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Peace education, militarism and neo-liberalism: conceptual reflections with empirical findings from the UK

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ABSTRACT

This article explores 'peace days' in English schools as a form of peace education. From a historical overview of academic discussions on peace education in the US and Great Britain since the First World War, we identify three key factors important for peace education: the *political* context, the *place* in which peace days occur and *pedagogical* imperatives of providing a certain narrative of the sources of violence in politics. Although contemporary militarism and neoliberalism reduce the terrains for peace studies in English schools, peace days allow teachers to carve out spaces for peace education. Peace days in Benfield School, Newcastle and Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire, are considered as case studies. We conclude with reflections on the opportunities and limitations of this approach to peace education, and on how peace educators and activists could enlarge its reach.

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Introduction: peace education and peace days

In a world that continues to be characterised by multiple forms of violence, from full-scale wars to discriminations against refugees, schooling should include means of challenging the logics of violence and inviting young people to think creatively about non-violent solutions to their own and humanity's problems. In practice, however, the political contexts in which schools operate can severely restrict the ability of teachers to deliver 'peace education.' This article explores the structural challenges through neoliberalism and militarism which educators in English secondary schools face when wanting to teach peace as well as ways in which they can overcome these obstacles.

The focus of our paper is on 'peace days.' A peace day is an off-timetable day set aside to explore meanings and practices of peace with external partners and outside speakers from peace activists, charities and universities over a variety of

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formats including workshops, plenaries and question-and-answer sessions. These offer rich opportunities for creative and intensive engagement with ideas about peace and non-violence and, although not common, do occur in different forms in schools throughout the UK, yet have not been subject to scholarly analysis. The purpose of this article is to address this lacuna with a detailed study of two such peace days in order both to contextualise them in traditions of peace education and to identify the factors that make them work in contexts when school curricula face pressures from militarisation and neoliberalism. In so doing, we are not only contributing to the literature on peace education, but also to discussions on neoliberalism in relation to education by arguing that respective discussions should also take account of the often over-looked role of *militarization as a by-phenomenon of neoliberalism* in contemporary schooling.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 'Peace education in global contexts,' we survey the global and historical literature on peace education and identify three main factors that are discussed as key for peace education: the global *political* situation, the specific *place*-based context and a characteristic *pedagogy*. In Section 'Peace education in the recent UK context,' we argue that the current climate in England of militarism and neo-liberal infringement of education leaves little room for peace education in a tightly-regulated curriculum where the hitting of targets and performance in league tables is all-determining. Nonetheless, there are spaces within the curriculum where teachers can creatively introduce peace education, in particular Citizenship Studies and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and, as in Benfield's case, widening participation initiatives. In Section 'Peace days at Benfield and Comberton schools,' we examine how two English schools have utilised these opportunities to run peace days. These are Benfield School in urban Newcastle upon Tyne and Comberton Village College in rural Cambridgeshire.[1] Based on 36 semi-structured interviews with teachers, school managers, academics and peace activists as well as through focus groups and feedback from student participants, we examine the genesis, development and form of peace days and consider how peace days allow practitioners to address the three key elements of peace education identified in Section 'Peace education in global contexts.'[2]

Peace education in global contexts

Historical and conceptual debates

A survey of historical debates on peace education, mostly from the United States and United Kingdom, leads to seven observations from which we filter out three key factors which help explain different forms of peace education. These factors will be used to help us understand peace education in general and in particular, both the ways in which peace days work (illustrated by our case studies) and how this approach can be improved.

The first observation is that peace education includes a *wide range of themes*, such as foremost justice (Scanlon 1959; Hicks 2003); difference (Behr 2014); multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity (Staub 1935; Davis-Du Bois 1939; Neave 1984; Sobol 1990); gender (Pierson 1987; Boutilier 1988; Vellacott 1988); democracy, human rights, tolerance (Johnson and Johnson 2005; Danesh 2006; Sakade 2010); development (Fujikane 2003), environment (Walker 1974); citizenship (Oxfam Development Education Programme 1997; Cremin 2007; Bickmore 2008); and futurity (Bell 1997; Hicks 2004). The need for an 'integrative' peace education was early-on identified by De Boer (1936) and restated by Danesh (2006). Peace education curricula thus, generally recognise that 'peace' depends upon various additional themes; and grapple with how to convey these multiple interdependencies in education.

Secondly, peace education is differentiated according to age groups and whether it takes place at schools or universities (see amongst others Wright and Wright 1974; Vasquez 1976; Bing 1989). This affects not only *what* is taught, but also *how*.

