



TOWARDS ONENESS & LOVE

Rethinking Education Beyond the Selfish Gene

ABSTRACT

The Question That Science Cannot Answer
There is a vibration within the quantum, a shimmer beneath being. In physics we call it the zero-point field, the restless vacuum where virtual particles flicker in and out of existence. Yet nothing comes forth long enough to be—until something happens. What was that first spark? What truly sparked it all? If we dare to say, “God is Love,” we are not mouthing a sentiment but declaring a physics of the divine. Love is not an afterthought layered on to an indifferent cosmos; it is the creative energy at the heart of reality. Here, spirit and matter meet in the explosive creativity of love. At its center, a quantum engine of life, where love shatters old forms and continually births new ones. The ancient cross—so often reduced to a symbol of suffering—can be reimagined as an alchemical diagram of creation itself. The vertical line: spirit, the infinite, the transcendent. The horizontal line: matter, finitude, immanence. At their crossing: the heart, a radiant singularity of inexhaustible light.

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Introduction: The Normalization of Violence in Education and Society

For centuries, human societies have been educated in systems that normalize violence. From history books glorifying conquest to political structures forged in conflict, the very fabric of our socialization has encoded the idea that war and domination are not only inevitable but somehow natural. Textbook narratives around the world exhibit a persistent pattern of normalizing violence – violent events are abundantly referenced, yet violence itself is rarely questioned or critically examined. This normalization runs deeper than curriculum content. It is reinforced by toxic memetic structures – the stories, symbols, and cultural scripts we repeat without question – and compounded by epigenetic trauma, whereby generations inherit the physiological scars of violence. Together, these forces have created what can be described as a global addiction to power and money, a cultural dependence on domination as a way of life. We live in societies where violence-as-realism is the prevailing worldview; calls for peace and cooperation are too often dismissed as naïve or idealistic. As former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans observed, any optimistic suggestion that conflict could diminish is met with accusations of “ignorance, naiveté or outright dementia”. In such a context, even well-founded alternatives to the paradigm of competition and conflict struggle for legitimacy. Yet evidence from diverse fields – evolutionary biology, anthropology, psychology, political science – increasingly shows that cooperation, trust, and “survival of the friendliest” have been decisive factors in human evolution and societal flourishing. The problem is not that these ideas lack merit, but that they challenge a worldview still in thrall to violence-as-common-sense. Breaking this vicious cycle requires a fundamental rethinking of education itself. This paper argues that we need nothing less than a systemic transformation of education: a conscious shift from training for compliance and competition to training for peace and justice. Such an education would equip current and future generations with the cognitive, social, and moral tools to navigate conflict without violence – fostering a culture of peace that extends to all humanity and all species. Before envisioning this alternative, we must examine how deeply violence is woven into the tapestry of our history, culture, and schooling.

War as the Midwife of the Modern World

“War made the state, and the state made war,” historian Charles Tilly famously remarked[5]. His insight captures an essential paradox of modern history: violence has been a principal engine of political formation. The rise of the nation-state system, especially in Europe, was fueled by near-constant warfare that forced the centralization of power and forged national identities under fire. Tilly and others documented how, in early modern Europe, relentless interstate conflict favored those polities that could marshal the most resources for war – leading to the dominance of large, centralized “national states” built on standing armies and heavy taxation. In short, war was the violent midwife of the state. The map of the world we know today – across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa – is largely the product of wars of conquest, independence, revolution, and unification. For example, in the 20th century alone, anti-colonial liberation wars across Africa and Asia birthed dozens of new countries, while earlier centuries saw revolutionary wars give rise to the United States and Latin American republics, and wars of unification consolidate nations like Germany and Italy. As one observer noted, the sense of national identity is never

stronger than when a country is at war, under threat, or remembering war. War has thus been a potent (if tragic) source of social cohesion: it unites populations against a common enemy and provides foundational myths of sacrifice and heroism. Even societies that celebrate peace often anchor their national pride in wartime perseverance – for instance, Australians commemorating the WWI battle of Gallipoli, or Britons recalling the Blitz spirit during WWII. In less benign forms, fervent nationalism stoked by war has fueled cycles of aggression: an “overdeveloped” sense of national identity, as Evans warns, can breed contempt for others and make violent conflict seem not only justified but necessary.

