

HOW TO RUN A PEACE STUDIES DAY



MARTIN LUTHER KING



COMMITTEE

About this document

This document was produced by schoolteachers and academics for the Martin Luther King Peace Committee, and is based on academic research into peace days run at Benfield School, Newcastle, and Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire (see back page for more information). Interviews were taken with teaching staff and visiting workshop facilitators, and the views of students were elicited through focus groups and surveys.

Rev. Dr. King came to Tyneside in 1967 to receive an honorary degree from Newcastle University; the only UK university to so honour him during his lifetime. The Martin Luther King Peace Committee commemorates his visit and exists to 'build cultures of peace' by drawing on his ideas and example.



What is a peace day?

A peace day is an off-timetable day set aside to explore meanings and practices of peace with external partners and outside speakers – such as peace activists from charities and universities – over a variety of formats including workshops, plenaries and Q&A sessions. A peace day works best with students in Year 11 or above.

"The topic, peace, I thought you could only talk about it in one way, but there are different ways of talking about it."

Year 10 female student from Benfield School, Newcastle.

Why is studying peace important?

In a world that continues to be characterized by multiple forms of violence, from full-scale wars to discrimination against refugees, schooling should include means of challenging narratives and logics of violence and inviting young people to think creatively about non-violent solutions to their own and humanity's problems.

"There's always a reason for war, we just found out why you shouldn't do it, rather than why you should."

Year 10 male student from Benfield

"It's an amazing experience for our students."

Teacher, Benfield School, Newcastle.

Why is studying peace hard?

There are two obstacles to studying peace in the current UK school system.

1. Timetable pressure

Since the 1980s, schools have been subject to significant auditing, inspection and performance management by targets. The production of data streams to satisfy these rituals of verification reduces staff availability. Because performing well in key auditing exercises is a top priority for a school, it has an enormous influence on how decisions about timetabling are made. Therefore any decision about whether a school can undertake such a time and resource-demanding activity as a peace day has to be justified within this logic.

2. The politics of militarism

In the 1980s peace studies teaching was widespread in UK schools under the rubric of 'World Studies.' This was criticised by conservative thinkers as pro-Soviet propaganda and a distraction from basic skills and knowledge, and expunged from the curriculum by the 1988 National Curriculum.

What do we mean by peace?

Everyone is 'for peace', and every war is fought 'for peace'. However, peace studies forces us to ask, 'What do we mean by peace?' Civil rights leader and Pastor Rev. Martin Luther King famously contrasted 'negative peace' with 'positive peace'. Negative peace is the absence of violent conflict, which could be brought about by repression, fear, and keeping communities separate. Positive peace is marked by the absence of the conditions of violence and by the presence of justice, love, and brother- and sisterhood. Peace studies emphasise positive peace.

What do we mean by peace education?

Peace education is characterised by an emphasis on 'positive peace' (see orange box on page 4). It explores a wide variety of themes: justice; difference; nonviolence; war and its consequences and prevention; global interconnectedness and responsibility; hospitality; multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity; gender; democracy; human rights and tolerance; development; environment; citizenship; and futurity. Peace education recognises that 'peace' depends upon multiple interrelated issues, and grapples with how to convey these multiple interdependencies in education. A multi-theme peace day is therefore ideally suited to this.

It is not only what is taught, but also how it is taught, that matters. Many peace educators argue that hierarchical structures which produce violence in society are replicated in traditional transmission-reception models of teaching. If this is the case, they contend, peace education should be a democratic process of questioning and challenging authority. The peace day's more informal approach to a variety of interactive workshop-style sessions, ideally chosen by students, where ideas can be explored and the opinions of the teachers challenged is thus an eminently suitable method.

"It was good that they welcomed you to ask questions. While they were speaking you could put your hand up and ask a question. You could argue with them and give your own opinion. You don't get to do that in school so much."

Year 10 female student from Benfield School, Newcastle.