Thirdly, and continuing this theme, peace education frequently stresses that it is, however, not only what is taught that matters, but *how* it is taught. Many peace educators posit that hierarchical and authoritarian structures which produce violence in society are replicated in traditional transmission-reception models of teaching. If this is the case, they contend, peace education should be a democratic process of questioning and challenging authority.

Fourthly, we observe that *there is no national or mono-cultural perspective on the content of peace education,* but a curriculum for peace education is constituted by practical experiences and philosophical teachings on non-violence from a global, cosmopolitan perspective.

Fifthly, peace education is *transdisciplinary* and therefore cannot and should not be bound to, or limited by, disciplinary paradigms. The literature posits the need for a comprehensive curriculum structuring all subjects, thus promoting peace education as not just one discipline and not just as a single day per week or year (for example, De Boer 1936; Danesh 2006), but as an organising focus for the whole curriculum and all subjects. Thus, throughout subjects – such as biology, mathematics, sports, religion, languages, physics – peace and non-violence, respectively become the central attention and pedagogical goal under and alongside which their contents are structured and presented (Pikas and Brock-Utne 1983; Johnson and Johnson 2005).

Sixthly, a recurring theme in peace education is an *emphasis on positive peace* as articulated by Martin Luther King Jr. who contrasted the 'negative peace' with 'positive peace' marked by the presence of justice, love and brotherhood (King 1956; see also Galtung 1969; Baylis 1982; Stephenson 2008).

Indeed, having identified the conceptions of positive and negative peace as central to peace education, we conclude finally and seventhly that a *common narrative of the human condition* can be identified in peace education. This acts as

a counter programme to military education whose main credo, as Van Slyck, Stern, and Elbedour (1999) critically argue, is that conflict would be the natural state amongst individuals and states and thus warfare is a regrettable inevitability. In contrast, peace education promotes (a) that violent conflict is not a natural state amongst people, peoples and societies, (b) that there are historical and present-day forms of cooperation and non-violent means of conflict management and resolution, and that (c) there are conflict-causing and conflict-propelling worldviews and perceptions which must be challenged through peace education.

Three key factors

From these seven general observations about peace education debates, we can conclude three key factors for peace education: *politics*, *place* and *pedagogy*. These will be used to help us understand, in part 4 of this paper, the empirical features and practical experiences of peace studies days held in Benfield and Comberton.

First, we conclude the importance of *politics* in fashioning peace education curricula. For example, we note the recurring mushrooming of peace studies in the UK and USA at times of grave military threat: in particular, the First and Second World Wars, and the 1980s 'Second Cold War' (Harris 1999; Pattie and Lantieri 1999). Similarly, processes of remilitarisation in the UK since the September 2001 attacks in the USA and the 'War on Terror' have led to an increase of military education in schools (Firer 2002; Cook 2008). Thus, we argue for a renewed urgency in peace education present-day today.

Second, we identify the importance of *place* in peace education – that is to say, the setting and context in which it takes place. This is twofold. *Firstly*, the links between classroom and militarised violence (Haavelsrud 1983; Vriens 1999; Duffy 2000; with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Spaulding 1998 and Hays 2002; also the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2005). Respective studies conclude that there is a fundamental difference not only with regard to the students and their experiences, but also with regard to the content (and pedagogy) whether peace education takes place in actual conflict settings and war zones or whether it occurs in societies that are more or less peaceful at home. *Secondly*, it refers to the educational policy context within which schools operate. In present-day UK, as this article will discuss at greater detail below, the twin forces of neoliberalism and militarism exert powerful influences which constrain peace education within schools.

The third factor is *pedagogy*. Peace education curricula are formed by an array of themes that bring in an age-appropriate manner global and interdisciplinary perspectives to bear to convey a narrative of the human condition that challenges the inevitability of violent conflict. Peace education also uncovers alternative, non-violent ways of moving from war to negative peace to positive peace.

Peace education in the recent UK context

When faced with the very practical decision of whether to approve the running of a peace studies day in a school, a head teacher or management team of a school needs to make a choice within constraints fashioned by the three key factors identified above: current understandings of *pedagogy,* the broader *political* contexts of the day as produced by global and state educational policies and the *place* in which students' discussions and/or experiences of violence and peace are formed. This section will show how two forces shaping the English education system – neoliberalism and militarism – are crucial to understanding teachers' and curriculum constraints for peace education. Arguing that neoliberalism and militarism have narrowed the possibilities for peace education in England, the paper will consider alternative spaces within English schools where peace education becomes nevertheless possible.

Obstacles to peace education

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, arising in the 1970s and mainstreamed in the USA and the UK by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher respectively, shifted governance away from the state emphasising privatisation, competition, performance management through audit cultures and the cultivation of subjects who are expected to cope in the high pressure and risky cultures it produces. Schools are supposed to prepare children to succeed in such cultures by developing curricula that focus primarily on 'transferable' skills. As the editors of a special issue of the journal *Educational Studies* conclude, 'neoliberal policies are transforming the delivery of public education' (Lakes and Carter 2011, 109).