If our political institutions themselves were born of war, it is no surprise that our educational systems have long mirrored that heritage. Schools have traditionally perpetuated narratives of patriotic militarism and taught obedience to authority structures modeled after the chain of command. History curricula often recount past wars in valorizing tones, emphasizing glory and victory while glossing over the human cost or moral ambiguity of violence. This conditioning subtly teaches each new generation that violence and domination are the drivers of progress – that might make right in the grand story of civilization. Meanwhile, the skills prized in many schools tend to be those useful for hierarchical, competitive systems: discipline, rote learning, and “getting ahead” of others. We train children to follow orders and compete for rank, but seldom to critically question unjust authority or to cooperate across differences. The implicit lesson is that the world is and has always been a violent zero-sum struggle, with winners and losers. In the words of American writer Randolph Bourne, “War is the health of the state” – and by extension, a certain warlike mindset is treated as the health of society.

Cultural and Biological Legacies of Violence

Beyond its visible impact on borders and institutions, violence imprints itself on cultures and even bodies in hidden ways. Peace scholar Johan Galtung uses the term “cultural violence” to describe how culture renders violence acceptable or even praiseworthy. Cultural violence operates through deeply embedded beliefs, ideologies, and symbols – the memetic structures of society. Flags, anthems, military parades, heroic statues, patriotic histories: these cultural artifacts often serve to legitimize direct or structural violence, making it seem normal or righteous. From childhood, people are surrounded by messages that equate violence with honor, bravery, and inevitability. As Galtung observes, cultural norms can make the continuation of war and oppression feel “right” or at least not wrong. For instance, a school might celebrate past battles in its curriculum or daily rituals (pledges, patriotic songs) without ever prompting students to reflect on the ethics of war itself. Such symbolic conditioning means that by the time they reach adulthood, many individuals accept the global arms race, punitive justice systems, or the exploitation of weaker groups as part of the natural order. In effect, our cultures are infected with toxic memes that glorify violence and domination; these memes replicate across generations, rarely interrogated for the harm they cause.

Adding to this cultural inheritance is a biological inheritance of trauma. In recent years, scientists have found startling evidence that extreme stress and violence can leave molecular scars that are passed down through generations. This field of study, epigenetics, has shown that the children and grandchildren of people who endured wars, famines, or other traumas often exhibit

physiological and genetic markers of those hardships. For example, a 2025 study of Syrian families found that the grandchildren of women pregnant during the trauma of war not only carried psychological wounds but also distinct epigenetic modifications – chemical changes to their DNA associated with the violence their ancestors experienced. These descendants, who never experienced the war themselves, nonetheless bear a genetic imprint of it. As one researcher put it, this is the first human evidence of “the genetic transmission of stress across multiple generations”. In practical terms, it suggests that a society steeped in violence doesn’t just hurt those directly involved; it quietly primes their children and grandchildren with heightened risks – perhaps a greater susceptibility to anxiety, aggression, or health problems linked to stress. In this way, cycles of violence perpetuate themselves not only through learned behaviors and cultural stories, but also through the very biology of populations traumatized by the past. The concept of inherited trauma has long been recognized in psychology and sociology; epigenetics now provides a concrete mechanism for how the “scars” of war may indeed live on in our bodies. A grim implication is that humanity may be caught in a feedback loop: violence begets trauma, trauma alters biology, and a traumatized biology may be more prone to further violence or fear-based responses. Breaking this loop requires conscious intervention – healing and education that address not only external behaviors but also internal wounds.

These cultural and biological legacies help explain what can be called a global addiction to power and money as means of security. Societies traumatized by violence (culturally and physically) often develop collective habits aimed at preventing future helplessness. One such habit is the accumulation of power – military, political, economic – as a buffer against vulnerability. Nations and leaders pursue dominance, wealth, and control compulsively, much like an addict chasing a fix. In today’s world, we see enormous resources devoted to arms races and economic growth at all costs, even when these pursuits perpetuate conflict and inequality. The logic of the “selfish gene” – a phrase popularized by Richard Dawkins to describe how gene-centric evolution can appear selfish – has been misappropriated into a broader social Darwinism that justifies greed and aggression as natural instincts. The result is a kind of cultural pathology: an inability to say “enough” to the pursuit of more power and wealth. Critics have likened extreme wealth hoarding to hoarding behavior in mental health – a tendency for accumulation to become self-destructive and insatiable. As one commentary wryly noted, society seems to have no upper limit on what is considered enough – “the current answer appears to be ‘never’”. Money and might have become ends in themselves, even as this addiction fuels new forms of violence: exploitation of workers and the environment, vast inequalities that breed unrest, and proxy wars fought over resources and markets. In sum, humanity is stuck in a self-reinforcing cycle whereby violence (physical and structural) feeds trauma and fear, which in turn feed the drive for dominance. But what if we could interrupt this cycle? What if the next generations were immunized against the old memes of hatred and trained to seek solidarity instead of supremacy?