"It was different... They didn't treat you like a kid, they were just open and honest about everything they were talking about."

Year 10 male student from Benfield School, Newcastle.

What does a peace day look like?

Peace days are a combination of plenaries and workshops delivered by teaching staff and visiting speakers. The two peace days we use as empirical examples to reflect the wider issue of peace education proceed as follows...

A plenary sets the theme of the day. The Benfield day used video clips of young people involved in non-violent protests against racial segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963, and the Comberton day used a clip from the 1983 film *Gandhi* showing non-violent protestors against British rule in India. Questions such as 'Can young people change society?' or 'Can non-violent activism transform the world?' are posed to the students. Following this plenary, students circulate between small-group (class size) sessions run by visiting speakers. Activities include, depending on age groups, thematic workshops, interactive activities, songs, and crafts (e.g. making 'peace badges'). The table opposite lists titles of workshops run in recent years at the two schools.

At the end of the day, a plenary Q&A session is run, either involving a single or a panel of workshop facilitators. Questions can be sought cold, or generated on post-it notes by class teachers in smaller reflective groups just beforehand.



COMBERTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Media Representations Of Muslims And
Arabs

Peace And Art

Non-Violent Communication

Peace In Israel/Palestine

Conflict And Violence

Music And Peace

Seeds Of Hope: Disarming a Hawk jet

Peace And Reconciliation

Conflict Resolution

Film and peace

Disarmament For Development

BENFIELD, NEWCASTLE

Is Martin Luther King Still Relevant
Today?

Nuclear Weapons And The Bomb Factor

Religious Symbols And Peace In Sri
Lanka

The Military And Young People

Cultural Differences: Positive Or
Negative?

Seeking Sanctuary In Britain

Understanding Everyday Differences
And Boundaries

The Value Of Disobedience

The December 1914 Christmas Truces

Handling Conflict

Conflict Resolution

Sport and Peace

Military Spending And Development

Spectrum Exercise: Understandings Of
Violence/ Non-Violence

Veterans For Peace – The UK Military
And Iraq



Where to hold the day

A peace day will usually be hosted by the school, but it can also be held in the partner's venue, such as a university.

How to initiate a peace day

If you are a teacher, find a local partner with good relevant connections: a parent in the peace movement, a suitable university academic, or a peace group. This needs to be someone able to invite appropriate speakers, ideally with existing relevant networks.

If you are a peace group, parent, or academic: approach a school with the offer of a collaborative programme.

Peace days take a lot of time and energy to organise; both sides need to be serious about the commitment involved and be willing to develop trust and invest in key relationships. Money will also be needed for travel expenses. However, if run successfully, it's very rewarding!

How to make space in the curriculum

Given the pressures identified above, how can schools find space for peace days? Teachers are adept at carving out spaces to teach peace creatively. For example:

- 1. Off-timetable scheduling.** A traditional model, a staple of the sciences for field trips outside the school, or an annual 'theme week' within it.
- 2. Citizenship studies.** The 2002 Education Act mandated the teaching of citizenship under 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural values' (SMSC). This followed the commissioning of a report on citizenship teaching in 1998, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Amongst the knowledge targets identified, the document stipulated that schoolchildren should be able to "understand the world as a global community, including issues such as sustainable development, economic interdependence, heavily indebted countries, and the work of United Nations organisations and major non-governmental organisations; understand the meaning of terms such as stewardship, interdependence, ethical trading, peace-making and peacekeeping."
- 3. A third space for peace education is 'Personal, Social, Health and Economic' lessons (PSHE).** The teaching of PSHE is mandatory for all English schools. However, as its content is not prescribed by the National Curriculum, PSHE provides a potential space for schools to incorporate peace education into their curricular.
- 4. Specific educational support.** Many universities run 'partners' programmes – a scheme whereby a university works with a local school in order to encourage and support students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds to apply to university. If a school works with an academic 'partner' to hold the peace day at a university, schools can present the day as an opportunity for their students to experience university life and teaching and thereby raise their aspirations.