The effects of neoliberalism have been especially marked in the schooling system. Writing of the US educational system, and drawing on the work of Nussbaum (2010), Baltodano describes how neo-liberal forces mitigate against the fostering of creative and critical thinking, and the formation of global visions of citizenship (Baltodano 2012, 489). With regard to the UK, the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced corporate practices through bidding cultures, performance data collection and niche marketing of schools. Subsequent developments announced self-governing schools outside local authority control which could be formed in alliance with charities, faith groups, businesses and other non-educational actors (Gunter 2015). The Conservative government of John Major passed an Education Act in 1992, mandating the inspection of schools by teams from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Neo-liberal practices and discourses were further embedded in UK schools under 1997–2010 New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (Wilkins 2012), with schools minister David Miliband describing children as 'educational shoppers in the market place' (cited in ibid, 128).

The results of both these periodic Ofsted inspections and public examinations are used to rank schools against each other in league tables, and to extend or terminate the contracts of staff. Indeed, a school's 'survival' depends on doing 'well' in auditing results, which come to be seen as determinants of the effectiveness, worth and value of a school. UK schools are thus considered to be 'instances par excellence of the audit culture endemic in UK (and other western) schooling contexts' (Keddie 2013, 751), where schools are placed under pressure for 'the constant production of evidence that you are doing things "efficiently" and in the "correct" way' (Apple 2005, 14). Keddie and Lingard suggest that the English schooling system 'is actually constructed or constituted through these data and the data infrastructures that manage them' (2015, 118). As hitting key metrics is thus a top priority for a school, it has an enormous influence on how decisions about timetabling are made. Therefore, any decision about whether a school can undertake such a time and resource-demanding activity as a peace studies day has to be justified within this logic.

Militarism

The second significant process which has fashioned the political and social environment for school education in England is militarism (or militarisation), a process through which military objectives, cultures and priorities extend into civil life (Jenkings et al. 2012), including schools. In the 1980s, peace education in UK schools was often framed as 'world studies' or 'global education,' characterised by the work of geographer David Hicks who directed the 'World Studies 8–13 Project.' Hicks stressed the role of peace education in questioning the cold war logics of a nuclear stand-off (Hicks 1986a, 1986b). The World Studies programme emphasised not only peace as content, but also as a practice, with the development of participatory and experimental learning to question knowledge hierarchies in the classroom. Cathie Holden reckons that by the mid-1980s 'over half the education authorities in the UK were promoting world studies' (2000, 4).

However, this educational movement ran against the grain of UK remilitarisation under the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. Her popular militarism was established by the Falklands/Malvinas War with Argentina in 1982 (Dodds 1996) and entrenched by her commitment to supporting the USA's confrontational stance towards the USSR in the post-*Détente* 'Second Cold War' (Dalby 1990), including the maintenance of the UK's nuclear weapon capabilities. In this climate, leading conservative philosopher Roger Scruton railed against world studies and peace studies as left-wing indoctrination (1985). Peace studies, Scruton argued with his collaborator Caroline (Baroness) Cox, 'is not a genuine educational discipline,' but is rather uncritical, politicised, pro-Soviet propaganda which is damaging to UK national interests (Cox and Scruton 1984, 7). They denounced peace studies as 'downright disreputable' (1984, 8) and argued that it should have no part in the curriculum. The government heeded such critiques, which informed the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 'where for the first time teachers

were required to teach a specified body of knowledge in 10 traditional subject areas with a largely Anglo-centric focus' (Holden 2000, 77). Global education was represented as a distraction from basic skills and knowledge. The emphasis was placed on the British past and through the introduction of the *National Curriculum* in 1988 all direct and explicit study of contemporary society had been removed.

The return of elements of peace education through the citizenship agenda in the Labour administration of Tony Blair (see below, next section) was, however, diluted by remilitarisation as a result of the UK's involvement from 2001 in the 'War on Terror.' In 2008, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Tony Blair's Labour successor, commissioned a report 'to identify ways of encouraging greater understanding and appreciation of the armed forces by the British public' (Davies, Clark, and Sharp 2008, 28). It diagnosed the growing military–civilian disconnect and the increasing public criticism of the armed forces as not a political response to the disastrous Iraq intervention, but rather a lack of 'familiarity and understanding' (2008, 4). It recommended 40 measures under four headings to increase visibility, improve contact, build understanding and encourage support of the armed forces in public life. Many of these were focussed on schoolchildren. They included strengthening cadet forces in schools, setting an expectation that officers of different ranks should make an identified number of annual visits to schools, and the recommendation that serving personnel of all ranks and forces should be allowed a day's warrant to revisit their old schools. For example, in the academic year 2013–2014 the armed services made 25 visits to schools in Cambridgeshire and 31 to schools in Newcastle.[3] These were predominantly for visits described as 'Careers' related or 'Curriculum Development.'