Beyond the “Selfish Gene”: The Case for Cooperation

One barrier to change is the entrenched belief – pseudo-scientific at times – that selfish competition is the fundamental law of life. Since the 19th century, phrases like “survival of the fittest” have been used to paint nature, and by extension human nature, as a ruthless struggle of

each against all. In the 1970s, Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* amplified the idea that even our genes are fundamentally self-interested replicators. Although Dawkins intended the term as a metaphor (genes behave as if selfish in evolutionary selection), popular culture took it almost literally, cementing a view of humans as inherently selfish beings driven by genetic destiny. This worldview has been used to rationalize a wide array of violent and competitive behaviors – from cutthroat economics to cutthroat politics – as simply the way the world works. Cooperative or altruistic impulses, in contrast, have been cast as sentimental anomalies, nice to have but ultimately secondary in importance. When scholars or activists propose that empathy and cooperation might be central to our species, they are often derided as unrealistic idealists who “don't understand human nature.” The result is a fatalistic outlook that any vision of a peaceful society runs against our biological grain.

However, emerging research across disciplines soundly debunks the myth that evolution favors only the brutal and selfish. Cooperation is not a frothy ideal; it is a profound evolutionary strategy that our species (and many others) have employed to great success. Biologists have documented countless examples of mutual aid in nature – from symbiotic partnerships between species, to social insects working selflessly for their colonies, to higher mammals like dolphins and primates exhibiting empathy and helping behaviors. In humans, the evidence for the primacy of cooperation is especially compelling. Anthropologists note that *Homo sapiens* evolved as a small-group living primate with unusually high levels of social cognition and empathy; our survival depended on “survival of the friendliest,” the ability to form bonds, share, and work together. Indeed, some evolutionary scientists argue that friendliness was a trait actively selected for in our species. For example, Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods have shown that species who outcompete others (like domesticated dogs outcompeting wolves, or *Homo sapiens* outlasting other hominids) often do so by being more cooperative and socially adept, not more aggressive. As Hare puts it, “friendship bears the real evolutionary winners” – species that excel at cooperating tend to thrive in the long run. In their research, Hare and Woods even draw an analogy to animal domestication: humans, in becoming more tolerant and cooperative with each other, underwent a kind of self-domestication that gave us an edge over more combative hominid cousins. The evolutionary record thus flips the script on the selfish-gene narrative: while competition has a role, our superpower as a species is social cooperation.

Even at the level of genetics and neuroscience, new findings support this view. Studies in social neuroscience show that trust and cooperation activate reward centers in the brain, reinforcing pro-social behavior chemically (for instance, via oxytocin release). Large-scale economic experiments demonstrate that humans often default to fairness and reciprocity, not pure self-interest, especially when there is communication and transparency. And contemporary evolutionary theorists have refined Darwinian theory with concepts like kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection, which explain how genes that foster cooperation can indeed be favored by natural selection under many conditions. In short, there is nothing “against nature” in striving for peace and mutual aid. On the contrary, cooperation has been as much a factor in our success as competition – if not more so in certain pivotal moments. Historian Yuval Noah Harari, for example, argues that the dominance of *Homo sapiens* was due to our ability to flexibly cooperate in large numbers around shared stories and values.

