



TEACHERS AS PEACEBUILDERS: EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE EDUCATION IN PAKISTANI SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study explores teachers' perceptions of school violence and investigate how these views influence their role as peacebuilders in educational environment. The study explore that effective peace education depends not only on supporting peaceful values but also on teachers' aptitude to identify, understand, and respond to varied kinds of violence within schools. Implementing an interpretive qualitative approach and thematic content analysis, the study investigates teachers' understandings of violence and the implications of these understandings for classroom management, student relationships, curriculum implementation, and peace-oriented pedagogical practices. The findings explore that teachers often associate violence mainly with physical aggression, whereas less perceptible types for example psychological, relational, gender-based, cyber, structural, and cultural violence remain under recognized. This inadequate understanding may hinder efforts to make comprehensive, safe, and peaceful learning environments. The analysis further recommends that teachers who have a wider conception of violence are better positioned to foster empathy, respect, conflict resolution, and non-violent communication among students. The study suggests a violence-informed peacebuilding framework that prepares teachers to find various types of harm, model non-violent behaviors, employ curative methods to conflict, and support students through suitable safeguarding and referral mechanisms. It determines that teachers play a vital role in transforming schools into spaces of peace and social justice. Strengthening teachers' understanding of violence is therefore essential for advancing meaningful peace education, increasing student well-being, and promoting a positive school climate.

Keywords: *Violence, peace education, school violence, teacher education, bullying, social cohesion, qualitative research are the keywords.*

Introduction

Schools are not only a vehicle for the transmission of academic knowledge. These are social places which children experience in daily life and in which they learn to speak with others, to deal with conflicts, to accept difference, to use power, and to determine what is considered acceptable behaviour. In this regard, teachers frequently are expected to make a contribution to peace, citizenship, social cohesion and moral development in the course of normal classroom activities. This is a reasonable expectation, but can be challenging to meet if the concept of violence is narrow or ambiguous.

This article's main thesis is that if teachers are unable to identify the nature of harms to be averted in the process of peace education, then they will not be able to teach peace. Values like

tolerance, respect, empathy, cooperation, patience, discipline and harmony are often used to illustrate peace. While these values are significant, they may be too abstract for students unless they are accompanied by other values. A lesson on respect is more valuable when it can be related to real-life experiences in the school, for instance, humiliation, name-calling, exclusion, bullying, harassment, unfair treatment, and fear.

This is a particular problem at Secondary School. Adolescents are in the process of forming their social identity, moral judgements, behaviour in peer groups, control of emotions and early civic attitudes. When violence is defined solely in physical terms, a lot of bad behaviours are not part of the lesson: a teacher's degrading comment, a student's repeated taunt of a weaker student, a group of students that excludes another; a school rule that tacitly discriminates against certain children. While not always flashy, these practices determine whether students are likely to have positive experiences in school, in terms of safety, dignity and fairness.

Violence-informed does not imply fear/classroom conflict. It implies that peace education should be based on the reality of children in the school life. The study thus attempts to answer three related questions: What should teachers mean by violence in the context of the school? How is this knowledge relevant to peace education? What role can teacher education, curriculum materials and school policy play in enhancing the practicality, protectiveness and sociality of peace education?

Figure 1

Conceptual relationship between teachers' understanding of violence and meaningful peace education



Note. The upper pathway illustrates how a narrow understanding of violence can lead to a 'slogan approach' to peace education. The bottom pathway illustrates the conceptual clarity that facilitates teachers' linking of peace with recognition, response and prevention.



Literature Review

Understanding Violence in the School Context

Violence does not necessarily refer to physical violence. Violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or a group or community, which may result in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (Krug et al., 2002). This definition is helpful in school based work as it encompasses all of these elements not only physical injury, but also power, threat, psychological harm and deprivation.

The school has always been a part of the problem and the solution to school violence. Violence can be direct and apparent, for example, fighting, slapping, corporal punishment, vandalism or assault. It can also be subtler and commonplace, for example, verbal humiliation, intimidation, threats, bullying, sexual harassment, exclusion, discrimination and practices that silence the victims. The literature also cautions that the definition of school violence determines what schools measure, what teachers see, and what schools consider as a problem that needs to be addressed (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Henry, 2000).

The global reports from UNESCO on school violence and bullying identify physical, psychological and sexual violence, bullying and cyberbullying as being a threat to learning, safety, health and well-being (UNESCO, 2017, 2019). Other research also reveals that violence in schools is not one or more acts of violence, but rather a set of relationships, discipline practices, peer cultures and institutional responses (Altun & Baker, 2010; Astor et al., 2004; Batsche & Knoff, 1994). For teachers, this means being able to recognise violence in a way that is practical and helps them to make judgements day-to-day in the classroom and school corridors.

Violence is poorly understood and so undermines peace education. Failure to recognize that violence can be manifested in many everyday behaviours, that are not necessarily obvious as serious crime or open physical assault, can mean that teachers do not notice them. The education for peace has to start with clarity of concepts, therefore. Teachers and students should be aware of what constitutes harm, the importance of harm, how harm is normalized and what can be done if harm shows up.