Returning to the report, it urged the designers of the National Curriculum to make understanding of the armed forces 'an essential element of the Citizenship Agenda and civic education in schools' (2008, 12). A major response to this has been the creation of a 'British Armed Forces Learning Resource,' with a foreword penned by Brown's successor as Prime Minister, Conservative leader David Cameron. Produced in high-quality print and made available for free from the Ministry Of Defence's website, this is a positive presentation of the history, role and ethos of the armed forces (Ministry of Defence 2014). *Forces Watch* argues that it 'presents a partial and uncritical history of British involvement in war, ignoring debate over the morality and legacy of such conflicts' and eschews a discussion of non-violent alternatives to resolving conflicts (ForcesWatch 2015, 1).

Possibilities for peace education/peace days

Given the pervasive influence of neoliberalism and militarism, is peace education still possible in English schools? We contend that it is, even if difficult. In general, as Keddie and Lingard (2015) argue, neo-liberal school governance has an inherent contradiction: it can free schools from local authority control, while at the same time subjecting them to tighter prescriptive mechanisms of centralised control

through auditing (see also Mills 2015). More specifically, teachers can creatively carve out spaces to teach ideas and skills associated with non-violence, using both existing school structures. In particular, the Peace Days in the two schools under consideration use the longer-standing model of occasional off-timetable scheduling. Traditionally a staple of the sciences for field trips (Lock 1998), its value in enabling creativity is also recognised in the humanities (Letts 2011) and more recently for citizenship studies (Burton and May 2015). However, as Barker, Slingsby, and Tilling (2002, 10) recognise, the 'increasing demands of an ever more complicated timetable' makes requests for off-timetable time harder to fulfil. Subsequently, there are especially two areas of the curriculum as alternative homes for peace education – 'Citizenship' and 'Personal, Social, Health and Economic' studies.

Citizenship studies

Citizenship studies were introduced in 2002 by the Labour government, following the commissioning of a report on citizenship teaching in 1998, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998). The document emphasised:

> Citizenship and the teaching of democracy, construed in a broad sense that we will define, is so important both for schools and the life of the nation that there must be a statutory requirement on schools to ensure that it is part of the entitlement of all pupils. (1998, 7)

Crucially, it identified key knowledge targets, namely that students (aged 8–9) should be able to

> understand the world as a global community, including issues such as sustainable development, economic interdependence, heavily indebted countries, and the work of United Nations organisations and major non-governmental organisations; understand the meaning of terms such as *stewardship, interdependence, ethical trading, peace-making and peacekeeping*. (1998, 52; emphasis in original)

The 2002 Education Act mandated the teaching of citizenship under 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural values' (SMSC). Surveying the change represented by the introduction of citizenship studies, this represented a fundamental shift in support for global perspectives in education. Nonetheless, the heavy emphasis on testing and league tables remains a tension. However, as we saw with the Prime Ministership of David Cameron (2010–2016), building on the new directions established under the Gordon Brown Government, citizenship has been in fact a key site of the remilitarisation of the curriculum. Furthermore, as with the 1980s educational reforms, since 2010 the focus of citizenship studies has moved almost wholly to the national level. A National Curriculum Guidance published in 2013 emphasises 'the importance of citizenship education for participation in society through the understanding of democracy and the rule of law,' as well as by enabling students to 'explore political and social issues critically' while being able to 'manage their money well and make sound financial decisions' (Department for Education 2013).

In 2014, as the government struggled to respond to the phenomenon of young British Muslims being radicalised by the Islamic State or similar groups, it issued new guidance for teaching SMSC. This mandated, within the framework of the 2002 Education Act, the teaching of 'British values' as part of the Prevent Duty to combat radicalisation (Department for Education 2014; Citizenship Foundation 2015). To ensure compliance, in 2015 Ofsted issued a new handbook for its inspectors, detailing how 'social values' are taught as part of SMSC, such as 'acceptance and engagement with the fundamental British values' of democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, individual liberty (Ofsted 2016, 36).

Personal, social, health and economic development

A second space for peace education are 'Personal, Social, Health and Economic' courses (PSHE). The teaching of PHSE is mandatory for all English schools. However, its content is not prescribed by the National Curriculum. As the current Department for Education (2013) guidelines state, PHSE should 'allow teachers the flexibility to deliver high-quality PSHE.' It would therefore be 'unnecessary to provide new standardised frameworks or programmes of study. PSHE can encompass many areas of study. Teachers are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription.'

