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Studies

# Creating a Culture of Peace through Basic Education



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## Abstract

While creating a culture of peace is often associated with peacebuilding processes after violent conflict, this study argues that the responsibility for attaining global peace lies with everyone, not just countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. Broadening the scope of previous research, it explores the role of basic education in maintaining a culture of peace in countries considered essentially peaceful. Specifically, this study analyses how the values and principles of peace education are applied in the Finnish education system to promote a culture of peace, based on interviews with basic education teachers. The interviews reveal that teachers believe they play a significant role in fostering a culture of peace, even if done unintentionally, and emphasize the individual's role in creating a more peaceful school environment through identified themes. The theoretical framework used in this study revealed both its alignment with educational practices and the challenges that hinder such initiatives, such as a lack of empathy and individualism among students. The findings open a discussion on the importance of actively maintaining a culture of peace, even in societies not engaged in or emerging from violent social conflict.

## Key words

Peace education, Culture of peace, Finland, Basic education, Teacher's perspectives, Thematic analysis



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## List of Abbreviations

**GPI** = Global Peace Index

**HDI** = Human Development Index

**NGO** = Non-Governmental Organization

**SDG** = Sustainable Development Goals

**SEL** = Social and Emotional Learning

**UN** = United Nations

**UNESCO** = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNICEF** = United Nations Children's Fund

**WHO** = World Health Organization



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and research problem

Peace is a concept that defies a single, universal definition. It is shaped by cultural, social, and political contexts and is interpreted in diverse ways by societies, communities, and individuals, each influenced by unique experiences and values. This complexity reveals that peace is not simply an abstract ideal but a multifaceted reality that requires active nurturing. Since no society is inherently peaceful, maintaining global peace is a shared responsibility that extends beyond nations in conflict or post-conflict situations. Traditionally, peace education has been studied in the context of conflict-affected regions, where its role in fostering reconciliation and stability is widely acknowledged. However, its relevance in societies perceived as peaceful remains largely overlooked, reflecting an implicit assumption that such initiatives are unnecessary. Given that peace is not a fixed state but a dynamic process that evolves over time, space, and society (Webel and Galtung, 2010), peace education must be considered a universal endeavour, applicable to all societies.

At the core of this study lies the complexity of peace, examined through education for a culture of peace beyond conflict-affected areas, with a focus on Finland—a society often regarded as peaceful (Vision of Humanity, 2024). Despite high standards of living, as indicated by an HDI of 0.941 (Herre & Arriagada, 2023) and a GPI score of 1.47 (Vision of Humanity, 2024), Finland faces significant societal challenges, including rising racism, inequality, and gender-based violence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023; NYTKIS, 2024). In fact, Finland reports some of the highest levels of racism in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023) and troubling attitudes toward gender-based violence, with a notable proportion of young men justifying violence against women based on appearance, behaviour, or attire (NYTKIS, 2024) with recent government policies that

have further exacerbated inequality (Pekkonen, 2024; Ryökäs, 2024; Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö, 2024). Moreover, the rising global tensions and the fragility of peace worldwide underscore the need for proactive peacebuilding efforts. Given these challenges, the role of education in fostering inclusivity, equity, and non-violence becomes increasingly significant. These issues call for an examination of how education can proactively and pre-emptively promote peace, making Finland a compelling case study.

This research investigates whether Finland's education system actively contributes to fostering a culture of peace or if it overlooks underlying challenges. Despite being situated in a peaceful society, it remains unclear whether the system effectively promotes peaceful coexistence through education, particularly because peace education is often associated with conflict-affected regions—leaving its relevance in stable societies like Finland underexplored. This study seeks to understand what education for a culture of peace looks like in such contexts and whether it can be more systematically integrated, challenging the implicit assumption that peace education is unnecessary in peaceful societies.

To achieve this, the study analyses Finland's curriculum, teaching practices, and educators' perspectives, exploring how peace-oriented principles are implemented and if they are a distinct part of the national curriculum. It seeks to determine whether, why, and how peace education can be more systematically embedded into Finnish schools. By broadening the scope of peace education research beyond conflict-affected areas, this study challenges conventional assumptions and highlights its role in building resilient, inclusive societies. In doing so, it underscores the universal relevance of peace education, demonstrating how it fosters resilience and nurtures an intergenerational commitment to a culture of peace, ensuring its sustainability for the future.

## 1.2 Relevance

In today's world of rising global tensions, the role of education fostering peace is more critical than ever. Learning should be transformative, equipping learners with the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and behaviours needed to actively promote peace within their communities (UNESCO, 2023). While peace education has traditionally been studied in conflict-affected regions, its necessity in stable societies remains largely overlooked. However, the absence of direct conflict does not equate to the presence of sustainable peace. Societies across the world, including those considered peaceful, face challenges such as social divisions, discrimination, and political fragmentation, all of which threaten long-term stability. Addressing these issues requires a renewed focus on peace education as a proactive tool for cultivating dialogue, critical thinking, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2024). This study contributes to that discussion by examining how basic education can foster a culture of peace even in societies that are not currently experiencing war or violent conflict. While Finland serves as the primary case study, the findings offer broader insights into the role of education in building resilient and inclusive societies worldwide.

Building on this perspective, this study examines the role of basic education in fostering a culture of peace in Finland, exploring the values and practices that contribute to this process. Peace education research has traditionally centred on conflict-affected regions, leaving a gap in understanding how education can nurture peace in societies that are generally perceived as stable. By analysing how peace-oriented principles are embedded within Finland's educational system and investigating teachers' perspectives on their role in promoting peace, this study provides insight into the broader societal impact of education in sustaining peaceful coexistence.

The relevance of this research is multi-dimensional. First, it provides a background analysis of how the culture of peace is reflected in the Finnish basic education curriculum, identifying its core components and objectives.

By understanding how teachers perceive their role in promoting peace, the study highlights their perspectives on the importance of education in fostering a more peaceful society. In this context, the study links educational practices to societal outcomes, illustrating the potential of education to address both local and global challenges.

Additionally, the research critically assesses the practical challenges involved in implementing peace education in Finland. Educators' perspectives reveal the specific issues faced by children and young people, which may not always be adequately addressed in the current educational framework. By identifying these challenges, the study provides insights into how peace education can be adapted to meet the needs of Finnish society. This research aims to inform the development of contextually relevant educational frameworks that resonate with both educators and society at large.

The study also contributes to the field of peace education by highlighting the application of the UNESCO peace education model in societies that are deemed peaceful to bridge theory and practice, guiding future efforts in embedding peace education into Finnish schools to promote justice, tolerance, and empathy.

On a policy level, this study aims to influence the current education discourse in Finland, particularly given recent reductions in funding for peace education initiatives by NGOs. By presenting educators' insights, the research advocates for the continuation or expansion of education towards a culture of peace, emphasizing its importance for fostering peaceful coexistence.

### 1.3 Research objective and questions

This study explores the elements of Finnish basic education that contribute to a culture of peace, examining both the curriculum and insights from interviews with Finnish teachers. Through this analysis, it aims to provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness of education frameworks in

fostering a culture of peace in Finland, based on the perspectives of educators working with children and young people. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Finnish teachers perceive and implement the principles of peace education in their teaching practices?
2. To what extent do the dimensions of the UNESCO peace education framework (personal, relational, political, structural, cultural and ecological) manifest in Finnish basic education?
3. What challenges do Finnish teachers encounter in promoting a culture of peace in schools?

## 1.4 Disposition of the thesis

This thesis examines peace education and its role in fostering a culture of peace. It begins by exploring the global context, analysing how education systems address conflict, promote tolerance, and support peaceful coexistence. This perspective highlights peace education as a key driver of positive social change and societal development.

The study then outlines its methodological and analytical frameworks, detailing the research design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. The UNESCO peace education framework serves as a foundational tool for examining the dimensions of peace education and its role in cultivating a culture of peace. The study also acknowledges its limitations and scope to ensure a clear and focused analysis.

At the core of the thesis are interviews with Finnish teachers, assessing whether and how peace education is incorporated into Finland's basic education system. The findings are analysed within the framework, identifying key strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

The thesis concludes by linking education and peacebuilding, offering recommendations for advancing peace education in Finland and beyond. It also reflects on the broader implications of integrating peace education into school systems to foster more just and harmonious societies.

## 2 Peace education: a literature review

Education that fosters a culture of peace is context-dependent, addressing specific societal needs. It covers themes like diversity, mutual understanding, civic values, and conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2002; Harris, 2004; Turay & English, 2008). This review explores how education, peace, and conflict are conceptualized in different societies, highlighting education's role in cultivating a culture of peace and examining how peaceful countries implement peace education globally.

Education shapes societies by transmitting values, fostering development, and promoting social cohesion. Okoh (2003) describes education as a process, product, and discipline, preserving cultural values and enabling societal transformation (Okoh, 2003 in Bright & Eguzozie Ngozi Gladys, 2018). When aligned with positive goals, education nurtures behaviours that promote harmony and sustainable development (Nnabuo & Asodike, 2012). However, education is not inherently neutral; it can mitigate or exacerbate conflict depending on its implementation (DFID, 2003, in Kotono, 2012). Systems that reinforce inequalities or divisive ideologies can lead to unrest and violence, underscoring the need for a global framework for peace education.

Efforts to promote peace education have a long history, with contributions from international organizations. UNESCO's 1995 Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and the 2000s International Decade for a Culture of Peace emphasized education's role in combating prejudice and fostering respect (United Nations, 1996; UNESCO, 2002). UNICEF has highlighted the importance of peace education in basic education systems, framing it as

essential for quality education (Fountain, 1999). However, the lack of a universal definition and consensus on peace education content and methods has hindered its systematic implementation (Fountain, 1999). Kotonno (2012) identifies the lack of standardization and data as significant barriers to consistent application.

Varied approaches to peace education illustrate these challenges. It may be delivered as stand-alone courses or integrated into broader subjects like literature, arts, and social studies (Fountain, 1999). While Fountain (1999) advocates for embedding peace education throughout the curriculum, Quigley (2000) emphasizes the importance of dedicated instruction, arguing that integrated approaches cannot replace focused study of key topics. The diversity of peace education methods and goals highlights the need for further research and global collaboration to develop coherent frameworks. By examining how other peaceful or semi-peaceful countries conduct peace education, this review lays the foundation for seeking the research gap and laying the foundation and the need to research Finland's basic education.

