

Peace Education in Action “Peace in Your Hands”
has given me back
my passion for teaching!

Condensed version practical study
‘Peace in your hands’.
Peace starts with you and you pass it on.’



Executed by Anke van Keulen, Bureau MUTANT, 2017

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peace
education
in Action

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

“Peace in your hands’ has given me back the passion I felt when I first decided to become a primary school teacher!’ (Inge)

‘Peace in your hands. Peace starts with you and you pass it on’ is an educational programme for children in primary education, with special attention for children in stressful situations. The programme, developed and published by the World Peace Flame (WPF) Foundation, is based on the vision that peace can be achieved especially by seeing and stimulating the positive and good within you and in others. Working for peace is not only beneficial for the individual’s mental health, it is also beneficial for society as a whole. It is about the connection between political peace and inner peace.

‘Peace in your hands’ has been put together so that the various parts can be used separately or as a full lesson series. There are suggestions for lessons and assignments that children can do individually or in groups. There are three parts:

- Peace in the world (world peacemakers such as Ghandi and Mandela)
- Peace near home (in the classroom, in the neighbourhood)
- Peace within yourself

There is a wide range of activities in the areas of creativity, cooperation, movement and breathing.

To get a clear view of the progress achieved by working with ‘Peace in your hands’, the WPF Foundation has asked Bureau MUTANT to carry out practical research that provides an answer to the following questions:

- How does peace education fit in with mainstream education?
- Which interventions and activities do teachers use to promote peace in the groups and in the school? And how do they use the ‘Peace in your hands’ materials to achieve these aims?
- What do teachers think works well when they use the ‘Peace in your hands’ lesson package?
- What reactions do they observe in the children in their groups? What do the children notice?
- Does ‘Peace in your hands’ align with mainstream education? If so, how? If not, which changes would be advisable?
- How do the implementation and embedding of ‘Peace in your hands’ take place?

To answer these questions, literature review has been carried out in combination with interviews with teachers working with the lesson package. The WPF Foundation aims to use the results of the research to support teachers and to further implement the lesson package.

“We hold weekly meetings at school in which we talk about what the children experience in relation to current events. So the terror attacks in Brussels, the peace marches and the arrival of refugees are all included. ‘Peace in your hands’ encourages children to form their own opinion and to do something themselves! (Evelien)



PEACE EDUCATION AND ‘PEACE IN YOUR HANDS’ – THEORY

“Peace doesn’t just drop out of the blue. Peace is a way of life, focusing on a culture of non-violence and safety (United Nations)

The definition used by the United Nations for peace education is copied in this study: peace education aims to teach young people that peace does not come automatically, but requires active investment to achieve and maintain it. Peace doesn’t happen by itself – it has to be worked on. Peace is more than simply the absence of war: it focuses on a culture of non violence and safety. “*Peace is not self-evident. We need continual peace research and peace education, over and over again.*” If peace is a culture of non-violence and safety, then it is important to create that culture, to promote it and to maintain it. For upbringing and education, this means that children need to acquire an attitude that is non-violent and focused on safety.

PEACE EDUCATION AND ‘PEACE IN YOUR HANDS’ IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

How does peace education fit in with mainstream education? The term ‘peace’ does not occur in the primary education curriculum targets in the Netherlands. In upbringing and education, there is a strong focus on physical health (sports, food). So why is there no attention for improving our mental health? Durable external peace is impossible without people cultivating their own inner peace.

The primary target nearest to the objectives of peace education is: *Orientation towards yourself and the world*. This means focusing on themes such as learning to get on with yourself and others, to solve problems and give meaning to life.

‘Peace in your hands’ enhances what the school does already, and aligns with various primary education headline targets. It is not a new programme but supports teachers in their existing activities.

