

Education and Peace

Inclusivity, Justice and Flourishing

SELC 2026 · Tenth anniversary conference

DATES

27–28 November 2026

VENUE

Bratislava, Slovakia

TO REGISTER

conference@skolalibellus.sk

Education, whether as theory, policy or practice, is shaped by its context, carries moral weight and is often contested. Peace is more than the absence of war: it is the active presence of justice, at every level of the educational space. That means peace between nations and peoples through well-formed minds and hearts, peace in our communities and homes, and peace in classrooms where young people do more than acquire knowledge: they flourish.

Practitioners, academics and policymakers from Slovakia, the United Kingdom and the United States will contribute. **Simultaneous translation will be available.**

A selection of our speakers for 2026

01

Professor David Oswell

Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Goldsmiths, University of London

A sociologist, David oversees research, innovation and knowledge exchange at Goldsmiths, and leads a number of cross-university and sector-wide projects.

Pax Universitas: Between Global Humanity and National Interest

Does the university have a particular relationship to either peace or war? I initially plot a history of the university and then focus on the state of the university now in the context of contemporary geopolitical tensions and forms of peace and warfare. The threat of AI looms in my reflection.

02

Judy Hutchinson

Senior Associate Director for Study Abroad, Notre Dame Global, University of Notre Dame (USA) · SELC Secretary

Judy has worked in formational education in Catholic higher education for more than 28 years and has been part of Notre Dame's international division since 2007. In London she established and led the role of Director of Student Affairs at the university's largest global location, providing pastoral care for around 250 undergraduate and graduate law students each semester and building its internship and immersion programmes. A KoinEd Associate Scholar, she is completing a doctorate in education at St Mary's University, London.

The Freedom to be Ordinary: Rethinking Inclusion in Education

Efforts to make education more inclusive often focus on opening doors: removing barriers, widening access, and creating opportunities for those who have historically been excluded. But access is not the same as belonging. What happens after someone has been welcomed into an educational community?

Drawing on Dr Rowan Williams's reflections on the highly publicised case of Cambridge scholar Jason Arday, this presentation considers the expectations placed on people from underrepresented backgrounds and whether they are given the same freedom to succeed, struggle and fail as everyone else. I contrast Arday's story with that of a first-

generation Latino university student whose study abroad and internship experiences became an exceptional success story, asking whether inclusion must produce exceptional outcomes to be considered successful.

Grounded in the principle of human dignity, I argue that genuine belonging allows people to be more than representatives of a group or symbols of progress. Educational communities should make room for people to succeed, to struggle, to be accountable, to begin again – and sometimes simply to be ordinary.

03

Shinghirai Hopkins

Director of Social Sciences, Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School, Reading · KoinEd Associate Scholar

Shingi holds an LLB and a Master's in History from the University of Reading, and is completing a doctorate on women's experiences of land, memory and belonging in Zimbabwe. In school she leads on student participation, curriculum development and skills-based learning, is Lead for Girls' Achievement and Engagement, and belongs to the Character Education team. She works with schools and cultural organisations to strengthen student voice.

Education as a Sanctuary for Peace: Belonging, Freedom and Learning

"The keeps hurt my soul, we lost school, I loved school and it took it away from me."

— Beatrice, personal communication, July 2023*

These words were spoken to me during an oral-history interview in Zimbabwe. The woman I was interviewing was remembering her childhood during the liberation war, when her community was moved into a protected village, commonly known as a 'keep'. Her recollections were filled with experiences of displacement, restriction and violence. Yet when she spoke about what had been taken from her, she spoke about school.

Her words stayed with me. "I loved school."

As an African historian, I have spent much of my research listening to people describe their experiences of colonialism, war, liberation and its aftermath. Education was not originally the central focus of these interviews. Yet it repeatedly appeared in people's memories. They remembered going to school, being prevented from attending, leaving school, returning to education, learning from liberation fighters, and watching siblings receive opportunities that were unavailable to them.

These memories have made me think differently about what an educational institution can represent in a young person's life. Education is, of course, about learning. But it can also provide something less easily measured: belonging, continuity, relationships, freedom and the opportunity to imagine a future.

In this sense, education can become a sanctuary for peace.

* All names used for oral-history participants are pseudonyms.

04

Professor Jacek Brant

Professor, Institute of Education, University College London

After two years in manufacturing and eleven years teaching economics and business in schools, Jacek is now in his thirtieth year at the IOE. He has led initial and continuing teacher education and master's programmes, supervises doctoral students and contributes to international projects. He writes on curriculum and pedagogy; his most recent article, with W. Kilar, appeared in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (2025).

Education in an Uncertain World: Subject Discipline and Competency Approaches to Teaching Are Not Enough

Today, humanity faces a crisis. There are wars in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa and the threat of war in many other parts of the world. The rise of ultra-nationalist ideologies fosters hatred and intolerance of others. Meanwhile, a growing climate and nature crisis threatens public health, food production and economic well-being. This paper argues for values-led education that fosters hope and enables learners to flourish both as individuals and as members of society: one that gives teachers and students agency to make a positive difference in their own and others' lives.

05

Maria Budzynska

Deputy Headteacher, Catholic secondary school, inner London · SELC Treasurer

Maria has worked in Catholic secondary education in inner London for more than ten years. From a background in 11–18 English teaching, she has come to specialise in inclusion, special educational needs and whole-school pastoral leadership, and is a lead practitioner in raising standards.

Are We Giving Every Student a Fair Chance? Practical Teaching for Equity and Educational Justice

Equality of opportunity does not always mean giving every student the same thing. This session explores how equity in classroom practice can create the conditions in which all students have a genuine opportunity to succeed, particularly those facing disadvantage, learning needs, language barriers or other obstacles to learning. Grounded in practical classroom teaching, it will consider how teachers can identify and respond to different starting points without lowering expectations. Participants will consider the difference between equality and equity, and how apparently “equal” approaches can sometimes unintentionally widen gaps.

The session will provide practical strategies that teachers can apply immediately, with a central message: equity is not about expecting less; it is about removing barriers so that every young person has a just opportunity to participate, achieve and flourish.

06

Brian Grady

Director of Education, Reading

Brian has more than twenty years’ experience in senior local government leadership in England, with responsibility for improving educational outcomes. He has worked in London, in densely populated urban areas and in rural districts, overseeing early years, primary and secondary provision and programmes to raise attainment for disadvantaged pupils.

How Educators and the State Can Teach Peaceful Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. The challenge for education is not to prevent children from encountering disagreement, but to help them learn how to disagree without hostility, exclusion or violence, in a journey to belonging through enquiry. Drawing on experience from England, we will explore how educators can create safe opportunities for children to encounter difficult and conflicting ideas. Examples from Thoughtful, the UK’s national charity for philosophy for children, will illustrate work addressing extremism, challenging issues, conflict and peace-building. Safe disagreement depends upon safe belonging. The session considers how educators and the state – through policies, structures, language and behaviour – can support education spaces in which every child can participate, belong, learn to disagree and, above all, learn.

Join us in Bratislava

Register: conference@skolalibellus.sk Website: sel-conference.org

Venue: Súkromná škola a škôlka Libellus, Mokrohájska cesta, Karlova Ves, Bratislava

Co-Chairs: Professor Simon Uttley and Martin Smilnak Host: Dr Michal Poldar, Director, Škola Libellus

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