The guidance further states that the emphasis should be on equipping individuals to 'make safe and informed decisions' in particular with reference to drugs, finance, sex/relationships and health/diet. The advice includes that where possible PHSE should be used to build on statutory national curriculum content with reference to statutory guidance on subjects such as in the 'Sex and Relationship Education Guide' (Department for Education and Employment 2000). Although there is an obvious tension between the stated freedom of teachers to define their own curriculum and the steer towards using the subject to reinforce areas of the National Curriculum, PHSE nonetheless provides a potential space for schools to incorporate peace education into their curricular.

In conclusion, the decision for an English school to commit resources to running a peace studies day is made in the context of national educational and foreign policies. Neoliberalism has refashioned how education is valued, and militarism has tended against the teaching of peace in schools. A peace studies day hence must be justified within these constraints. We thus see a narrowing of spaces for teaching peace, yet opportunities remain.

Peace days at Benfield and Comberton schools

Organisational issues

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

the theme of the day, the Benfield day used video clips of young people involved in non-violent protests against racial segregation in Birmingham, Alabama 1963 and the Comberton one used a clip from the 1983 Film *Ghandi* showing non-violent protestors against British rule in India. Questions, such as 'Can non-violent activism change the world without force?' are posed to the students. Following this, students circulate between small-group workshops run by visiting facilitators. Activities include thematic workshops, interactive activities, songs and crafts (e.g. making 'peace badges'). Table 1 lists titles of workshops run in recent years, giving a sense of the wide range of themes identified in section 2 as typically characterising peace education. At the end of the day, a plenary Q&A session is run, either involving a single speaker (the Comberton model) or a panel of workshop facilitators (the Benfield model). While Comberton involved year 11 students (age 16), Benfield experimented with delivering the day to different age groups: in 2014 the event ran over two days, the first day to around 60 year 12 students (age 17) and the second to approximately 170 year 7 and 8 students (age 12–13). The Comberton Peace Studies ran from 2003 to 2014, involving a total of 3000 year 11 students The day stopped running in 2015 because the school reverted to having lessons on timetable, which presents huge practical issues in negotiating to have all year 11s 'off timetable' for a day.[4] The Benfield day involved around 60 year 11 students each year between 2013 and 2015, joined by some 170 year 7 and 8 students in 2014. It was rested in 2016 for logistical reasons, but a restart is planned.

Using the three-fold structure identified above, the remainder of the article will explore the genesis of these days in *political* contexts of UK foreign policy; how teachers are able to maintain and justify them within the *place*-bound constraints of neoliberalism and militarism; and analyse (with particular reference to Benfield) how they work *pedagogically*.

Table 1. Topics delivered at Comberton and Benfield peace studies days.

Comberton, 2011	Benfield, 2014
Media representations of Muslims and Arabs	Is Martin Luther King still relevant today?
Peace and art	Nuclear weapons and the bomb factor
Non-violent communication	Religious symbols and peace in Sri Lanka
Peace in Israel/Palestine	The military and young people
Conflict and violence	Differences: positive or negative?
Music and peace	Seeking sanctuary in Britain
Seeds of hope: disarming a Hawk jet	Understanding everyday differences and boundaries
Peace and reconciliation	The value of disobedience:
Conflict resolution	The December 1914 Christmas truces
Film	Handling conflict
Disarmament for development	Sport and peace
	Military spending and development
	Spectrum exercise: understandings of violence/non-violence
	Veterans for peace – the UK military and Iraq

Politics

While there are multiple perspectives on peace education in schools, the Comberton and Benfield peace days have their own geneses and trajectories that can be located within the political context of post-cold war UK foreign policy.

The story of both begins in the early 2000s and has interconnected roots. A mother of a Comberton pupil was a Peace activist with Campeace, a Cambridge-based organisation founded in opposition to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 and subsequently growing against UK involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. She had children at Comberton and was horrified to learn that the school had hosted an 'army day' in which students were invited to shoot at straw effigies of people. She wrote to the headmaster of Comberton who passed her letter to a colleague in Personal and Social Development. The school responded to the mother by asking her to develop an educational response. She then gathered a number of people from Campeace to form a group to see how they could respond to this invitation. A teacher at the school became the main point of liaison and organiser of the event. He recounts:

> I had a personal interest in the subject because before I got married and had a family I spent the summer holidays working in refugee camps in the Balkans. In 1997 I worked north of Zagreb, 1998 in Bosnia with displaced families, 1999 in Kosovo (…) in May and by July it was safe enough for me to go [and] I went to a UNICEF refugee camp, where I taught English. So I already had an interest in this sort of thing.[5]

The first day ran in 2003 with presenters from Campeace and representatives from their wider networks of peace activists. These included Paul (name anonymised) who had been involved with peace work since the early 1950s with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), was the chair of Catholic peace group Pax Christi, and a founding member of Campeace; Steve (name anonymised), who works at a high level for the Campaign against the Arms Trade and the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship and is on the board for the Peace Museum in Bradford; as well as the keynote speaker Pete (name anonymised), founder of CND.