In Japan, peace education originated after World War II, aiming to prevent future conflicts (Murakami, 1992). The Hiroshima Education Board distributed peace education guidelines for elementary schools, emphasizing a nuclear-free world (Murakami, 1992). Moral education became compulsory, promoting respect for life, democracy, and international peace through war experiences (Murakami, 1992). Peace education was integrated across disciplines (Kotonno, 2012). Today, it focuses on multiculturalism, human rights, and environmental education, while maintaining anti-war sentiments (Nakamura, 2006, in Kotonno, 2012).

Similarly, in Germany, peace education was shaped by post-World War II de-Nazification efforts. Civic education aimed to replace biased teachers and materials, addressing extremism and xenophobia (Kotonno, 2012; Jäger, 2015). Despite these efforts, Germany lacked a cohesive academic framework, with decentralization leading to grassroots initiatives. Schools and NGOs played

critical roles in addressing societal challenges (Jäger, 2015), contrasting with Japan's centralized approach.

In Great Britain, peace education is implemented through civic education and Citizenship Studies and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education courses, with some schools incorporating "Peace Days" (Behr et al., 2018). However, the educational climate, characterized by militarism and neo-liberal priorities, limits space for peace education within a performance-focused curriculum (Behr et al., 2018).

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, peace education emerged as civic education after the Yugoslav War, initially promoting patriotism and defence (Kotono, 2012). Over time, it evolved to focus on societal cohesion, reconciliation, and civic engagement (Kotono, 2012).

In Sweden, on the other hand, peace education evolved from post-World War II and ranges from international understanding and disarmament to contemporary themes like multiculturalism, conflict resolution, and environmental consciousness (Andersson & Zaleskienė, 2011). Standish and Nygren (2018) highlighted strengths and shortcomings in promoting positive peace, noting a lack of clear strategies for conflict resolution. They argue that civics is the primary subject for peace education, but limited integration in other subjects restricts its scope to international issues, neglecting local dimensions of peace and violence.

Finally, the existing research on peace education in Finland is limited, with most studies focusing on its historical development rather than its role in basic education today. Historically, peace education blended nationalism and internationalism, initially promoting national unity after the civil war and later emphasizing Nordic collaboration and demilitarization (Ojajärvi, 2021). Today, NGOs such as Taksvärkki and Rauhankasvatusinstituutti address contemporary issues like racism and human rights (Taksvärkki ry, 2024; Rauhankasvatusinstituutti, 2023). These NGOs work on a voluntary basis and no basic education facility is obligated to use their services. However, peace education within basic education has not been studied, leaving a critical



research gap in peace and development studies, particularly in peace education research.

This literature review shows that peace education has been implemented in various societies, but research is limited, general and historically focused. In addition, the literature around peace education in Finland is limited and there is no research done on how the principles and values are highlighted in education, leaving a research gap that this research aims to fulfil. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring basic education today, emphasizing the critical need for education towards a culture of peace in a changing world.

### 3 Analytical Framework Consideration

As demonstrated, there is clear commitment for utilising peace education as a tool for a more peaceful society and as the literature review demonstrated peace education has been utilised in countries other than conflict-affected ones. This analytical framework explores the foundations of a culture of peace and the tools for its implementation. It examines peacebuilding frameworks and how their principles can be applied across different societal contexts. Additionally, it highlights UNESCO's peace education framework as a key analytical tool and emphasizes the vital role of teachers in bringing it to life.

Peacebuilding frameworks offer diverse strategies for fostering lasting peace, addressing the social, economic, and political foundations of a just society. Johan Galtung's distinction between negative peace, the mere cessation of violence, and positive peace, which requires deeper structural and cultural transformation, is central to this approach (Webel and Galtung, 2010). Education plays a crucial role in this process, shaping attitudes and behaviours that promote non-violence, empathy, and social cohesion. By embedding conflict resolution and human rights principles into everyday practices, education becomes a powerful tool for sustainable peacebuilding (UN General Assembly, 1998). Peacebuilding theories, like Galtung's, provide a foundation

for understanding how societies cultivate peace, particularly in post-conflict settings where education is essential to rebuilding stability. Locally driven and bottom-up approaches are especially important in sustaining positive peace. Post-liberal peacebuilding theory emphasizes the significance of grassroots efforts, recognizing that small actions in educational settings can have a broader societal impact (Richmond, 2010). Similarly, John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation model highlights reconciliation, relationship-building, and dialogue as long-term strategies for fostering peace (Paffenholz, 2013). His approach underscores education's role in equipping individuals with these lifelong skills, ensuring that peace is actively cultivated from within communities (Paffenholz, 2013).

These values of peacebuilding are in unity with the culture of peace. A culture of peace, as defined by the UN encompasses values such as tolerance, solidarity, justice, and democracy, with an emphasis on preventing conflicts at their root and resolving them through dialogue and negotiation (UN General Assembly, 1999). These principles are foundational in creating peaceful societies, but they also extend to the daily lives of individuals, as they shape the attitudes and behaviours that underpin a culture of peace. This goes beyond just resolving conflicts. It is about fostering long-lasting, positive social change, hopefully valued by people in diverse societies, whether conflict-affected ones or not. Peacebuilding and working towards a culture of peace go hand in hand, with peace education being one of these tools to do so. The interesting notion that this study is conducting is using the values and principles of these tools in society deemed peaceful to highlight the value everywhere in the world.

Education plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of peace, extending beyond formal schooling to families, media, and social institutions (UNESCO, 2024). It shifts societal norms from aggression and fear to dialogue, solidarity, and justice (UN General Assembly, 1998). More than a tool for knowledge, education instils values that support both negative peace, which refers to the absence of violence, and positive peace, which promotes justice and equity.

UNESCO's peace education framework integrates conflict resolution, human rights, democracy, social-emotional learning, and sustainability to drive individual and societal transformation (UNESCO, 2024).

Peace education is vital in both conflict-affected and peaceful societies, addressing inequalities and fostering resilience. By embedding peacebuilding principles into education, it cultivates empathy, critical thinking, and reconciliation, ensuring future generations actively contribute to sustainable and harmonious communities worldwide (UNESCO, 2024).

### 3.1 UNESCO Peace Education Framework for education for culture of peace in Finnish basic education

This study employs the UNESCO's framework to explore the core elements of peace education, guiding the analysis and interpretation of the data (UNESCO, 2024). The UNESCO framework outlines six interconnected dimensions—personal, relational, political, structural, cultural, and ecological—that serve as transformative tools for peace education. These dimensions include learning goals, objectives, and practices that aim to eliminate violence (negative peace) while nurturing conditions for peace at multiple levels (positive peace). The framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual growth, social relationships, systemic understanding, cultural awareness, and ecological responsibility.

The personal dimension of the framework focuses on self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking, empowering individuals to navigate conflicts and biases while promoting empathy and non-violent action. The relational dimension emphasizes empathy, cultural awareness, and conflict resolution, encouraging dialogue, active listening, and collaboration across different cultures. The political dimension fosters civic engagement, democratic participation, and advocacy for human rights, empowering

individuals to shape just societies. The structural dimension explores how systems and institutions shape relationships, highlighting the need to recognize structural violence, inequality, and injustice while working toward fairer systems. The cultural dimension encourages intercultural dialogue and appreciation of cultural diversity, while the ecological dimension fosters systems thinking and sustainability, connecting ecological consciousness with peace education.

These dimensions aim to nurture critical thinking, social-emotional intelligence, empathy, and ecological responsibility, supporting the development of non-violent conflict resolution, justice advocacy, and sustainability. Transformative practices, such as reflective learning, dialogue, systems thinking, and experiential engagement, are central to the framework, empowering individuals to build long-term global peace and interdependence across cultures, systems, and the natural world.

In the context of formal education, teachers play a crucial role in implementing this framework, helping to foster a culture of peace within schools and broader society. This study will explore how Finnish teachers perceive peace education and whether they recognize the application of the UNESCO framework in their teaching practices. Through interviews with teachers, the research will investigate whether they consciously or unconsciously contribute to building a culture of peace and what issues they believe should be addressed within the education system. Additionally, the study will examine whether the Finnish education system aligns with the framework's dimensions and whether Finland's education system contributes to the country's peacefulness.

The UNESCO framework will serve as both an interview guide and analytical tool in this study, allowing for the inclusion of emergent themes and ensuring a flexible approach to understanding peace education in Finland. Ultimately, this research seeks to determine whether Finland's educational system supports peace education and if so, how it can further develop to contribute to a more peaceful and inclusive society.

Goals, objectives, and transformative practices of peace education		
Dimension	Learning goals and objectives	Transformative learning approaches/practices
<b>Personal</b>	Develop capacities for managing internal conflicts, biases, and ethical/moral decision-making; engage in critical self-awareness and introspection; nurture social-emotional intelligence and creativity; engage in worldview reflection; and foster political agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ self-reflection</li> <li>▪ ethical/moral reflection</li> <li>▪ journaling</li> <li>▪ perspective taking</li> <li>▪ critical thinking</li> <li>▪ social-emotional learning</li> </ul>
<b>Relational</b>	Develop empathy and understanding of others, as well as appreciation of cultural, ethnic, and national differences; foster global citizenship, developing awareness of interdependence & interconnection across cultures and amongst and between members of nation states; and develop skills and capacities for resolving & transforming conflicts without violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ social-emotional learning</li> <li>▪ conflict transformation and resolution</li> <li>▪ reflective listening</li> <li>▪ dialogue</li> <li>▪ education for health and well-being</li> <li>▪ cooperative &amp; collaborative learning</li> <li>▪ restorative and circle processes</li> <li>▪ peer mediation</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	Develop understanding of basic principles of rights and responsibilities; foster civic engagement, political agency and develop advocacy skills; experience and practice collective and democratic decision-making processes; and learn to dialogue across differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ critical thinking</li> <li>▪ cooperative &amp; collaborative learning</li> <li>▪ dialogue and deliberation</li> <li>▪ experiential and place-based learning</li> <li>▪ nonviolent direct action</li> <li>▪ human rights learning</li> </ul>
<b>Structural</b>	Develop awareness of the systems in which relationships are embedded and the institutions through which norms and values are established and maintained; develop awareness of structural violence (the conditions, processes, and root causes that give rise to direct violence); understand equity and justice and how to pursue them; engage in systems and institutional analysis & design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ restorative justice</li> <li>▪ history education</li> <li>▪ historical narratives</li> <li>▪ futures thinking</li> <li>▪ systems thinking</li> <li>▪ critical/analytic thinking</li> <li>▪ designing institutions &amp; systems</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural</b>	Develop awareness of the cultural roots of knowledge creation and meaning construction;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ experience different cultures</li> <li>▪ cross-cultural and intercultural dialogue</li> </ul>
	cultural assumptions related to communication, expression of emotion, ways of settling differences, & approaches to dialogue; nurture appreciation of cultural differences and develop intercultural competencies; and explore cultures of peace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ global citizenship education</li> <li>▪ creative thinking and expression</li> </ul>
<b>Ecological</b>	Nurture respect for all life and ecological thinking and awareness; foster systems and future thinking in support of sustainability; develop awareness of interdependence and interconnection amongst and between peoples and the broader web of life; and nurture ecological responsibility; develop awareness of relationship of self to others and all living systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ systems thinking</li> <li>▪ futures thinking</li> <li>▪ education for sustainable development</li> <li>▪ experiencing nature</li> </ul>