‘Peace in your hands’ contributes to the following curriculum targets:

'Peace in your hands' and social-emotional competences

Many peace education programmes focus on promoting social-emotional competences. This results in more cooperation in the classroom, more meetings and friendships and more understanding of each other. 'Peace in your hands' contains a range of activities to promote social-emotional competences – for example various breathing and movement exercises that contribute to children's emotional balance and concentration, giving each other compliments and making digital self-portraits. Transforming negative emotions is an important part of this process, for example by creating an image of a sad person and then transforming it into a happy and powerful person. The bangle experiment also helps to transform negative thoughts.

'Peace in your hands' and a safe school environment

"Children are so enthusiastic, they ask me 'Miss, when are we going to do the secret friend again?'" (Mira

Peace education programmes focusing on a safe school environment are also effective in preventing bullying. 'Peace in your hands' contains various activities aimed at making friends, together with the required skills such as empathy, standing up for yourself and others, positive thinking and thinking in terms of solutions.

'Peace in your hands' gives suggestions for activities encouraging balance and concentration for the individual child as well as for the whole group. 'Peace in your hands' also contains suggestions on how to learn to think positively about yourself and others, and how to act accordingly. In the assignments the children look for similarities between people, and they are invited to look for solutions to problems. Keeping a peace classroom book promotes solidarity within the group. Celebrating the Festivals of Light (in different religions) also connects with the culture at home

Peace in your hands' and democratic civic education

Civic education and peace education have a lot in common, and can even run into each other. In 'Peace in your hands', various activities in the classroom and in the neighbourhood are aimed at cooperation, doing things for others, taking the initiative, fighting prejudices and bullying, and caring for the world. Examples of activities in 'Peace in your hands' are learning from world peacemakers such as Gandhi and Mandela, peacemakers in your own neighbourhood (do you know them?), what you can do yourself (to reduce feelings of powerlessness and increase feelings of hope), making a 'good news' newspaper, and what ideas do you have to make the school safer and more peaceful?

'Peace in your hands' and moral development (religion, world view)

Peace education clearly has a moral component, with the objective of developing moral awareness and children's moral attitude fostering on peaceful coexistence. Moral education also has a clear link with philosophical education. 'Peace in your hands' repeatedly goes into moral questions such as poverty and wealth, empathy, unselfishness and a caring attitude towards others. The activities include what does peace mean to you?, what can you do or not do (eating fewer sweets, giving away something), what is your dream?, and celebrating Festivals of Light in various religions.

'Peace in your hands' and children in stressful situations and refugee children

"The materials and exercises are ideal for making children aware of their position in the world, in relation to issues like poverty and wealth, refugees..." (Patrick)

Teachers can make an important contribution to children who have been through a lot. They can also ensure that children get on with each other peacefully. Do all the children feel welcome and part of the group? A safe and peaceful classroom environment will help with that. Are mutual differences and families accepted and respected? How do you deal with 'being different together', prejudice and bullying? In 'Peace in your hands', these themes are addressed by drawing yourself and others, songs and books about 'being different together', making a family wall, relaxation and games in the classroom.

When it comes to children who have been through a lot, teachers are often affected emotionally themselves. 'Peace in your hands' also includes relaxation exercises to help teachers deal (professionally) with these effects.

'Peace in your hands' and societal themes

"We hold weekly meetings at school in which we talk about what the children experience in relation to current events. So the terror attacks in Brussels, the peace marches and the arrival of refugees are all included. 'Peace in your hands' encourages children to form their own opinion and to do something themselves!" (Evelien)

Children bring subjects into the classroom which they have heard about and seen at home, on the street and in the media. This requires effort and expertise from the teacher to discuss reactions and emotions with the children, and to help them deal with them. 'Peace in your hands' gives suggestions for exercises, such as the world's peacemakers, what is enough and what do you have too much of, and what things should you do or not do? There are also stories that help to develop positive characteristics in children, such as the ability to cooperate, to look after each other, to build self-confidence and to help others.

