphosis" of society to safeguard our common home.

Quoting Edgar Morin from *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future* (1999): "We must learn to 'be there' on the planet, which means learning to live, to share, to communicate, to fraternize." In this perspective, Living Peace is a path of peace education that restores human dignity, even to a child in a war zone or an individual with a disability, teaching them to live simply without forgetting their inherent worth.

Born in a context characterized by religious pluralism and social heterogeneity, Living Peace presents a universal language of peace, respecting individual identities beyond prejudice. The project embodies equity and equality, remaining attentive to the characteristics of each person. Educating for peace today means maintaining the responsibility to form citizens who are simultaneously rooted in their territory and open to the world: **glocal citizens**. Investing in this means providing young people with the "toolbox" to dismantle hate speech and act as leaders of collective improvement. No one should feel alone in the vastness of society. Supporting teachers, educators, and families in this journey means transforming education into an act of resistance against indifference. A young person educated in peace does not merely survive their reality; they commit every day to making it more just, inclusive, and human. Peace education is the only true strategy to defeat the poverty of tomorrow.

In an era marked by global conflicts and increasing polarization, peace education can no longer be understood as a mere rhetorical abstraction, but as a political and ontological imperative.

Living Peace promotes a **situated female agency**, where women—representing at least 80% of project participants—are leaders of change within their communities, reclaiming public space and ethical discourse across various global contexts. Through Service Learning, the young female ambassadors and peace leaders of Living Peace—recognized by the Universal Circle of Ambassadors of Peace (France/Switzerland) for their community actions—acquire the ability to influence political and social decisions. Gender-sensitive education, therefore, is not only an act of justice toward women but a prerequisite for global peace: there can be no sustainable development if half the world's population is deprived of their capacity for agency.

In contexts of war and international tension, the daily practice of "caring" for the other becomes a subversive act against the logic of violence. While international institutions struggle to mediate major conflicts, the global network of Living Peace builds a **transnational citizenship**: an alliance

that does not erase differences but values them as "plural femininities" and "cultures in dialogue," in line with the vision of an integral and intersectional humanism.

An emblematic case study of how this pedagogical tool can support relationships in vulnerable contexts—while providing hope and resilience for women in difficulty—is a prison in southern Italy, in Lecce. This facility includes a female section housing approximately 80 women, 12 of whom are of foreign origin. The women of the Lecce Penitentiary (known as *Borgo San Nicola*) represent a complex reality, where detention seeks to transform into an opportunity for redemption through creativity and solidarity.

Here, several incarcerated women encountered Living Peace in 2025 and decided to create a "Dice of Peace" specifically for women in prison. The faces of their dice feature the following phrases:

- *I avoid reacting*
- *I help those in need*
- *I comfort the most vulnerable (companions)*
- *I listen to the other (companion)*
- *I forgive offenses*
- *I embrace the other (companion)*

The Lecce prison is known as one of the few in Italy to regularly promote artistic and tailoring workshops. The women involved in projects like Living Peace use art and colors—such as those on the die you see here—as a form of psychological resistance against the monotony of "prison grey." The phrases chosen (such as "I listen to others" or "I avoid reacting") are not accidental. Forced cohabitation in confined spaces makes managing anger and impulse a daily challenge. For these women, the die is not a child's game, but a handbook for relational survival and resilience. Choosing to propose an alternative form of conflict resolution in a high-tension environment requires extraordinary strength of character.

Projects like this help these women feel they are still part of society. Knowing that "their" die is being translated into English or shown to the outside world (as we are doing now) breaks the walls of isolation and restores their dignity as citizens and as human beings. This is just one practical example of how Living Peace lives concretely in the world through the actions of its global network. The project adapts its educational methods while respecting local sensitivities (e.g., Islamic or rural contexts), gender identities, and diversity in general, while remaining steadfast in the pursuit of human dignity. Its flexibility accounts for gender not as an isolated issue, but as one intertwined with poverty and resource access, adopting an **intersectional gaze**.

In conclusion, in contexts of crisis, educating for peace and citizenship represents an act of reclaiming one's identity in the public space. The introduction of the "Dice of Peace" in an Egyptian school context marked by deep sectarian and gender tensions operates a deconstruction of "borders" (both physical and symbolic), echoing the sociological thought of Fatema Mernissi. Where the Moroccan sociologist highlighted how public space was historically precluded from full female expression, the Living Peace approach rehabilitates the subjectivity of young women, offering them a relational device that neutralizes traditional hierarchies and empowers them as peace leaders.

In this sense, the practice of peace proposed by Carlos Palma is not an abstract universalistic imposition, but a "**situated practice**": it arises from below, within an Islamic socio-cultural context, to demonstrate that the values of reciprocity and respect are endogenous to local culture rather than a colonial import. The resulting "active citizenship" is thus an intersectional citizenship, capable of integrating faith, gender, and geopolitical belonging into a new paradigm of coexistence without borders—a paradigm necessary for today's society.

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