(UNESCOs Goals, Objectives, and Transformative Practices for Peace Education,

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388385/PDF/388385eng.pdf.m>

[ulti](#) )

## 4 Methodological Framework

### 4.1 Qualitative Research and Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design, emphasizing textual analysis and contextual insights rather than numerical data (Bryman, 2012). Conducted as an abductive field study in Finland, this approach enables an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions, which a quantitative method would not adequately capture (Bryman, 2012). The methodological framework follows Alan Bryman's structured outline of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 384), guiding the study through key stages: formulating research questions, selecting relevant sites and participants, collecting and interpreting data, and integrating theoretical frameworks into the analysis and presentation of findings.

The research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which prioritizes understanding how individuals construct meaning within their social context (Bryan, 2012). This paradigm is particularly relevant for examining education toward a culture of peace, as this concept is not an objective phenomenon but is socially constructed through educational practices, interactions, and institutional frameworks. The study adopts an abductive case study approach, focusing on Finland's basic education system and its role in fostering a culture of peace, while also considering variations across schools and school districts. A case study allows for an in-depth investigation of a specific context, providing rich, contextually embedded insights (Bryman, 2012).

An abductive approach was chosen because the objective of this research is neither to test a hypothesis nor to generate a new theory but to explore peace education from participants' perspectives as well as analysing that perspective through a particular theoretical lens. This approach facilitates a dynamic interaction between empirical data and theoretical frameworks, enabling a refined understanding of the phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). The interpretivist paradigm complements this abductive approach by emphasizing the ways

individuals make sense of their experiences within a broader social and educational context. To structure data collection, this study draws on UNESCO's peace education framework, which informed the design of the interview guide (Appendix 1). This methodological choice ensures that participants' subjective experiences contribute to a broader conceptualization of education for a culture of peace (Bryman, 2012).

## 4.2 Data Collection

### 4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

To effectively capture participants' perspectives, this study employs a semi-structured interview approach. This method was chosen to provide participants with flexibility in their responses, aligning with the interpretivist research paradigm. By avoiding rigid, predefined categories, semi-structured interviews allow for a more nuanced exploration of participants' views while ensuring that discussions remain relevant to the research objectives (Bryman, 2012).

A fully structured interview format was not used, as it would have limited the depth of responses, restricting the study's ability to capture the complexity of peace education in Finnish schools (Bryman, 2012). Conversely, unstructured interviews, where participants lead the conversation, were deemed unsuitable because they risked failing to gather sufficient data aligned with the UNESCO's peace education framework (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews offered a balance, enabling both consistency across interviews and the flexibility to ask follow-up questions when insightful topics emerged (Bryman, 2012). This adaptability was particularly valuable for an abductive research approach, as it facilitated an iterative interplay between theoretical concepts and participants' lived experiences.

This method also allowed participants to elaborate on the aspects of education they considered most significant, contributing to the identification of overarching themes across different interviews. While individual teachers employed varied pedagogical methods, shared patterns emerged, providing valuable insights into peace education practices. Given that teaching methods vary across educators, neither structured nor fully unstructured interviews alone would have been sufficient. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, provided the most effective means of capturing how elements of the analytical framework manifest within Finnish education.

## **4.2.2 Interview Guide**

The interview guide provided a structured yet flexible framework for conducting interviews, ensuring consistency while allowing participants to elaborate on key topics. The idea of an interview guide is to be a less specific version of a structured interview schedule (Bryman, 2012, p. 472). Questions were arranged to facilitate a logical flow, beginning with general background information before moving to specific inquiries on the culture of peace and the theoretical framework underpinning this research.

To ensure clarity, the language used in the questions was carefully considered, avoiding overly complex terminology and leading questions (Bryman, 2012). The guide (Appendix 1) aimed to explore educators' understanding of peace education, its implementation, and their perspectives on UNESCO's Goals, Objectives, and Transformative Practices for Peace Education framework. Each dimension of the framework was reflected in the interview questions while maintaining the flexibility for participants to introduce additional insights. Open-ended questions encouraged detailed responses, supporting the abductive approach by allowing an interplay between theory and lived experiences (Bryman, 2012).



The interview guide was constructed based on the research questions and an analysis of the UNESCO framework. To enhance clarity, participants were provided with an overview of the analytical framework, including definitions of key dimensions, before answering related questions. A pilot study was conducted to refine question wording and structure (Bryman, 2012).

The final guide (Appendix 1) consisted of approximately 30 questions categorized into general participant information, general questions on peace education, framework-specific questions, and overarching concluding questions. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, some questions were omitted if participants addressed them naturally, while follow-ups were introduced when relevant themes emerged. To ensure consistency, all participants received the UN definition of peace education to establish a shared understanding of the concept.

### **4.2.3 Implementation of In-Person and Digital Interviews**

This study employed both in-person and digital interviews to maximize flexibility and accommodate participants' preferences. The use of multiple interview formats ensured broader participation, overcoming geographic and logistical constraints.

In-person interviews allowed for the interpretation of non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, and created a more engaging interview environment (Bryman, 2012).

Digital interviews on the other hand were conducted via Zoom or phone, depending on participants' availability and preferences. Zoom interviews maintained some level of visual connection, fostering engagement, though they lacked the full interpersonal dynamics of face-to-face interactions. To mitigate this, additional probing questions were used when clarification was needed. Phone interviews, while limiting the ability to observe non-verbal

cues, offered other advantages, such as reducing participant inhibition, which may have encouraged more candid responses (Bryman, 2012).

The decision to include digital interviews provided practical benefits, enabling participation from diverse geographic regions while minimizing travel-related costs and scheduling constraints. Offering both interview formats enhanced accessibility and ensured participant comfort, ultimately contributing to the reliability and depth of the data collected.

#### **4.2.4 Sample**

To complement the purpose of this study, it was necessary to target a specific group of individuals. A non-probability sampling method, purposive sampling, was employed. This approach is particularly suitable for the study as it enables the strategic selection of participants who are directly relevant to the research questions and overall objectives (Bryman, 2012).

Although Finnish schools and teachers are required to align their educational content with the national curriculum, there remains flexibility in how they deliver education. Teachers and schools have the autonomy to employ various pedagogical methods. To ensure diversity within the sample, specific criteria were established: the majority of participants were required to teach in different school districts or schools. This criterion was set despite the understanding that pedagogical approaches may vary even within the same district, as some schools may follow unifying guidelines (e.g., in areas such as conflict resolution). Additionally, snowball sampling was utilized to expand the sample. Participants were asked to identify other potential respondents who met the selection criteria, thus broadening the scope of the sample (Bryman, 2012).

The sample consisted of 12 participants (Appendix 2) selected based on the established criteria. To ensure diversity, the teachers were chosen based on their experience teaching different age groups (ranging from pre-school to

ninth grade) and various subjects. The teachers were found through educational facilities and contacted through their supervisor by email and asked if they wanted to participate. Additionally, some interviewees were acquired by using previous contacts and some were using the snowball method.

It is important to note that the use of non-probability sampling may limit the generalizability of the study's findings to the broader population (Bryman, 2012).

## 4.3 Interpretation of the Data

### 4.3.1 Coding and Thematic Analysis

The coding process involves labelling and organizing data into distinct codes to identify key pieces of information (Bryman, 2012). Key aspects of this process include initiating coding as soon as data collection begins, reviewing the codes multiple times, considering relevant theoretical concepts, and maintaining perspective to avoid generating an excessive number of codes (Bryman, 2012, pp. 576–577).

In this study, both deductive and inductive approaches were employed in the coding process. Some codes were developed deductively, based on the analytical framework, while others were derived inductively from the data itself. This dual approach allowed the analysis to remain open to emerging insights.

The research utilized a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying overarching themes from the initial codes. Thematic analysis seeks to identify broader patterns within the data by grouping related codes together (Bryman, 2012). A theme, in this context, is a category that aligns with the research focus, expanding upon the identified codes and contributing to the theoretical

understanding of the topic (Bryman, 2012). The themes identified in this study included: A Child-Centered Approach, Core Values and Principles, Agency, Cohesion, and Understanding and Discussing Conflicts. Within these themes, several sub-themes also emerged, providing further depth to the analysis. In addition, the analysis concludes with a section on the challenges teachers faced.

## 4.4 Limitations and Delimitations

### 4.4.1 Time Limitations

The data for this study was collected within a constrained time frame, which may have limited the depth of exploration into certain themes. This time limitation also meant that changes or developments in the themes could not be captured as the study progressed, particularly since participants' experiences and perspectives may have evolved over time.

### 4.4.2 Sampling Limitations

The sample size in this study was relatively small, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Given the limited number of participants, it is possible that other individuals might have expressed different views or opinions, which could have influenced the outcomes. Furthermore, the scope of content related to education for a culture of peace may introduce additional limitations. The interpretation and implementation of such education can vary across schools, with each educator bringing unique perspectives and approaches to the subject matter.