Benfield's annual peace days began a decade after Comberton's, and likewise have their origins in responses to UK foreign policy. But in Benfield's case, these were academic as well as activist responses. The origins of the Benfield peace day lie in conversations between key Benfield teachers and Nick Megoran (author). Through personal and professional contacts, Nick Megoran (author) was involved in delivering workshops at Comberton in the late 2000s. In 2011, a group of activist geographers began conversations at the annual conference of the Institute of British Geographers. United in their opposition to the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions, they agreed to try and mobilise geographers to establish peace work in schools along the Comberton model. Thus, Nick Megoran (author) had begun to formulate the idea and wanted a local school to try it with. Nick Megoran (author) established the Martin Luther King Peace Committee, a group of academics and university chaplains committed to peace studies, named in honour of the legacy

of Rev Martin Luther King, Jr., who visited Newcastle University in 1967 to receive an honorary degree. Judy (name anonymised), a history teacher at Benfield who led the peace day from the school side, was a neighbour and personal friend and suggested Benfield trial it, working on this with Joe (name anonymised), a religion studies teacher at the school. Both were passionate for their subject areas and the 'Widening Participation' – aspect of Benfield under which students should experience university teaching.

Place

The two peace days under consideration came about because of both global *politics* (as we have seen above), and, too, because of various factors in the local *place*. Indeed, local contexts were significant not only in whether the peace days could take place, but also how they took place and have developed.

As we have seen in the discussion on militarism and neoliberalism above, there is no obvious disciplinary space in English curricula for 'peace studies,' and neoliberal imperatives put pressure on schools to focus on end-results, rather than on the wider development of cultural or social capital. This makes it difficult for schools to find the time to be involved in activities which might contribute to a broader education or personal enrichment. As David Leat, Professor of Curriculum Innovation at Newcastle University, explains:

> The current situation in schools is that they have targets, particularly at GCSE and A-Level which means constant monitoring, target-setting, feedback and intervening with staff. There is a performative culture in schools which means that curriculum development as a bottom up process has somewhat withered in secondary schools. There is not a lot of time for enrichment for [a peace studies day].[6]

And Peter (name anonymised), Comberton Head of School, also talks about the pressure from Ofsted to meet targets:

> (The) government's agenda drives what happens in schools, partially at least. There are new progress measures (…) English and Maths are been given a disproportionate weighting (40% of the measure) … So subjects that aren't as highly rated by the government [such as] PE, PHSE and Arts and Technology are squeezed in terms of curriculum time …[7]

Therefore, the Comberton peace day was justified by 'saving up' timetabled slots for PHSE and collapsing them into a single day.

Benfield teachers found a different way to justify the inclusion of the peace day in the school year. These were place specific, based on university entrance being not particularly high amongst Benfield students. However, Benfield is one of Newcastle University's 'Partner' schools – a scheme whereby, the University works with the school in order to encourage and support students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds to apply to university. So teachers presented the Benfield Peace Studies Day at Newcastle University as an opportunity for their students to experience university life and teaching and to thereby raise their aspirations.

Janice (name anonymised), from Benfield School, was responsible for the school's 'Gifted and Talented' students, a programme designed to support talented children in state schools said:

> The Peace Studies Day coincides with [our] Higher Education Week; we wanted students to experience what university might be like (…) [and] how it might … get them to think about things in a slightly different way. We looked at the Comberton Peace Studies Day model and thought about what would work with Benfield students and what wouldn't.[8]

And Janice (name anonymised) concurred:

> We didn't think that it would be good for our school to be off timetable for a whole day and we wanted our students to … experience the university (…) so we didn't follow the model at Cambridge. So it's evolved in different ways over the three years, we've tried different things.[9]

In the second year of the Benfield Peace Study Day, younger children (aged 12–13) were invited to take part. However, this was not deemed a success as the concentration demanded was too much for some and it was not repeated the following year. Further, the participation of geography, history and politics academics also contributed to the day's aim of giving students a taste of university teaching. This was a marked change from Comberton where all the speakers were activists. In order to help academics adapt to a different classroom environments, a training day was run in advance where staff from Newcastle University's School of Education joined teachers and students from Benfield to help train the workshop facilitators. All of these measures were necessary to meet the needs of the school and thus justify the school's participation.[10]

We therefore see that although both peace days followed on paper a similar format, local contexts produced different configurations of facilitators, logistics and indeed purposes between the two days.