Importance of local place

Peace days will differ based on local contexts, which can be used to justify, frame and develop the peace days. For example, Benfield School developed a peace day with Newcastle University framed around the historic visit of Martin Luther King Jr to Newcastle University. Comberton Village College worked with an active and well-connected local peace group, one of whose members was the mother of a child in the school. Does your community have any current or historic specific links to an important peacemaker or relevant episode? This can enhance learning as part of an area-based curriculum.



Checklist – what do you need?

- Committed teacher ✓
- Committed external key partner (parent, peace group, university) ✓
- High-trust relationship between school and key partner ✓
- Invitation to a range of external speakers bringing a variety of topics and delivery methods ✓
- Collaborative generation of structure of peace day ✓
- A way to justify inclusion of peace day in the pressured curriculum ✓
- Critical co-reflection/debrief on peace day to develop future iterations ✓

Challenges

Our research identified three challenges to running peace days, as well as how these might be tackled:

1. As a one-off event, peace days are not necessarily well incorporated into the ongoing education of students and the curriculum. Both peace days studied here offer some indications of how longer-term engagement could be reached and what it would look like.

- In the run up to the Comberton day, a local peace activist visited the school on a number of occasions and worked with music students on a concert of peace which concluded the peace day.
- In Benfield, a session on religious symbols and the Sri Lankan civil war was designed closely in connection the ongoing religious education curriculum.
- Additional visiting speakers can be invited during course of the year, for example, to deliver assemblies, reinforcing the theme of the peace days.

2. For academic speakers, it can be a struggle to bridge the gap from Higher to Secondary education.

- Provide school-led training and reflection for academic staff before and after the peace days.

3. For peace activists, there was a tendency to use similar participatory methods of delivery, such as break-out groups or opinion lines. These can become repetitive for students.

- Peace day organisers could coordinate with speakers to ensure a range of methods are used.



Conclusion

Peace days demand a strong and sustained set of relationships amongst and between activists and school teachers, commitment over time, and resources. There is no simple blueprint; rather, peace days must be negotiated in unique ways within local contexts. Nonetheless, they are productive and exciting ways to ensure stimulating peace education.

"It is a fabulous opportunity and I feel sorry that other schools aren't involved."

Teachers from Benfield School, Newcastle



Resources

The following groups offer resources to help run peace days:

Peace Education Network: www.peace-education.org.uk/

Martin Luther King Peace Committee: www.mlkpc.org

These groups may be able to offer speakers:

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: www.cnduk.org/

Pax Christi: www.paxchristi.org.uk/

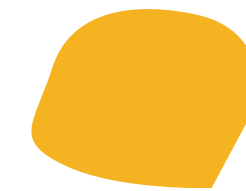
Veterans for Peace: www.veteransforpeace.org/

Forces Watch: www.forceswatch.net/

For other groups, including regional-based organisations, see www.peace-education.org.uk/

For the fuller analysis on which this brochure is based, see "Hartmut Behr, Nick Megoran, and Jane Carnaffan. "Peace Education, Militarism and Neo-Liberalism: Conceptual Reflections with Empirical Findings from the UK." *Journal of Peace Education* (2017).

If you have used this resource to help you run a peace day, we'd love to hear about it! Please let us know at mlkpc@ncl.ac.uk



Credits

This resource was created by the Martin Luther King Peace Committee, Newcastle. It was authored by Nick Megoran, Jane Carnaffan, and Hartmut Behr (Newcastle University) and Janice Wanley and Karen Hall (Benfield School). It is based on 36 interviews with teachers, school managers, academics, and peace activists, as well as through focus groups and feedback from student participants. We are particularly grateful to the staff of Benfield and Comberton schools. This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, Impact Acceleration Account (Grant Ref: ES/M500513/1, Newcastle University).





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