#### **4.4.3 Self-Report Limitations**

The data collected and analysed in this study are based on self-reports from participants. This introduces the possibility that some responses may not fully reflect participants' true beliefs, either due to reluctance in answering certain questions or the desire to provide socially desirable responses.

#### **4.4.4 Researcher Bias**

As a researcher and a Finnish citizen, my own perspectives and experiences may have influenced the interpretation of the data. This is a critical consideration, as such bias can occur unconsciously, potentially affecting the analysis and conclusions drawn.

#### **4.4.5 Language Limitations**

This study was conducted in Finland, where interviews were conducted in Finnish and later translated into English for analysis. The translation process may have introduced subtle shifts in meaning or cultural nuances, as certain concepts or expressions may not have direct equivalents in English, potentially affecting the interpretation of the data.

#### **4.4.6 Cultural Limitations**

The study was conducted within a specific cultural context, and as such, the findings may not be directly applicable to other cultural contexts. The views, experiences, and practices surrounding education towards a culture of peace in Finland may differ significantly from those in other countries or educational systems, limiting the transferability of the results.

#### **4.4.7 Delimitations**

A key delimitation of this study is its focus on the specific concept of education for a culture of peace and its reliance on the perspectives of basic education teachers. Additionally, the analytical framework used in this study, shaped by existing literature and materials reviewed, guided the formulation of interview questions and the subsequent analysis.

### **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to the ethical framework outlined by Diener and Crandall (1978), as cited in Bryman (2012), which is based on four core principles: avoiding harm to participants, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, and preventing deception.

To prevent any physical, mental, or emotional harm to participants, they were fully informed of their rights in relation to the research. Specifically, participants were made aware that they could choose not to answer any question that caused them distress. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were also assured of their anonymity, ensuring that none of their personal information would be used or disclosed. This measure was taken to uphold confidentiality, with all data securely stored and accessible only to the researcher and thesis supervisor. Once the study was completed and the data was no longer needed, it was safely destroyed.

The study did not involve any form of intentional or unintentional deception. To ensure transparency, the interview questions were designed to be clear, open, and straightforward. Additionally, the questions were piloted prior to the first interview to identify and address any potential issues. Participants were provided with a comprehensive understanding of the research context; the

theoretical framework used and were clearly informed of their rights throughout the study. They were also encouraged to ask questions at any point during the interview. The piloting of interview questions further ensured that they did not lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

## 5 Background

This chapter provides an overview of Finland's education system and its alignment with peace education principles. While Finland has not implemented a specific "peace education" curriculum, many of its educational values reflect an emphasis on fostering a culture of peace.

The Finnish education system is built on free public schooling, with compulsory education beginning at age six. Following nine years of basic education, students choose between general upper secondary or vocational tracks, both of which provide pathways to higher education. Teachers, all of whom are required to hold a master's degree, operate within a framework that grants them significant autonomy at both national and municipal levels. This study examines how peace education principles are reflected in Finnish education policies, particularly within the National Core Curriculum and supplementary teaching materials (Opetushallitus, 2014, 2021b; KiVa Koulu, 2019; NYT Yrityskylä, 2025).

Although peace education is not explicitly outlined, its core principles are embedded in the National Core Curriculum, which prioritizes individual growth, equality, democracy, and well-being to promote active citizenship and reduce social disparities (Opetushallitus, 2014). Subjects such as language studies and social sciences incorporate essential peace education elements, including critical thinking, communication skills, and discussions on democracy and human rights (Opetushallitus, 2014).

Beyond the curriculum, Finland emphasizes inclusivity and cultural awareness through Ministry of Education resources that promote diverse representation in educational materials and encourage teachers to reflect on implicit biases (Opetushallitus, 2014). Additionally, Finland participates in UNESCO's Associated Schools Network, which supports intercultural dialogue and peace education, although participation remains voluntary (Opetushallitus, 2021b).

Several national initiatives further reinforce peace-oriented education. KiVa Koulu, a widely implemented anti-bullying program, is active in over 800 Finnish schools and has gained international recognition (KiVa Koulu, 2019). Another initiative, Yrityskylä (Business Village), provides experiential learning opportunities focused on economic and social structures, fostering teamwork, problem-solving, and civic engagement (NYT Yrityskylä, 2025). While these programs contribute to promoting a culture of peace, their impact largely depends on how individual teachers incorporate them into classroom practices.

## 6 Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with teachers on the implementation of education for a culture of peace. Five core themes were identified: a Child-Centered Approach, Core Values and Principles, Agency, Cohesion, and Understanding and Discussing conflicts. Each theme is further divided into sub-themes, providing a more nuanced understanding of the topic. Additionally, the findings highlight the challenges teachers raised.

The results reveal that the principles of peace education are embedded not only in the curriculum but also in various aspects of everyday school life. Teachers recognized that peace education extends beyond specific subjects, influencing broader school practices and interactions within the community, including the relationship between school and home. This highlights the importance of a



holistic approach, where the school environment is interconnected with the student's home life.

Although peace education is not an intentional addition to the curriculum, many teachers recognized that they unintentionally implement its principles through their everyday teaching. Teachers agreed that they hold an important role in education for a culture of peace, contributing to a more peaceful school environment. While they felt aligned with this goal, they also acknowledged the limitations of their influence and the challenges that hinder their perceived idea of peace education in schools and society.

The presentation of the data follows a structured progression through the themes and sub-themes, with each section addressing a core theme. This chapter aims to answer the central research questions by outlining the key findings derived from the interviews.

## 6.1 A Child-Centered Approach

A child-centred approach to education prioritizes children's perspectives, needs, and experiences, allowing them to actively shape their learning (Lal, 2014). This approach empowers children to express their thoughts, ask questions, and engage in dialogue about issues affecting them. Teachers emphasized that children's questions often serve as starting points for addressing complex topics.

Teachers stressed that this approach ensures discussions remain relevant to students' experiences while maintaining appropriate boundaries. One teacher shared: "We often start our day by opening the floor for discussion so everyone can share how they are feeling, and during this time, students often raise issues that worry them or things that have happened in school. Then I decide whether we should discuss them with everyone, in small groups, or not at all." (T,9) Another teacher reflected: "It is not really my job to address everything that

goes on in the world, but issues that worry the students or cause problems in school, that is.” (T, 6)

Discussions were often initiated by children, with teachers guiding them to ensure age-appropriate engagement. Topics arose in response to global or social matters, such as peer conflicts, multiculturalism, bullying, and discrimination. Teachers expressed the importance of letting discussions emerge from students, ensuring familiarity and meaning.

One teacher explained that misconceptions often arise about what children find troubling. Sometimes, adults assume children are worried about world events, but when the conversation is opened, it becomes clear that students are not as concerned as anticipated. As the teacher put it: “Sometimes, we as teachers think that students are troubled by something, like events in the world, and we feel the need to discuss it as a group, but when I open the conversation, none of the students end up caring about it.”(T,5) This highlighted the importance of listening to children’s concerns and ensuring classroom discussions are student-driven and relevant to their experiences.

Teachers noted that children often raised questions about differences, such as why people have different skin colours or what it means to be “different.” For younger children, these questions often arose in informal settings like lunchtime, where dietary restrictions prompted curiosity and conversation. One teacher commented: “The lived experience of diversity in the classroom is the best tool to teach with.” (T,2)

For older students, teachers addressed the use of language, particularly slurs or insensitive terminology related to ethnicity or culture. These moments were tackled in real time to promote respectful communication. One teacher gave an example: “It is as simple as trying to consistently interfere with the use of harmful language during recess, for example, but sometimes it is hard because there is such talk consistently.” (T,12)

Teachers also shared instances where classroom discussions centred around fears sparked by students’ exposure to horror stories. One teacher mentioned

that over the Christmas holidays, many households had watched a documentary about the 2004 tsunami. When students returned to school, many were worried about a tsunami hitting and began spreading horror stories. These conversations impacted class dynamics, leading to concerns from parents. As one teacher explained, the discussions became a classroom-wide topic that needed to be addressed to protect students' well-being and reassure parents.

Through these examples, it becomes clear that a child-centred approach is fundamental in fostering a culture of peace, as it ensures discussions are rooted in children's experiences, driven by their curiosity, and framed in a way that promotes understanding, empathy, and respect. Teachers were not hesitant to speak about challenging issues but sometimes found it difficult to address them. They felt they lacked the tools to do so in a "correct" way. They let students lead the conversation and only intervened, when necessary, without intentionally introducing topics.

## 6.2 Core Values and Principles

A prominent theme that emerged in the data was the central role of core values and principles in shaping education for a culture of peace. Teachers identified specific values as crucial for creating peaceful school environments, including those aligned with established frameworks for peace education, as well as methodologies beyond traditional peace education, such as celebration, play, and the importance of creating a safe space.

All teachers agreed on the necessity of certain core values in education, particularly for fostering a culture of peace. While there were differences across schools and districts, there was strong consensus on the importance of values like equality, inclusivity, democracy, empathy, and critical thinking. Teachers emphasized that empathy and critical thinking are particularly underdeveloped in students today and should be prioritized in education, while values such as equality, inclusivity, and democracy largely fall under the

teacher's responsibility to implement. One teacher highlighted the importance of promoting equality and justice in the classroom, noting, "It's essential to facilitate the values I believe in," (T7) while another pointed to the lack of empathy as a key factor contributing to the rise in conflicts at school.

These core values were consistently linked to the broader principles of peace education. For instance, one teacher explained that practising democratic principles helps students understand democracy's political structure, the value of equal voice, and the need to manage emotions when outcomes don't align with their preferences. Many teachers mentioned the presence of a "student council board" in their schools, where representatives from each class participate in decision-making. One teacher explained: "This directly teaches students how democracy works in society." (T,8) Understanding rights and responsibilities was also seen as essential for creating a peaceful school environment, which, when implemented properly, extends into broader societal engagement. As one teacher stated, "We have created classroom rules that everyone follows, and there are consequences if students do not follow them." (T,12) Many teachers emphasized that these skills are crucial for learning how to act as an individual within a larger school community.