Why, then, do cooperative solutions still get dismissed as utopian? Part of the answer lies in the aforementioned culture of violence – a kind of cognitive bias that conflates realism with cynicism. International relations scholar E.H. Carr once distinguished between utopians and realists in global politics; for decades, “realists” (who assume perpetual state conflict) dominated discourse, portraying anyone advocating for disarmament or global cooperation as foolishly idealistic. This mindset trickles down to the public: a citizen who suggests that nations could abolish war is likely to be met with skepticism or ridicule about human nature. Yet this cynicism is increasingly out of step with reality. In truth, some of the most practical advances in modern society have stemmed from cooperative movements – from the establishment of the United Nations and worldwide public health campaigns, to local community policing and restorative justice programs that break cycles of violence. Empirical trends also give hope: statistically, cross-border wars have declined dramatically since 1945, and overall global violence (including homicide and war deaths) has trended downward in recent decades. We may actually be living in one of the most peaceful eras in human history (relatively speaking), thanks in part to international norms and institutions that prioritize dialogue over force. To acknowledge this is not naive fantasy, but evidence-based optimism. Still, the old worldview dies hard. As Evans quipped from experience, any hint of optimism invites scorn in policy circles. The time has come to update our conception of “realism” to include the tangible power of cooperation and the waning tolerance for mass violence. A new realism for the 21st century would recognize that human security is better achieved through justice, development, and shared prosperity than through domination. And crucially, it would recognize that how we educate the next generation will determine whether we continue on a path of diminishing violence or relapse into old destructive patterns.

Education: From “Training to Obey” to “Training for Peace”

If war and cultural violence built the current world, then education is the arena where we must build a peaceful world. At present, however, most educational systems around the globe remain largely geared toward reproducing the status quo – including its injustices and violences – rather than transforming it. The structure of mass schooling that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries was designed, in many ways, to meet the needs of nation-states and industrial economies, not to cultivate peaceable humans. Schools taught literacy and technical skills, yes, but also instilled hierarchy, nationalism, and conformity. The typical school day, with its bells and rigid schedules, mirrored factory discipline (or military regimentation). The hidden curriculum often emphasized obedience to authority, competition for rewards, and acceptance of established narratives. Critical thinking – truly questioning dominant frameworks – was rarely encouraged beyond superficial exercises. As a result, generations have grown up proficient in taking orders and tests, yet deficient in skills of conflict resolution or ethical reasoning.

Consider how history and civics are taught. In many countries, these subjects focus on dates of battles, names of leaders, and patriotic lore. Students might learn what happened in past conflicts, but not engage in why violence occurred or how it could be avoided. Seldom are they asked to critically evaluate, say, the morality of colonial conquests or the human suffering of war, except perhaps in a token lesson on world peace near UN Day. Dr. Angela Bermúdez, who

studied history textbooks across various nations, found that violence is almost never made the explicit subject of critique; instead, it is narrated in a matter-of-fact way that normalizes it. Wars are presented as inevitable events, sometimes even as noble crucibles of the nation, rather than as catastrophes or failures of diplomacy. This pedagogical approach conditions young minds to see war as a normal tool of politics. Meanwhile, civics classes often train students in national pride and institutional respect (pledging allegiance, venerating founding fathers), but not in global citizenship or civil resistance. The idea of questioning unjust laws or transforming society through nonviolent activism is typically outside the curriculum.

Equally important is what schools do not teach. Most students graduate without ever taking a course in peace education, conflict mediation, or emotional resilience. They may learn geometry or grammar, but not how to communicate across cultural differences or de-escalate an argument. They learn to solve algebraic equations, but not to solve ethical dilemmas through dialogue. This omission is glaring when one considers that interpersonal violence (bullying, abuse) and intergroup violence (racism, xenophobia) remain pervasive issues. We leave young people ill-equipped to handle conflicts except through the binary of fight or flight. As the saying goes, if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail – and our education has not given us many tools beyond competitive “hammering.” Furthermore, the way success is defined in many educational systems – high grades, test scores, elite college admissions – reinforces individualism and rivalry. Students often internalize that their peers are competitors rather than collaborators. The pressure to succeed in cutthroat exams or college admissions can foster cheating, stress, and a win-at-all-costs mentality. In subtle ways, this too primes them for a world of zero-sum competition, not one of shared progress.

A critique of contemporary education by Andrew Lehti (2024) goes so far as to argue that the system “engineers compliance, conformity, and unwavering loyalty to authority” at the cost of critical thought. He describes a culture of “standardized obedience” in which students are conditioned through rigid structures and fear of failure to follow rules rather than question them. The consequence, Lehti warns, is a populace that may efficiently fit into existing social machines but lacks the innovative and moral capacity to challenge injustice. These are strong words, but they resonate with the experience of many educators and students who feel schooling is more about producing loyal subjects and workers than conscientious citizens. An obedient workforce and citizenry is easier to govern, yes – but it is also more susceptible to demagogues and less prepared to transform conflict nonviolently. The tragic irony is that while we train people to obey in hopes of social order, we fail to prevent the ultimate disorder of violence and war that arises from lack of critical, compassionate engagement. In other words, we drill obedience but neglect peace competence.