Pedagogy[11]

Peace as concept

Both peace days had, at their core, a commitment to bring cosmopolitan and interdisciplinary perspectives to bear to convey a narrative of the human condition that challenges the inevitability of violent conflict and uncovers alternative, non-violent ways of moving from negative to positive peace. Many of the activists at the Benfield and Comberton days represented groups involved in the Peace Education Network, whose philosophy is stated as:

> True Peace is more than the absence of war; it requires the presence of justice and care. Without these basic core values, there can be no real or lasting peace.[12]

The plenaries of each day began with newsreel or cinematic portrayals of King's and Gandhi's politics of non-violence. These messages were reinforced throughout the days by speakers from a variety of backgrounds using examples from the UK and globally. We saw above how personal accounts of the origins of the peace days

in Comberton and Benfield attest to the personal engagement and commitment which lie behind them, but they also point to shared pedagogies.

In the focus groups conducted immediately after the Benfield day, students were asked what they had learnt. A recurring answer was that they had come to think of war and peace in different and new ways. One student said: 'The topic, peace, I thought you could only talk about it in one way, but there are different ways of talking about it,' to which one of her classmate added: 'There's always a reason for war, we just found out why you shouldn't do it, rather than why you should.' Given the framing of the day around Martin Luther King Jr., students were also asked to what extent they could relate to him. One student replied: 'I think everyone can relate to him, because he's like really significant, like Ghandi and people [who] … changed history.'[13] These focus groups indicated that students had grasped the main principles of the day – the contention that war is not inevitable, different notions of peace, and the power of nonviolence.

Peace as pedagogical practice

In the literature on peace education we identified a recurrent concern with interactive, non-hierarchical teaching methods that was shared by teachers, activists and academics in Comber ton and Benfield. Thus, the Comberton day was formed out of conversations between parents and teachers and an invitation to an activist-parent to develop a peace education stream. In Benfield, the decision to hold the peace day at Newcastle University rather than the school was based on a request by the teachers that suited their school's desire to increase university applications. Further, in the Benfield case, a training day was run to help academics learn appropriate pedagogies for the school classroom environment from activists, teachers and school students. These stressed the importance of interactive teaching sessions, emphasising the value of instructors eliciting and working with student ideas, questions and interventions.

How successful were these approaches? This is difficult to answer, as a humanities education slowly informs values necessary to sustain a peaceful and democratic society over time, and thus the role of a single component of that is impossible to 'measure.' However, based on our interviews, we can make comments on how teachers, students, activists and academics considered the days.

The need to be 'interactive' was stressed as a key pedagogical imperative. Teacher and student feedback on the Peace Studies Day sessions indicate that interaction, student engagement and activity (often involving physical movement) are key to student satisfaction. The Benfield day's dual aim of teaching peace as well as wanting to introduce students to a university environment produced tensions, however, one of teachers' motivation and rationale clearly was to make students experience university-style teaching and learning. Moreover, the teachers particularly want the students to be challenged, and interactive learning would be key for that.[14] Student feedback in focus groups concurred. Most students in both year 10 and year 12 focus group said they would have liked more interactive sessions.

At the same time, however, the interactive methods favoured by teachers and activists are not universally popular with students. For example, in both the Comberton and Benfield days a number of speakers used 'activity lines' to elicit interaction. Interviews on both days reported students complaining of repetition between some sessions run by activists:

> When asked to tell us what their best external event had been, the students agreed it was a holocaust survivor who sat on a chair and told his story for 45 min, with no interaction at all. The ability to tell compelling stories that students can engage with clearly trumped the imperative to be interactive.[15]

In spite of the limitations of the Benfield day arising from its academic-activist interaction, some year 10 students, in contrast, particularly enjoyed the university-style teaching. This was clear from comments made during the focus group with year 10 students at Benfield School.[16]

Some students commented on content, noting the range of new topics related to peace that were taught: Mike (name anonymised) said, 'It was really interesting because it was totally new topics, it wasn't what we learn in school.' A number of students also appreciated the pedagogical differences. For one student, 'It was different being at university. They didn't treat you like a kid, they were just open and honest about everything they were talking about.' His classmate opined that

> it was good that they welcomed you to ask questions, while they were speaking you could put your hand up and ask a question. You could argue with them and give your own opinion. You don't get to do that here so much, you're told.

The first student agreed, struck by the novelty of knowledge as contestable and co-constructed. We can conclude from these focus groups that pedagogically the peace days were broadly successful at engaging with older students. They also appreciated the move from hierarchical to dialogic ways of teaching peace.