Teachers also stressed the importance of equality and inclusivity, emphasizing the need to treat all students equally and create an environment where they feel safe to be themselves. One teacher shared, "I always try to lead by example, being myself, positive, encouraging, and sensitive towards everyone, both other teachers and students. To me, that's the most important part of promoting inclusivity and equality." (T,5) Another teacher explained that students had discriminated against a school worker from a different ethnic background. She not only intervened but also took the time to explain to children the consequences of their actions. Another teacher commented: "I try to promote equality and inclusivity by understanding how young people use words and how prejudices are formed within children, and through understanding, reinforce positive behaviour patterns." (T,4)

An interesting finding from the data was that while all teachers considered equality among students of different genders and cultures highly important for creating a peaceful school environment, very few, only one teacher, reported considering students' personal backgrounds when dealing with issues or conflicts. For example, when asked about different cultural communication styles in conflict resolution, only one teacher acknowledged the relevance of this factor. Many teachers simply stated that they treat all students the same, regardless of background. One teacher noted: "I rarely think about the background of the student, I just look at students as students." (T,1) Yet, at the same time, many teachers emphasized the importance of knowing their students. As one teacher put it: "Knowing the student is crucial—you understand where they are coming from, why they are reacting the way they are, and how the situation should be handled." (T,2) This created an interesting dynamic, as teachers highlighted the significance of knowing their students while not necessarily considering factors that might make a student more vulnerable.

These core values were integrated into teachers' daily practices and curricula, with many emphasizing that they must first believe in these values themselves to lead by example and have the situational awareness to address issues effectively. This was particularly important given the increase in discrimination and conflicts within schools. One teacher observed, "Conflicts among students are now more serious and harmful than before," (T,11) underscoring the need for consistent, value-driven approaches to address these challenges.

## **6.2.1 Beyond Traditional Peace Education**

Teachers emphasized the importance of celebration, play, and the creation of a safe space as essential elements in fostering a peaceful and supportive school environment. These values, closely tied to core educational principles, were

seen as fundamental in helping students develop emotional resilience, social skills, and a sense of belonging within the classroom.

Play and imagination played a crucial role, particularly for younger students. Teachers noted that unstructured play is increasingly absent from children's lives, making it more important than ever to integrate it into the school day. One teacher explained, "Playing teaches so many valuable skills, like conflict resolution, empathy, and tolerance, as well as friendship skills." (T,1) Another highlighted that playing together as a class strengthens teamwork and builds cohesion among students. Even teachers of older students recognized the value of play, though many admitted struggling to find time for it. One teacher shared, "When we take time to play, draw, or do something creative, I use that opportunity to talk with students about things outside of schoolwork and just have fun. It opens possibilities for deeper conversations. I wish we had even more time for this." (T,3) These moments of informal interaction were seen as key to strengthening teacher-student relationships and fostering a relaxed, open classroom atmosphere.

Celebration was another important aspect of creating a positive school environment. Teachers emphasized recognizing students' efforts and personal achievements to boost confidence and motivation. It was also seen as a tool for fostering inclusivity, particularly when students shared their cultural or religious traditions. One teacher shared an example: "One student gave a presentation about their family's celebration related to their religion. It was incredibly interesting for everyone, but most importantly, it was highly meaningful for the students who got to share their experience." (T,2). These moments encouraged mutual understanding and respect, leading to intercultural dialogue that allowed students to learn from one another.

Creating a safe space in the classroom was also a priority. Teachers described a safe environment as one where every student is valued, classroom values are upheld, and time is taken to engage with students as individuals. One teacher explained, "I try to create a space where students feel safe expressing even difficult moments. It's important to ensure they don't feel overwhelmed

because that can lead to more conflicts.” (T,5). A calm and respectful atmosphere was seen as essential for both emotional well-being and effective learning.

By prioritizing play, celebration, and emotional safety, teachers aim to create classrooms where students not only develop academically but also gain the social and emotional skills necessary to build positive relationships and navigate challenges. These values were viewed as integral to maintaining a harmonious school environment and ensuring that all students feel included, valued, and heard.

### 6.3 Agency

The data underscored the significance of fostering student agency, the ability of students to act independently, make decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. Teachers emphasized the need to equip students with essential skills such as self-reflection, critical thinking, self-regulation, and relationship-building, all of which contribute to their capacity for agency.

A key aspect of agency is self-regulation, which was frequently mentioned as foundational for creating a peaceful and positive school environment. Teachers noted that students who can manage their emotions and behaviours are better prepared to engage in constructive social interactions and conflict resolution. One teacher explained, “A peaceful school climate starts with students learning to self-manage and regulate their emotions.” (T,9) However, concerns were also raised about the current state of self-regulation among students, as one teacher noted, “It all starts there (self-regulation), but unfortunately, I fear this is a skill that students are more or less lacking today.” (T,4)

Critical thinking was also identified as essential in helping students reflect on their actions, consider different perspectives, and navigate societal norms. Teachers stressed the importance of providing students with tools to analyse

their own behaviour and make thoughtful decisions. As one teacher put it, “When students have the ability to critically examine their own behaviour, they can become a cohesive part of society.” (T,6)

In addition to emotional regulation and critical thinking, relationship-building emerged as a crucial component of agency, particularly considering increasing conflicts among students, even at the preschool level. One teacher highlighted the importance of self-awareness in this process: “Strong relationships are built on a solid sense of self. When students are more self-aware, they are better able to navigate conflicts and build meaningful connections with others.” (T,11) Teachers emphasized the role of empathy, communication, and active listening in forming positive relationships, understanding others' perspectives and resolving disagreements in a respectful manner. Leading by example was seen as essential in reinforcing these values, with teachers modelling behaviours that promote cooperation and understanding.

Beyond personal and social development, teachers stressed the importance of encouraging students to take initiative and make responsible decisions that positively impact their surroundings. One concrete example that many teachers described was environmental responsibility and their desire to lead by example. One teacher shared, “Students need to understand how to act for the environment. I lead by example, picking up trash around the school and doing small things like that.” (T,5) Another teacher added, “It’s in the small things, like tidying up your own desk, using all of your drawing paper, or taking only as much food as you can eat.” (T,7) By giving students opportunities to make choices and take on responsibilities, teachers believed they could instil confidence in students’ ability to create change in their environment.

Overall, the data indicated that teachers viewed the development of agency as essential to fostering a culture of peace. They saw agency as a multifaceted concept encompassing individual growth, social relationships, and environmental awareness. By cultivating self-regulation, critical thinking, and decision-making skills, teachers believed that students would be better



equipped to navigate conflicts, engage meaningfully with their communities, and contribute positively to society.

## 6.4 Cohesion

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was cohesion, encompassing various aspects of fostering unity both in the classroom and within society. Cohesion was emphasized in relation to building relationships, creating inclusive environments, and promoting responsible citizenship. This theme was prevalent throughout the data, highlighting the importance of cultivating a harmonious and supportive environment in both student interactions and the broader community.

### 6.4.1 Building Cohesion in the Classroom

Teachers placed significant importance on creating a classroom environment that encourages self-expression while fostering respect, empathy, and inclusivity. A cohesive classroom was one where students felt valued and respected for who they are, without fear of judgment or exclusion. Some teachers implemented programs focused on anti-bullying and emotional regulation to establish a safe space for all students. As one teacher noted, “For my classroom to have peace, everyone needs to feel that they belong, and no one is bullied. That’s why anti-bullying programs are so important because then students know there is a system in place to address bullying.” (T,12)

The collaborative development of classroom rules also played a crucial role in ensuring that expectations for behaviour and respect were clear. By involving students in creating these guidelines, teachers helped maintain a cohesive and positive learning environment where everyone understood their role in fostering unity

### **6.4.2 Developing Relationship Skills**

Relationship skills were another key component of fostering cohesion. Teachers emphasized the importance of helping students engage with others in respectful and meaningful ways, particularly in conflict resolution and building empathy. Many implemented specific programs designed to teach students how to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and develop emotional intelligence. One teacher shared, “We learn how to listen and how to say no, for example.” (T,1).

Emotional regulation, empathy, and respect were regularly highlighted as essential skills for creating a peaceful classroom. Teachers often led by example, demonstrating how emotional intelligence contributes to a more harmonious environment, both within the classroom and in broader social interactions.

### **6.4.3 Citizenship and Society**

The final aspect of cohesion explored the connection between the classroom and society, particularly in fostering responsible citizenship. Teachers emphasized the need to equip students with the skills to navigate society and contribute meaningfully as active citizens. This included teaching students about their rights, responsibilities, and how to engage respectfully with others. One teacher remarked, “Sometimes, for some students, it’s more important that they learn how to be part of society than how to solve algebra problems.” (T,5)

Citizenship education was seen as a critical step in preparing students to integrate into society and function cohesively within it. Teachers also recognized that fostering student agency was key to empowering them to participate actively in their communities. By nurturing empathy, promoting intercultural understanding, and incorporating democracy education, teachers

aimed to prepare students to resolve conflicts constructively and become responsible, engaged citizens.

## 6.5 Understanding and Discussing Conflicts

The fifth theme that emerged from the data focuses on conflict and conflict resolution, highlighting how teachers perceive the impact of both global and everyday conflicts on students and their role in addressing these issues. Teachers viewed conflict resolution as essential for fostering a peaceful learning environment, emphasizing the need to equip students with skills such as empathy, active listening, and problem-solving. By managing conflicts proactively and encouraging open discussions, they help create a supportive and respectful classroom atmosphere.

### 6.5.1 Conflict Resolution and the Role of the Teachers

Teachers widely agreed that conflict resolution is an area where many students struggle, particularly in schools with younger children. Educators working with younger students noted that conflicts, whether small or large, occur regularly and need to be addressed daily. In contrast, teachers working with older students faced more complex challenges, particularly with issues like cyberbullying, which is harder to detect. One teacher explained, “Young people are so sneaky with bullying. It’s hard to detect because they sometimes use terminology I don’t understand, or they do it online.” (T,6) Another teacher added, “Bullying has become more physical, but students are also very clever about hiding it.” (T10)

The methods employed to resolve conflicts varied among teachers, with no universal model in place. However, many emphasized empathy and emotional regulation as key tools in conflict resolution. Teachers often described their

role as helping students verbalize their emotions to process and resolve conflicts, especially for younger children or students with special needs. While some teachers followed specific programs to address conflict and bullying, others preferred a more flexible approach, adjusting their methods based on the situation.

When asked whether there should be a standardized model for conflict resolution, teachers expressed divided opinions. While most agreed that consistency in handling conflicts is important, some believed that consistency should be applied across the entire faculty, while others felt that individual teachers maintaining a consistent approach within their own classrooms was sufficient.