What would it mean to change this? It would mean reimagining both the content and purpose of education. Rather than socializing each generation into the norms of a violent world, education would aim to socialize into peace. This does not imply a sugar-coated curriculum that ignores harsh realities – quite the opposite. A peace-oriented education would squarely face the atrocities and injustices of history, but treat them as problems to be solved, not valorized inevitabilities. Students would study war and violence the way medical students study disease: as a pathology to understand and prevent. Crucially, they would also study past successes of peace

– the nonviolent movements, diplomatic breakthroughs, and traditions of compassion that are often sidelined in mainstream history. Just as importantly, the school environment itself would model principles of equity, respect, and dialogue so that students practice peace in daily life.

Training for Peace: Skills and Values for a Nonviolent Future

Training for peace does not mean instilling passivity or naïveté. It means equipping people with the intellectual and emotional tools to handle conflict, uncertainty, and diversity without turning to violence. In fact, cultivating a culture of peace requires active, courageous engagement – “fighters” for peace, in a sense, who are willing to challenge injustice and endure discomfort for the greater good. Key competencies and values that a peace-focused education would impart include:

- **Critical Consciousness:** This goes beyond generic critical thinking into the realm of questioning underlying frameworks of power and ideology. Students would be encouraged to ask hard questions: Who benefits from this policy or narrative? Whose voices are missing? Is there another way to understand this conflict? Rather than absorbing a single authoritative textbook, learners examine multiple perspectives, including those of marginalized groups. The goal is to inoculate them against propaganda and toxic memes. In practice, this could involve analyzing media for bias, debating ethical issues, and studying historical injustices and how they were challenged. By developing what Paulo Freire called “critical consciousness,” individuals gain the ability to recognize and resist narratives that legitimize violence or dehumanization. For example, a class might critically examine the doctrine of “might makes right,” juxtaposing it with philosophies of nonviolence from figures like Gandhi or Tolstoy, thereby validating skepticism toward glorified violence.
- **Empathy and Alliance-Building:** Peace is impossible without understanding others. Education must foster the ability to build alliances across differences – be they ethnic, religious, national, or even species differences. This involves empathy, communication skills, and a strong ethical foundation. Classroom activities could include intergroup dialogues, cultural exchanges, and collaborative projects that unite students from disparate backgrounds on common goals. Learning to negotiate and mediate should be as fundamental as learning to read and write. Imagine students participating in model parliaments or conflict-resolution simulations: they would practice listening to opposing viewpoints, finding common ground, and formulating win-win solutions. Research shows that cross-group friendships and cooperative contact reduce prejudice and dehumanization. Schools, therefore, should deliberately create conditions for such friendships – mixing different social groups, partnering with schools in other countries, or engaging with community groups. Alliance-building also means teamwork skills: knowing how to lead without dominating, and how to compromise without feeling defeated. A person trained in alliance-building does not see an “Other” to be feared or fought, but a potential partner with whom to tackle shared problems.

- **Emotional Resilience and Nonviolent Conflict Resolution:** A peaceful society is not one without conflicts, but one where conflicts are resolved without violence. Thus, teaching peaceful conflict resolution methods is essential. Students can learn techniques of active listening, anger management, and finding mutually acceptable solutions. Many schools are experimenting with restorative justice practices – when a misbehavior or clash occurs, the parties involved sit in a mediated circle to discuss what happened, who was harmed, and how to make amends. This builds an internalized understanding that problems can be worked through, not simply suppressed or fought over. Coupled with this, emotional resilience education (often part of social-emotional learning curricula) gives youth tools to cope with stress, provocation, and fear. A person who has learned to calm themselves, empathize with an opponent, and respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively is far less likely to resort to aggression. Emotional resilience training might involve mindfulness exercises, reflection journals, and lessons on the psychology of emotions – normalizing that feeling anger or fear is not a license to inflict harm. It also involves cultivating courage: the moral courage to speak out against wrongdoing and the psychological courage to endure frustration or insults without striking back. In essence, resilience and nonviolence skills together create a mindset that sees violence as a failure of imagination – the very last resort when all creative problem-solving truly fails.
- **Complexity Navigation:** The modern world is complex and rapidly changing. One driver of extremism and violence is the appeal of simplistic answers to complex problems (scapegoating a group, for instance, or embracing an authoritarian who promises order). Education for peace would place a premium on systems thinking and comfort with ambiguity. Students should learn to analyze issues in all their complexity – seeing how political, economic, environmental, and social factors interconnect – rather than falling for black-and-white narratives. This could be taught through interdisciplinary projects (for example, studying climate change from scientific, ethical, and geopolitical angles) so that learners appreciate nuance and multiple causation. By learning to hold paradoxes and see multiple sides of an issue, individuals become less prone to the polarizing us-versus-them thinking that leads to conflict. They also become more adaptable and creative, able to generate innovative solutions where a rigid mind sees none. Holding complexity also means recognizing that one can disagree with someone on some things and agree on others – thus avoiding totalistic rejection of those who are different. In short, it fosters tolerance and open-mindedness, key ingredients for peace.
- **Global and Interspecies Compassion:** Finally, “training for peace” must expand the circle of moral concern to all life. The instruction to “lean into justice and injustice for all species,” as the prompt suggests, is both ethical and practical. Human violence towards the environment and non-human animals – whether through destructive industries, factory farming, or habitat destruction – is part of the same domination paradigm that fuels violence among humans. An education for peace and sustainability would teach respect for all living beings and highlight our interdependence with nature. This aligns with the principles of humane education, which draws connections between human rights, animal protection, and environmental stewardship. By learning that compassion is