"The children enjoy sharing their views, they find it important that everyone has the same rights and receives the same treatment, and they promote these views. Exchanging films with the school in Damascus has made them realise how different the situation is for children in Syria, and how different their life is. It has given our children a wider view on life – they learn to respect others and they also learn to form their own opinions." (Evelien)



EXPERIENCES WITH 'PEACE IN YOUR HANDS' – PRACTICE

What do teachers find important in peace education and in 'Peace in your hands'? Finding rest and peace within yourself, finding understanding for each other, and developing awareness of international and social themes. Teachers working with refugee children indicate that 'Peace in your hands' is definitely suitable for this group of children

Today, children need time to experience peace within themselves, to rest and to get back in touch with themselves. Children's attention easily weakens; together with them I'm going to look for silence, practicing quiet breathing. (Mira)

'Peace in your hands' has been put together in such a way that the various parts can be used separately or as a full lesson series; there are suggestions for lessons and assignments that children can do individually or in groups.

The lesson package aligns perfectly with curriculum targets, even more so with civic education. (Evelien)

We make a link with learning objectives on safety. (Patrick)

In Flanders, teachers have formulated learning objectives as part of catholic religious education. Teachers are free to choose how they use the lesson package, it is an open package from which just parts can be used. 'Peace in your hands' is not meant to be a new or extra subject.

With this material, you can find your own balance, you can pick your own tools, it can be used freely and is not a tight and detailed programme. (Patrick)

I have made worksheets to go with the world peace makers myself, children look things up via Wikipedia and report in the classroom on what they have found. We also watch films on school TV. (Mira)

What teachers find important in the didactical approach is: listening to children and taking their ideas seriously, starting from within their own inner circle, building in moments for reflection and rest, discussion on 'what can you do', discussing social themes.

The most important is that you listen to children, they have their ideas about peace and on how they want to create a peaceful world. (Evelien)

The teachers find the various parts of 'Peace in your hands' very useful and usable, some teachers have adapted the material a bit or made extra material.

At which moment in time do the teachers use the material? Some teachers build in a 'Peace in your hands' moment every week or every day, others use special moments such as advent or

the Remembrance period for World War II.

The teachers say that the children react enthusiastically and positively – they are interested and talk about it at home. They ask the teacher for more or repeated activities

The children are very enthusiastic. They talk about it together and also at home with their parents. As a result, we also talk about 'Peace in your hands' at parent-teacher meetings.
(Monique)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this practical research, the following recommendations are made:

- When working with or communicating about 'Peace in your hands', it is recommended to mention explicitly the related educational curriculum targets: social-emotional competences, a safe school environment, democratic civic education, moral development, children in stressful situations, refugee children and social themes in the classroom. This will help teachers to realise that the programme is not something new or extra, but rather should be regarded as complementary and providing enhanced depth.
- Regional 'Peace in your hands' or World Peace Flame workgroups could support schools with guest lessons, workshops or events involving more schools. This would relieve teachers, who are often already under pressure, and at the same time could provide them with new lesson suggestions. One example is the World Peace Flame Twente workgroup. <http://www.wereldvredesvlamtwent.nl>
- In reception classes for refugee children and children of asylum seekers, a short daily moment of focus on 'Peace in your hands' has a positive effect: it reinforces the children's sense of safety and well-being, and also helps to create a positive learning climate in the classroom.
- In primary schools with a busy schedule, 'Peace in your hands' works best in special project weeks, for example around the annual Peace Week in September, during advent and in the WW II Remembrance period.



IN BRIEF 'PEACE IN YOUR HANDS':

- Ties in with key educational areas such as social-emotional competences, a safe school environment, democratic civic education, moral development, children in stressful situations, refugee children and social themes in the classroom.
- Reinforces and deepens what the school is already doing.
- Supports teachers as children themselves become active in spreading the peace message.
- Supports teachers by promoting peace and quiet in the classroom and within each child.

... for people with a heart for education!

COLOFON

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Bureau MUTANT specialises in research, developing methods and training in the areas of early childhood education and healthcare.

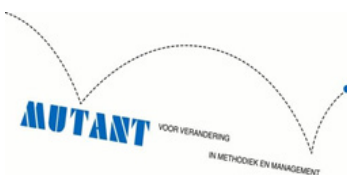
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