## **6.5.2 Conflict Origins and Prevention**

Teachers recognized that conflicts are common in schools, particularly among younger students, but emphasized that many are relatively simple to resolve. Smaller conflicts are often managed through self-reflection, with students encouraged to express themselves and guided by teachers in the resolution process. One teacher described their approach: “I alternate between strategies. Sometimes, I address the whole group, and other times, I use peer counselling so students can really hear how their actions affect others.” (T,4).

Prevention also emerged as a key strategy, with several teachers highlighting the importance of teaching emotional regulation and empathy to reduce conflicts before they arise. Many teachers emphasized that student agency plays a critical role in conflict resolution, as students should be empowered to manage their emotions and resolve issues independently whenever possible.

Teachers working with older students reported greater challenges, particularly with bullying, physical altercations, and discriminatory behaviour. One teacher noted that online bullying is especially difficult to address because it often goes unnoticed. Many teachers also observed a rise in the use of

discriminatory language, such as slurs, and increasingly aggressive behaviour among students. One teacher commented, “The use of slurs and derogatory terms is so common that sometimes it’s hard to intervene, otherwise, I’d have to do it constantly.” (T,12). Another teacher noted, “There’s a lot of shouting in the hallways and classrooms, with students using derogatory words without really understanding how they impact others.” (T,11) They also raised concerns about discriminatory behaviour regarding students' cultural background but none of the teachers explicitly mentioned racism.

Teachers also expressed concerns about the increasing severity of conflicts, both physically and emotionally. One teacher remarked, “I believe the rise in physical violence often stems from internal crises that teens experience. When they struggle to regulate their emotions, they resort to violence.” (T,11). Despite these challenges, all teachers emphasized the importance of promoting non-violent conflict resolution skills.

While some schools followed structured programs for conflict resolution, such as anti-bullying initiatives, many teachers relied on their own methods to address conflicts. This highlighted a contradiction in the data: while teachers acknowledged the need for a more cohesive, systematic approach to conflict resolution, many remained hesitant to adopt a universal model.

### **6.5.3 War and Social Media Influences**

The influence of global conflicts, particularly the war in Ukraine, emerged as another significant topic in the data. Many teachers noted that students are increasingly aware of international conflicts, frequently discussing them in class. More than half of the teachers linked this heightened awareness to social media, which they identified as students' primary source of information. Teachers expressed concerns about the spread of misinformation on these platforms, which often leads to misunderstandings about conflicts. One teacher emphasized the importance of media literacy, stating, “Teaching

critical media literacy is crucial to helping students navigate misinformation and form well-rounded perspectives.” (T,10)

The war in Ukraine was frequently mentioned by teachers, even before being prompted by the interview guide. Some teachers described how discussions about the conflict were initially widespread but had since quieted down. While Ukrainian refugees integrated into the school community without significant issues, teachers noted that conversations surrounding the war had shifted, particularly with the increase in misinformation about Russia and related political topics. One teacher observed that “students often mirror what they hear at home,” (T,6) making it challenging to address these topics in class.

Teachers also reported feeling unprepared to discuss these sensitive topics, particularly when students repeated opinions they had heard from their parents. This disconnect between the student’s home and school created challenges for teachers, as students struggled to reconcile differing viewpoints. Teachers highlighted the broader difficulty of navigating classroom discussions on political or social issues that students may not fully understand but are nonetheless influenced by.

## 6.6 Challenges to Fostering a Culture of Peace in Education

A noteworthy aspect to emerge from the data involves the challenges teachers identified as significant barriers to effectively fostering a culture of peace in education. Despite variations in school locations and districts, there was strong consensus among the teachers regarding these challenges. Key obstacles included a lack of critical thinking and media literacy skills, and a deficiency in empathy linked to increasing individualism. These factors were seen as major impediments to successfully integrating peace education into the classroom.

### **6.6.1 The Lack of Critical Thinking**

One of the most prominent challenges identified by teachers was the lack of critical thinking skills among students, particularly in relation to media literacy. Many teachers stressed that critical thinking is essential for fostering a culture of peace, as it enables students to examine their own thinking and better understand the world around them. However, the majority of teachers observed that a significant number of students struggle with critical self-reflection and have difficulty analysing information critically. This issue was especially linked to the rise of social media as a primary source of information.

Teachers reported that social media platforms, such as TikTok, are frequently used by students as their main source of news, leading to the spread of misleading information. One teacher remarked that their role often involves debunking the false claims students encounter on platforms like TikTok. Another teacher explained: “Sometimes students might spread information that is not correct, such as regarding politics, and you can tell because when you discuss it with them, you realize they have no idea what they are talking about.” (T,12) Additionally, many teachers highlighted the negative impact of social media on students’ attention spans. They noted that students, especially in upper elementary and middle school grades, often arrive at school already saturated with information from social media, making it harder for them to engage with the content being taught in class.

One teacher explained that the unfiltered and unsupervised consumption of information at home contributes to this problem, as students often come to school with preconceived ideas and a lack of interest in learning. One teacher commented: “It is sometimes very hard to even get students to be slightly interested in something other than their phones.” (T,6) Furthermore, some teachers reported that the use of derogatory language on social media, particularly on platforms like TikTok, has become increasingly normalized and has started to infiltrate the school environment. Teachers noted that this

shift has led to a decline in students' respect for one another and a general erosion of empathy.

The role of teachers in addressing these issues was also discussed. Many teachers emphasized that their work is complicated by the home-school nexus, where students' behaviour at school is influenced by their home environment. One teacher explained: "It is clear to hear when students do not have any rules regarding the use of their phone, because at school, getting them off of it is almost impossible." (T,12) Teachers acknowledged that if students are not monitored or guided at home regarding their use of social media, their efforts to address the issues at school may be less effective.

### **6.6.2 The Lack of Empathy and "Individualism"**

The lack of critical thinking, according to many teachers, is further compounded by a decline in empathy, which they attributed to the growing signs of what teachers described as "individualism" among students. Teachers described this shift towards "individualism" as students becoming more self-centred and less capable of seeing the consequences of their actions on others. This lack of empathy often manifests in behaviours like racism and the use of slurs, particularly as students fail to understand how their actions affect those around them.

Many teachers emphasized that teaching empathy is more important now than ever before, as it is central to addressing issues of social cohesion and conflict resolution. Some teachers observed that students today are more prone to blaming others for their misfortunes instead of reflecting on their own behaviours or emotions. The pervasive influence of social media was again cited as a contributing factor to this decline in empathy, with many teachers observing an increase in derogatory language and discriminatory attitudes, especially among middle school students.



Teachers also pointed out that students often fail to understand why they use harmful language, especially when they cannot explain where they learned it. One teacher explained: “Harmful language is so normalized, students are unable to think about why it hurt someone's feelings or why it caused a fight.” (T,11) This suggests that much of the problematic language and behaviour stems from external sources, such as the home environment or social media, rather than from the students' own reflections or understanding.

## 6.7 Summary of the Findings

To conclude, all the teachers recognized their role in fostering a culture of peace, emphasizing that both the curriculum and their actions, whether intentional or unintentional, integrate such values. While many of the findings were expected given the national context, some interesting insights also emerged. The focus was on the individual student, their agency, emotion regulation and their skills and how these can be utilised to build relationships, solve and prevent conflicts and build a more peaceful society. The presentation of data truly showed how teachers started from the individual and broadened their perspective from that. The simplicity of the themes and the unintentional integration of peace education values should be considered a vital aspect of the data, one that shapes Finnish peacefulness but may also have broader implications. The upcoming analysis section applies the analytical framework to further examine the implementation of peace education in the Finnish context.

## 7 Analysis

This chapter examines the application of the UNESCO Peace Education Framework (2024) as the foundation for the interview guide and primary analytical tool. Chosen for its comprehensive approach, the framework is a

credible source for structuring this analysis. Findings indicate that Finnish basic education teachers incorporate various components of the framework into their teaching, despite being unfamiliar with it. Teachers emphasized their role in fostering a culture of peace and the significance of peace education values. While not consciously aligning with the framework, their practices often reflected its core elements. This chapter analyses the framework's dimensions, highlighting similarities, differences, and unexpected findings.

## 7.1 Personal Dimension

In the interviews, teachers highlighted the personal dimension as one of the most important aspects of education. They emphasized strengthening individuals' abilities to self-regulate, manage internal conflicts, and act within society. Tools like self-reflection and perspective-taking were frequently used, as teachers explained that these practices foster a cohesive classroom environment. SEL was also a key focus, with many teachers seeing emotional regulation and expression as essential to creating a peaceful school atmosphere.

On the other hand, creativity was less emphasized by the teachers, with some focusing on celebration and play, elements that are not part of the UNESCO framework, yet arguably important and deserving greater visibility in both the framework and education. Betty Reardon (2001) and Elise Boulding (2002), pioneers of peace education, highlighted aspects of education that promote well-being and engage with emotional and social dimensions of learning, emphasizing hope, care, play, and celebration (Reardon, 2001; Boulding, 2002 in Afkhami, 2002). This importance was also highlighted by the teacher when they reflected on the students' use of phones and inability to play or use imagination as a tool. Many teachers wished they had more time to nurture creativity, but the packed curriculum often led to its dismissal.

Regarding political agency and world view reflection, teachers acknowledged that students engaged in these reflections but often struggled to reconcile the values promoted by the school with those from their home lives. The values of the home environment frequently conflicted with the school's goal of fostering a shared, critical understanding. Critical thinking was also a point of concern, with many teachers noting students' challenges in this area.

Finally, most teachers did not mention ethical or moral reflection or journaling, though some said they could only promote these through questioning students and encouraging reflection on their thinking.

Overall, the personal dimension of the framework offers valuable insight into how peace education is understood in Finland. The focus on the individual, their agency, and action reflects Finnish cultural values. However, this focus also raises a question: while many teachers identified "individualism" and a lack of empathy as barriers to a peaceful school environment, they simultaneously emphasized the importance of the individual as the primary actor.