not a finite resource and that empathy can extend to animals and the planet, students cultivate a mindset of guardianship rather than exploitation. For example, a curriculum might include lessons on how consumer choices affect factory-farmed animals or distant ecosystems, or involve students in projects to protect local biodiversity. When learners see non-human life as worthy of care, they reinforce the fundamental value of nonviolence. As the Institute for Humane Education puts it, this approach prepares people to identify unjust or inhumane systems and to devise solutions that allow people, animals, and nature to thrive together. In practice, this could manifest as school initiatives for animal welfare, gardening and permaculture programs that teach cooperative relationship with nature, and ethical discussions on how we treat creatures that cannot speak for themselves. By enlarging empathy to all species, we erode the very roots of violence which often lie in drawing a hard line between “worthy life” and “unworthy life.”

These are ambitious goals, but they are already being tried in various forms around the world. Montessori schools, for instance, explicitly incorporate peace education and conflict resolution from early childhood – Maria Montessori herself believed that “establishing lasting peace is the work of education”, urging that schools must foster global citizenship and respect for all life. In Montessori classrooms, differences are respected, and even very young children learn to resolve disagreements by talking through their feelings with guidance, rather than through punishment or retaliation. Similar ethos can be found in programs inspired by John Dewey’s progressive education (which emphasizes democratic community in schools) and in modern peace education initiatives supported by UNESCO and others. These programs use methods like cooperative learning (students working in mixed-ability teams where they succeed only by helping each other), dialogue circles, peer mediation training, and community service learning. They treat the classroom as a microcosm of society, where the norms of a peaceful world can be rehearsed and ingrained. Students educated in this way not only learn about peace, they live it daily – making it far more likely they carry those values into adulthood.

Is This Utopian? Or Simply Necessary?

Skeptics might dismiss the vision of “training for peace” as utopian dreaming. After all, can schools alone overturn millennia of violent norms? Is it realistic to expect that a new curriculum could counteract the harsher lessons kids learn from the news, video games, or even their own traumatic experiences in unstable regions? These are fair questions. Education is not a silver bullet, and transforming education is itself a monumental task. However, consider the alternative: If we do not educate people in how to live peacefully with uncertainty, conflict, and diversity, then violence will indeed remain the default setting of our societies. We will continue to witness nations drifting into war out of nationalist fervor or fear of the Other; communities tearing themselves apart along ethnic or sectarian lines; and humans plundering the natural world and abusing fellow creatures, to the detriment of all. The status quo may feel “realistic” to its defenders, but it is nothing short of catastrophic in the long term – with nuclear weapons, climate change, and deep social divisions, humanity simply cannot afford for violence to be our

go-to strategy in the 21st century. So perhaps the true naiveté is to believe we can survive without radical changes in how we think and educate.