Concluding discussion: making space for peace

Peace is a vital component of education in our violent world, yet neoliberalism has diminished the timetabled space available for its study in UK schools, and militarism has closed down the discursive space for non-violence. Nonetheless, off-timetable Peace Days provide spaces for creative and rewarding peace education to occur. A fuller discussion of the impacts of the peace days is beyond the scope of this paper, and points to the need for further research. The purpose of this scholarly analysis is to help activists, educators and academics reflect on how peace days operate, how they could be improved, and what can be learnt by those who wish to develop them in new venues.

Firstly, we observe that the international *political* context is crucial. 'Campeace' in Cambridge and the 'Martin Luther King Peace Committee' in Newcastle that resourced the peace days at hand were formed in response to the global challenge of interventionism in UK foreign policy.

Similarly, *place* – the local and educational context – was vital. Absolutely indispensable is the role of key members of teaching staff at the schools. Without them, and without good relationships between them and activist networks, the peace days could not have occurred: Because neoliberalism and militarism have turned UK schools into an inhospitable terrain for peace education, it is necessary to persuade school administrations to devote significant resources to peace education. For the Comberton peace days, this was under 'Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural' values within Citizenship Studies and Personal, Social Health Education (PHSE); for the Benfield days, school involvement was justified in terms of the requirement to teach PSHE and, too, the imperative to raise aspirations amongst the 'gifted and talented' students to go to university.

There is, nonetheless, a drawback bringing peace education into schools for single days. Teachers in both schools, and academic participants in the Benfield case, asked questions about how peace days could be better incorporated into the ongoing education of students and the curriculum, rather than being one-off events. Both peace days studied here offer some indications of how longer-term engagement could be reached and look like. In the run up to the Comberton day, a local peace activist visited the school on a number of occasions and worked with music students on a concert of peace which concluded the peace day. In Benfield, a session on religious symbols and the Sri Lankan Civil War was designed closely in connection the religious education curriculum.

Finally, reflection on *pedagogical* issues is important. A shared narrative of peace and conflict (and the role of non-violence) was important for framing a one-day curriculum, particularly in an interdisciplinary and multi-thematic perspective. Peace days should also be age appropriate – as the Benfield experiments show, they work best for older students. There was also a shared discourse that sessions should be non-hierarchical, which was interpreted as being enacted through 'interactive' teaching. Some academic speakers struggled to design sessions appropriate for school students, and this research points to the value of providing training and reflection to help them. It also shows how difficult this is to achieve. However, the danger with trying to teach a set of classroom techniques (such as break-out groups or opinion lines) is that sessions become repetitious, a trap into which professional peace activists fell at times. Peace days thus demand a strong and sustained set of relationships amongst and between activists and school teachers, commitment over time and resources. There is no simple blue-print; rather, peace days must be negotiated in unique ways within local contexts. Nonetheless, they are productive and exciting ways to ensure that a stimulating peace education is not entirely squeezed out of schools.

Notes

1. In the following we do anonymise individual teachers of these schools, however, mention the school names. Free information on the schools' participation is available at www.mlkpc.org.
2. On this methodological approach of semi-structured individual and group interviews (focus groups with students), see the methodological and ethical guidelines for design, data collection, and data storage as well as important further literature at http://www.qualres.org/HomeFocu-3647.html. As mentioned in the note above, we have anonymised the name of interviewed teachers and students as sensible data, however, not of the involved schools and academics.
3. FOI 205/06654, FOI 2017/02545 and FOI 064161. We requested figures for all armed forces visits to schools in the Cambridgeshire and Newcastle Local Education Authorities 2012–2015. Due to incomplete figures being provided (possibly due to a confusion between academic and calendar years) we have used the complete 2013–2014 year. We would also note that as the MOD records visits by town rather than LEA, these figures may not be entirely accurate.
4. Interview at Comberton (18/9/2015).
5. Interview at Comberton, (18/9/2015).
6. Interview with David Leat, Newcastle University (5/6/2015).
7. Interview at Comberton (18/9/2015).
8. Interview at Benfield school (12/8/2015).
9. Interview two teachers from Benfield school, 12/8/2015.
10. Interview two teachers from Benfield school, 12/8/2015.
12. http://peace-education.org.uk/teach-peace (Accessed September 2016); see also https://research.ncl.ac.uk/martinlutherking (accessed December 2016).
13. Focus group with year 10 students at Benfield School, 9/7/2015.
14. Interview at Benfield school (12/8/2015).
15. Interview with Nick Megoran (founder of the peace study day Newcastle) Newcastle University, 17/12/2015.
16. See note xi.

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