## 7.2 Relational Dimension

Regarding the relational dimension, many of the teachers highlighted the individual's ability to work with others and as part of society. They emphasized individual agency, enabling students to engage with the world, and noted students' struggles with relationship and friendship skills. Conflict resolution was highly emphasized, with teachers arguing it is one of the most used tools in schools, though many students lack these skills. Teachers highlighted dialogue as crucial for peace education and conflict resolution, especially between teacher and student, focusing on SEL and emotion regulation.

This created an interesting paradox between the personal and relational dimensions. While teachers found group collaboration and friendship skills important, they often emphasized individual actions like active listening and

emotion regulation. Despite recognizing "individualism" and lack of empathy as issues causing conflict, teachers focused on individual rather than group dynamics.

The relational dimension also revealed some confusion among teachers, with certain aspects unfamiliar or difficult to reflect on. Education for health and well-being was seen as obvious, while restorative practices were considered unsuitable for the Finnish context, highlighting the need for context-specific models. Teachers perceived the relational dimension as overly comprehensive, with overlap in concepts with the personal dimension.

Finally, the relational dimension emphasizes global citizenship and challenging students' biases, encouraging discussions about global issues and cross-cultural understanding. Finnish teachers rarely engage students in intentional discussions about global issues, focusing instead on a child-centred approach. This raises questions about which approach better supports children's development and fosters a more peaceful society.

## 7.3 Political Dimension

The research found that many teachers unintentionally implement aspects of this dimension in their daily work. During interviews, teachers often realized how much they already applied these concepts, such as students' rights and responsibilities, school rules, and democratic decision-making, which were part of their routine. Teachers linked these ideas to broader societal concepts and civic engagement.

Human rights education was primarily emphasized by teachers in subjects like history and social science. Outside of these areas, many teachers noted that they didn't explicitly teach human rights, though they integrated it in an unintentional way. Although there was no consensus on the topic, the research revealed instances of human rights education, such as preschool students learning about children's rights on the United Nations Children's Rights Day.

However, it was clear that human rights education should be taught intentionally to be effective.

There was also a noticeable tension between the framework's emphasis on political dialogue and the reluctance of Finnish teachers to engage in such discussions. While the framework encourages challenging biases and empowering students to critically engage with civic issues, Finnish teachers were hesitant, often citing concerns about students' home environments and the strong political views they encountered there. This hesitation reflects the difficulty of balancing the framework's goals with the realities of diverse and deeply rooted perspectives outside the classroom.

Although teachers did not explicitly mention experimental or place-based learning, many referenced understanding the culture around them and using nature in their teaching, which indirectly aligns with place-based learning. This connection was not recognized by the teachers, even though the data indicated such practices. Context-specific peace education is an important aspect in scholarly work, and when done intentionally, place-based learning could involve exploring Sami culture or other cultural, political, and social factors in a more hands-on way.

## 7.4 Structural Dimension

This dimension was the least recognized by teachers. While topics like structural violence, including bullying, slurs, and online harassment, were discussed, there was limited reference to broader systemic issues such as social inequality, unless teachers taught subjects like social sciences or health sciences.

Teachers also struggled to reflect on concepts such as restorative justice when these did not align with the context's narrative. Additionally, topics like historical narratives, future perspectives, and systems thinking were primarily emphasized by teachers in subjects such as history, social science, and

geography. This suggests that applying such a framework to daily teaching may be challenging, particularly when it is not designed specifically for school environments or the local context. The data revealed that systems thinking and the understanding of how norms and values are embedded in society were mostly referenced by teachers in related subjects, such as how conflicts arise in society.

Overall, the structural dimension highlights a gap in the application of systematic and intentional thinking in peace education. Despite this, many teachers acknowledged that education in itself addresses these issues in a broader context, discussing them within the framework of Finland or the world.

The structural dimension also raises a significant question, more so than other dimensions: how valuable is peace education in schools in tranquil societies like Finland, which already has a high level of education? Does such a society need dedicated peace education?

## 7.5 Cultural Dimension

This dimension was highly talked about by the teachers but differed from the way the framework emphasizes it. Again, many of the teachers focused on the perspective of the individual when discussing the cultural dimension. They focused on how individuals can develop skills to understand different cultures and capabilities to have empathy for everyone despite differences. They focused on strengthening the agency of the student to make decisions that respect themselves and everyone around them. They also focused on experiencing different cultures as well as cross- and intercultural dialogue. The teachers emphasized that such notions are easier to implement when there is diversity in the group because such issues arise on their own. This reflected the very child-focused approach that the teachers had and the unintentional nature of education for a culture of peace.

The teachers did not focus on cultural differences of students and were unable to reflect, for example, on the different communication styles of their students or themselves. All except one of the teachers argued that they face students as students, not considering their ethnic or other background. This leaves another interesting paradox in the data; the teachers emphasized individuals and knowing the individuals but disregarded notions such as culture or ethnic background. It is important to note that the framework has aspects that could be only applicable to post-conflict countries, which could explain the emphasis on understanding different cultures within nations. But this research wishes to challenge and critically assess this notion and argues that understanding different communication and conflict styles would be helpful for long-lasting peace, whether in post-conflict or in a tranquil society.

In the cultural dimension, there is a clear tension between the framework's advocacy for cultural awareness and the prejudices students hold in the classroom. This is a direct issue that peace education seeks to address, and it could be especially beneficial in the Finnish context.

Finally, while teachers were willing to address cultural awareness within the subjects they taught, they were more hesitant to do so when it came to classroom dynamics. Failing to address these issues directly may, over time, lead to frustration among some students, especially when their needs are not acknowledged.

## 7.6 Ecological Dimension

The ecological aspect of peace education was highly valued by the teachers and continuously brought up across the data. They focused on concepts such as recycling, food waste, ecological thinking in general, and experiencing and valuing nature. SDGs were also brought up often by teachers who taught related topics but also in everyday school life. Many of the teachers expressed that the schools in general are very committed to ecological goals and have

made progress to support them. The rights and responsibilities of individuals related to such notions as well as awareness were brought up often, and many of the teachers emphasized that the dimensions are seen both unintentionally as well as intentionally in education.

From this dimension of the framework, all aspects were heavily recognized by the teachers and were also recognized to be one of the cornerstones of the curriculum. As the data showed, the multidisciplinary approach was highly utilized in environmental education.

When critically assessing the ecological dimension of the framework in the context of Finland, it can be detected in a way as a form of place-based learning. Nature is a value of the culture that is highly valued in general as well as in the education curriculum. Many of the teachers described experiencing nature and the outdoors around them, indicating an aspect of place-based learning.

## 7.7 Summary of the Analysis

Applying the UNESCO peace education framework deepens understanding of education for a culture of peace in Finland by highlighting how education promotes peace values, aligns with the framework, and reveals gaps. This framework reflects a general model of peace education tailored to Finland, showcasing strengths like individual agency, emotional regulation, and ecological awareness, while also exposing challenges in structural, political, and cultural dimensions. Key insights reveal that Finnish teachers unintentionally incorporate many aspects of the framework, suggesting that peace education principles are embedded in Finnish teaching culture. However, a paradox emerged where teachers focus on individual rather than collective engagement yet see individualism as an issue. The framework further indicates a need for contextual adaptation in Finland, as teachers struggle with political dialogue, systemic inequalities, and integrating



intercultural competencies. While Finland is a peaceful society, peace education could be more intentional and context-specific to address issues like discrimination and conflicting values.

## 8 Conclusions

In conclusion, the research identifies three urgent areas that require reconsideration in terms of peace education in peaceful countries: rethinking individualism, rethinking equality and inclusivity, and rethinking peace education as a whole in peaceful countries.

Firstly, "Individualism" was described by Finnish teachers as a problem that hinders a more peaceful school environment. Teachers stated that students are becoming more selfish, less empathetic, and less able to consider how their actions affect others. Although they did not explicitly mention the academic concept of individualism, which includes personal autonomy, self-reliance, and individual rights and liberties (Realo et al., 2002), they focused on how students are increasingly prioritizing themselves over the broader community.

This was not surprising to anyone familiar with Finnish and broader Nordic culture, where individualism is deeply embedded. This cultural trait was also evident in the data. Teachers emphasized individual students over the whole class or school community. This research highlights a connection between teachers' concerns about students exhibiting individualistic traits and the fact that teachers themselves emphasize individual agency and self-management, values deeply ingrained in Finnish individualistic culture. This suggests they were not fully aware of the link between their own actions and the issues they identified. It could indicate a need for systematic implementation and greater awareness of education for a culture of peace.

Previous research has found that the culture a country harbours plays a significant role in conflict resolution and decision-making (LeFebvre and

Franke, 2013). In peacekeeping and conflict situations that require external assistance, peacekeepers in a collectivist society should come from another collectivist society, as they understand the social dynamics, values, and decision-making processes of the people involved. The same applies to individualist societies (LeFebvre and Franke, 2013).

Building on this perspective, Finnish individualist society does not need to, nor would it likely be able to, change the individualistic culture embedded within society, the school environment, and individual students. However, teachers can strive to understand the cultural traits that shape their communication, decision-making, conflict resolution skills, and other factors influencing the culture of peace. Understanding different communication styles, and other cultural traits as well as collectivist cultures, can help guide students in recognizing why others handle situations differently.

This research suggests not only that teachers would benefit from understanding the culture they live in and reflecting on other cultures, but also that peace education everywhere should take into account the cultural context in which it is being implemented. Whether in an individualistic or collectivist society, peace education must consider the communication and conflict resolution styles inherent to that culture to be truly effective.

Secondly, equality and inclusivity were notions highly emphasized in the dataset, but what are these if we do not pay attention to what makes individuals vulnerable to discrimination, bullying, or inequality in the first place? The analysis revealed that some of the Finnish teachers, who highlighted these values simultaneously, unintentionally ignored the factors that put individuals at risk. This can be seen as a type of neutrality where the teachers wished to treat everyone the same way, but there is nothing neutral about neutrality. Education is not inherently neutral (DFID, 2003, in Kotono, 2012) and every human being harbours some type of bias which can lead to unintended consequences like discrimination if we do not consider specific social realities. A concept that we often associate this with is colour blindness, and this

conclusion takes race as an example, because racism is a problem that is highly prominent in Finnish society.