Moreover, the idea of large-scale peace education is not without precedent or evidence. International bodies like UNESCO have long advocated that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defenses of peace must be constructed.” Peace education programs implemented in various conflict zones have shown positive outcomes: in regions of Africa and Asia, for example, integrating peace and values education in schools has correlated with reduced youth involvement in violence and greater community cohesion (as documented in UNICEF and UNESCO reports). In Northern Ireland, integrated schools for Catholic and Protestant children were anecdotally credited with easing sectarian tension over a generation. No one claims these efforts single-handedly resolved conflicts – but they helped create citizens more inclined to reconciliation than revenge. At a global scale, we have seen a dramatic reduction in interstate wars since mid-20th century. Part of that success owes to deliberate education and exchanges (like student exchange programs, peace scholarships, cross-cultural dialogues) that built constituencies for peace across national lines.

It is also worth noting that values can shift dramatically when new generations receive different educations. Consider attitudes toward slavery, which was once a near-universal institution; today, thanks to moral education and norms change, it is almost universally condemned. Or take dueling – once an acceptable way for gentlemen to resolve disputes with pistols or swords, now seen as barbaric. These shifts happened because society decided to teach the next generation differently, emphasizing the inhumanity or irrationality of those practices. Why should war and systemic violence be any different? They are not laws of nature but human choices maintained by culture. If those choices can be framed as unacceptable and unnecessary by future citizens, they will become relics of a less civilized time. What seems idealistic now can become “common sense” later, if we manage to instill new norms. Imagine a future where the notion of settling international disputes by mass killing is viewed with the same horror and incredulity as we now view the medieval practice of trial by combat.

None of this implies that a peace-oriented education leads to a world without any conflict or that human beings will miraculously lose all aggressive impulses. Rather, it aims for a world where conflicts are addressed within frameworks of justice and empathy – where violence is a rare last resort, not a first instinct or a glorified tradition. It also aims for a world where structural violence (oppression, inequality) is systematically reduced, because people educated for peace will recognize that true peace is not merely the absence of war (negative peace) but the presence of justice and well-being (positive peace). They will be less likely to acquiesce to systems that perpetuate poverty, racism, or environmental devastation, understanding these as forms of violence by other names.

Ultimately, training for peace is not just a lofty ideal; it is a practical necessity for human survival and flourishing. We have reached a point in history where the destructive power of our technologies and the fragility of our planetary ecosystem make aggression an existential threat. As Albert Einstein reputedly said, “the splitting of the atom has changed everything bar our way

of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.” Changing our way of thinking – through education – is therefore not a luxury but an imperative.

Conclusion: Education as the Catalyst for a Culture of Peace

In essence, the world does not need more obedience to the old violent order. It needs more courage, more imagination, and more skill in navigating the messy plurality of human life without recourse to domination. Education is where that transformation must begin. By reforming what and how we teach, we can rewrite the script that has for too long told us that selfishness and violence are the drivers of history. We can choose to teach a new story – one in which cooperation and compassion are not the exceptions, but the expected norms. This is not a quick fix; it is the work of generations. But it offers hope for a more just and peaceful world than the one we inherited.

A Chinese proverb says, “If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want one-hundred years of prosperity, educate children.” We might add: If you want a future without war and wanton cruelty, educate children for peace. Each child who learns to resolve anger with words instead of fists, each teenager who learns to question propaganda and empathize with foreigners, each graduate who values the well-being of other people and species alongside their own – each of these is an agent of a profound cultural shift. Over time, they become the critical mass that can move institutions and nations away from violence. In the words of Dr. Maria Montessori, a pioneer of peace education who witnessed the horrors of two World Wars, “Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war.” Politics and treaties may halt guns temporarily, but only education can prevent the mindset that leads to guns in the first place.

It is fitting, then, to end on a call to action that echoes the title of this discussion: let us commit to Training for Peace. This means rethinking every level of education – from early childhood through university and community learning – to emphasize our shared humanity, our shared biosphere, and the shared values of dignity and nonviolence. It means empowering teachers with the training and resources to teach peace, and adjusting metrics of success to value emotional intelligence and ethical reasoning as much as math or reading. It also means each of us, as lifelong learners, taking responsibility to unlearn our own ingrained violence and practice compassion daily. The bridge from a violent past to a peaceful future is built in classrooms, libraries, and hearts. By crossing that bridge – by educating a generation beyond the selfish gene, beyond the glorification of war – we honor the survivors of past traumas and give hope to all species that our intellect and spirit can triumph over our fears.

The task is immense, but the vision is clear: a world trained for peace and love, rather than war and domination. The choice lies with us – in what we teach and what we normalize to the children watching our example today. The consequences will reverberate for centuries to come. Let us begin this urgent work, for there is no time to waste and no objective more worthy.

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