Colour-blindness is a concept that originated in the United States, but evidence of it has also been found elsewhere. In the Finnish context, we need to consider the idea of Finnish exceptionalism and the denial of racism in history (A. Rastas, 2012). Even though discriminatory practices in schools are not highly researched in Finland, there is evidence that they persist (Zacheus et al., 2019). It is important for Finnish teachers to understand this because even if they aren't prone to such thinking, other teachers or students might be as well as unintentionally the system and curriculum. The racist way of thinking is formed in the processes of racialization (Zacheus et al., 2019). This refers to classifying groups of people by perceptible and defining features which are based on assumptions (Zacheus et al., 2019). The way of thinking "students as just students" and ignoring race, is problematic because it suggests that racism does not exist in schools. In this data set there was clear evidence and concern for racism even though the word "racism" or "racist" were not explicitly mentioned. Previous research has concluded that the understatement of Finnish exceptionalism has led to a culture of denying racism and is typical in Finnish schools and in society (Alemanji, 2016). Although this research did not focus specifically on this topic, it suggests the need for further investigation. Peace education is most effective when tailored to the specific context (Bar-Tal, 2002) and therefore, this study highlights the importance of this approach for fostering peaceful coexistence in Finnish schools.

This research poses the question: what are the consequences of unintentional practices and contradictions in education models? The teachers truthfully communicated that they wish for equality and inclusivity and to them this meant treating everyone through the same means. It was clear that there was no ill intention, but there is always a flip side to everything. The teachers wished for a more peaceful school, society, and world and agreed with the notion that they, along with education, play a part in this, emphasizing the

needs of individuals. Yet, how is it that both they and their practices remained in ignorance? Treating everyone equally in school must entail equity, which includes understanding diversity rather than shying away from it. Without further research it is impossible to know where this stems from among the teachers. Does it stem from a strong teacher agency or from Finland being still relatively homogeneous or from something completely different?

Regardless, this suggests that education for a culture of peace must be done intentionally with emphasis on understanding the role education can play and recognising the fault practices in the education system. Especially because we live in a time where peace is fragile everywhere and we must aim to restore and keep the pieces we have, while simultaneously understanding the ever-changing nature of the world and adapt our education to it. Being able to see both sides of the story and broaden your perspective into realms that you did not think were necessary.

To conclude this, immigration or increasing diversity in society, in general, is not the reason why Finland needs education for a culture of peace. Multiculturalism and immigration do not bring less peace, gender- and sexuality-sensitive teaching does not cause perverted behaviour in schools, and eating tofu does not make a child gay—despite what the rhetoric of today’s politics in Finland might suggest. In fact, the opposite is true. Finland needs immigrants due to the country’s ageing population. In a couple of decades, “Finns” will not be able to care for the majority of the elderly or fill jobs because there will not be enough people to do so. Including sexuality in sex education has not had a negative impact but rather serves as a basic normalization of concepts that have always existed. Likewise, denying that a plant-based diet is better for the environment contradicts scientific facts.

Finally, the ultimate remark that this thesis aims to conclude is the primary question of whether education for a culture of peace in tranquil societies should be intentional or whether it will be sufficient if the non-intentional nature of education for a culture of peace continues.

The answer to this question is by no means linear. The data and analysis showed that education for a culture of peace persists even if it is not done intentionally. However, the data also revealed challenges, as teachers expressed that they do not have enough tools to handle certain issues, suggesting the need for intentional implementation. One could also argue that peace education and education for a culture of peace are not necessary in a society that is already peaceful. Intentional peace education risks promoting one-sided or culturally specific perspectives on peace, it may overlook the personal responsibility of teachers, and it can be perceived as indoctrination.

But what defines a society that needs peace education or education towards a culture of peace? A society at war? Peace and war are not simply two sides of the same coin; they are complex concepts that cannot be solved with simplistic solutions, and thus, should not be seen in black-and-white terms. The definition of war has also evolved over time. Today, war takes different forms compared to traditional understandings of conflict, so why should we assume that peaceful societies do not need to actively work to maintain the peace they have?

Intentional peace education emphasizes consistency and systematic implementation, which helps prevent conflict and promotes inclusivity and social cohesion. In the case of Finland, it could provide teachers with more tools and uncover methods and curriculum changes that would benefit all students. Because as mentioned earlier, education is not inherently neutral and needs to be criticised and worked on constantly (DFID, 2003, in Kotonu, 2012). Especially now that the Finnish government has decided to cut all funding for NGOs working on peace education, we must assess the consequences of this decision and understand why every teacher would benefit from integrating peace education into their practice. Even if, in the case of Finland, peace education is not introduced as a separate subject, it should be considered in curriculum development, teacher education, or as a separate course available to all teaching professionals. Finnish education must critically

assess how it implements the values it aspires to uphold and how it intends to act on preventive measures while actively working toward them.

So, what is the model peaceful societies should use? It is impossible to determine one model, but it is safe to say that it needs to be consistent, context-dependent and in the case of a school environment, it needs to tackle issues that students are experiencing today. It needs to take into consideration historical factors, like Finnish exceptionalism with current social issues. Additionally, it needs to consider the current state of the world and aim to connect individuals and bridge unity.

Finally, this thesis aims to spark discussion about why education for a culture of peace should be integrated into educational systems and tranquil societies and calls for future research on the topic to highlight this need. Education for a culture of peace and peace education goes beyond teaching non-violent conflict resolution and social justice; it also involves critically assessing the way we educate future generations and the vision we create for the society we wish to cultivate. Peace is not a static state—it is an ongoing process, and no nation can afford to neglect the continuous effort required to maintain peaceful coexistence in every sphere of life.

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## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Interview Guide: Exploring Peace Education and Culture of Peace in Finnish Schools

Introduction to Peace Education and Culture of Peace

Definition of peace education

Peace education is a process that aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to prevent conflict and promote a culture of peace at personal, societal, and global levels. It emphasizes critical reflection, empathy, and cooperation, fostering social justice, human rights, and sustainable development through education. Peace education can be instilled into the education curriculum as well as taught by NGOs.

1. Have you heard of the term peace education before?
2. Do you feel that aspects of peace education are present in your daily teaching? If yes, how?
3. What does a culture of peace mean to you in the classroom and in the school environment?
4. How do you see your role in promoting and teaching a culture of peace? Do you consider your role important?
5. What are some challenges or issues in your work that might hinder the promotion of peace?

Personal Level

Developing skills to manage internal conflicts, biases, and ethical/moral decision-making; fostering critical self-awareness and self-analysis; promoting social and emotional intelligence, creativity, and political agency.

1. Do you recognise the aspect in your teaching?

Guiding questions:

2. Do you teach students to reflect on their thoughts and emotions, for example, after a conflict?
  - Do you discuss with students what they could have done differently or how others might have experienced the situation?
3. How do you create space for creativity and allow students to have influence in their daily school life?
4. What strategies do you use to develop students' social and emotional intelligence?

Relational Level

Fostering empathy and understanding towards others; promoting respect for cultural, ethnic, and national differences; raising awareness of global interconnectedness; and developing non-violent conflict resolution skills.

1. Do you recognise the aspect in your teaching?

Guiding questions:

2. How do you promote empathy and understanding among students, particularly regarding cultural, ethnic, or national differences?
3. Do you have methods to create a classroom environment that encourages listening skills and open discussions?
4. How do you teach students to resolve conflicts non-violently and constructively?

Political Level

Developing an understanding of rights and responsibilities, promoting civic engagement and political agency, and practising democratic decision-making processes.

1. Do you recognise the aspect in your teaching?

Guiding questions:

2. How do you teach critical thinking to your students?
3. Do you include human rights education in your curriculum?
4. How do you help students understand civic engagement and what democracy means?
5. How do you assist students in understanding their rights and responsibilities both in the classroom and as members of society?

Structural/Societal Level

Raising awareness of social systems and institutions that shape relationships and norms, understanding structural violence and promoting equality and justice.

1. Do you recognise the aspect in your teaching?

Guiding questions:

2. How do you help students understand the systems and institutions that shape social norms and values?
3. Do you discuss topics like discrimination or inequality with students?
4. Are there any school programs that address issues like discrimination or inequality (e.g., KiVa or Verso program)?

Cultural Level

Raising awareness of the cultural roots of knowledge creation and meaning making; fostering appreciation for cultural differences and developing multicultural competencies.

1. Do you recognise the aspect in your teaching?

Guiding questions:

2. Do you discuss with your class what it means to come from different cultural backgrounds?



3. Have you ever experienced conflicts or divisions in your classroom due to cultural differences? How do you handle such situations?
4. Do you reflect on how your own cultural background influences your teaching approach and how students from different cultures perceive things?
5. For example, considering the war in Ukraine, do tensions arise in class between students with Russian or Ukrainian backgrounds? How do you handle these difficult situations and questions when they come up?

## Ecological Level

Promoting respect for all life, ecological awareness, and responsibility; fostering systems thinking and sustainable practices.

1. Do you recognize ecological perspectives in your teaching?

## Guiding Questions:

2. How do you teach students to care for the planet and nature? Do you address topics such as sustainable development, recycling, or other similar themes?

## Concluding Questions:

1. Do you think that the topics we discussed are emphasized in the school curriculum?
2. Do you feel that peace education in schools is more intentional or unintentional?
3. Finally, one of the most important aspects of peace education is that it should be context specific and include things that are current and important to the people that it is being implemented with, so What do you believe peace education should include to make schools and Finland a more peaceful and unified place for young people?

## Appendix 2 – List of Interviewees

**Teacher 1** (T,1) - Pre-School (Ages 6-7)

**Teacher 2** (T,2) - Pre-School (Ages 6-7)

**Teacher 3** (T,3) - Middle School (Ages 13-17), Geography, Biology, and Health Sciences

**Teacher 4** (T,4) - Elementary School, First Grade, Textiles and Design

**Teacher 5** (T,5) - Middle School, 8th Grade, Special Education

**Teacher 6** (T,6) - Middle School (Ages 13-17), Social Sciences and History

**Teacher 7** (T,7) - Elementary School, Fourth Grade

**Teacher 8** (T,8) - Elementary School, Fifth Grade

**Teacher 9** (T,9) - Elementary School, Third Grade

**Teacher 10** (T,10) - Middle School (Ages 13-17), Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry

**Teacher 11** (T,11) - Middle School, Grades 7-9, Languages

**Teacher 12** (T, 12) - Middle School, 8-9th Grade, Special Education