Table 1

Forms of School-Related Violence and Teacher-Facing Peace-Education Responses

Form of violence	Teacher-facing indicators	Peace-education response
Physical violence	Fighting, slapping, corporal punishment, assault, forced physical intimidation, or deliberate damage to another learner's belongings.	Stop immediate harm, protect the learner, avoid harsh discipline, document incidents, and refer serious cases through school procedures.
Psychological and verbal violence	Humiliation, threats, ridicule, degrading language, intimidation, shaming, or	Use respectful correction, teach dignity through examples, challenge abusive



	repeated embarrassment.	public language, and model non-violent communication.
Bullying and cyberbullying	Repeated peer aggression, social targeting, online harassment, image-sharing, name-calling, exclusion, or group-based intimidation.	Look for patterns rather than isolated incidents, protect the targeted learner, involve responsible adults, and rebuild peer norms.
Sexual and gender-based violence	Harassment, coercion, unwanted sexualized comments or contact, gendered humiliation, or fear created through sexual threat.	Use clear safeguarding procedures, avoid blaming the victim, maintain confidentiality, and refer through approved reporting channels.
Relational and social violence	Isolation, exclusion, rumour-spreading, group pressure, forced silence, or practices that make a student socially unsafe.	Teach inclusion, fairness, empathy, and restorative dialogue; observe peer dynamics rather than only visible fights.
Structural or cultural violence	Unfair rules, discriminatory norms, biased textbook examples, silence around harm, or practices that normalize fear or inequality.	Review school culture, curriculum examples, discipline policy, and teacher routines so that peace is supported institutionally.

Note. The categories are offered as a recognition tool for teachers. They are not prevalence estimates.

Peace Education and the Role of Teachers

Peace education is more than asking students to avoid conflict. It involves the development of knowledge, dispositions, and skills that support non-violent relationships, empathy, justice, cooperation, responsible conflict resolution, and respect for human dignity. Education has also been linked with resilience, social cohesion, and peacebuilding in conflict-affected or socially divided contexts (Harber, 2013; Novelli et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2016).

Teachers occupy a difficult but powerful position within this process. They interpret curriculum, select examples, manage classroom conflict, model acceptable language, and decide whether a behaviour is ignored, punished, discussed, or referred. A teacher who recognizes humiliation as psychological harm is more likely to avoid degrading language and to intervene when students ridicule one another. If a teacher is aware that humiliation is a psychological injury, he or she will be less likely to use language that humiliates, and will more likely step in when a student makes fun of another student. Even when a teacher is teaching a lesson on



respect, a teacher who thinks that using corporal punishment is a normal way of disciplining students can unconsciously be counterproductive for peace education.

This double role puts teacher preparation at the heart and center of the matter. Teachers require the language of peace as well as the practical ability to identify harm, defuse conflict, respond non-violently and pass on situations that are beyond their ability to manage in the classroom. If this is not done, peace education can easily turn into a moral issue taught in the book, but contradicted in the classroom.

Why Teaching Peace Without Teaching Violence Remains Partial

The absence of violence education in peace education leaves a disjunction between moral discourse and the actual school life. Students can be taught words like respect, patience, tolerance and cooperation, without understanding what it is in practice that is a violation of these values. For example, a lesson about respect should also include information about why calling someone a name, ridiculing them, excluding them from the group, intimidating them and digitally harassing them are all harmful. It is important to engage students in a lesson on justice to consider issues of power, fear, silence, and unequal treatment.

This is the same issue that is found in textbooks and teacher training. If peace is discussed in textbooks only in general moral terms, without being defined or described in terms of the various forms of violence, then teachers may not have much content to discuss in class. Bullying, child protection, restorative response, non-violent discipline, referral mechanisms and classroom aggression are not covered in teacher education, which may make it difficult for teachers to put peace values into practice.

A violence-informed approach thus is not in place of moral education. It provides a more specific goal for moral education. It assists teachers in demonstrating to their students the values that are safeguarded by peace, what violence is, and how a school community can act to prevent the same violence it is trying to avert.

Table 2 *Teaching Peace as a Moral Message Compared with Violence-Informed Peace Education*

Dimension	Peace taught mainly as a moral message	Violence-informed peace education
Conceptual focus	Peace is presented mainly as a desirable moral value.	Peace is connected with recognition of physical, psychological, sexual, relational, bullying-related, and structural harm.
Classroom examples	Examples remain general and may not reflect students' daily experiences.	Examples are drawn from real school situations such as humiliation, exclusion, corporal punishment, harassment, and peer aggression.
Teacher role	The teacher mainly delivers	The teacher also models non-



	moral instruction.	violence, identifies harm, responds safely, and refers serious cases.
Student learning	Students repeat peace-related words and values.	Students learn to identify, prevent, report, and respond to harmful behaviour.
Policy connection	Peace remains a textbook theme.	Peace becomes linked with school safety, child protection, well-being, and social cohesion.

Note. The comparison summarizes the conceptual argument of the article.

Methodology

Research Design

An interpretive qualitative paradigm was used for the study. This design was suitable as the aim was not to assess the extent of violence but to gain an understanding of teachers' conceptions of violence and how this impacts on the teaching of peace. Interpretive qualitative inquiry can be applied when the researcher is interested in the meanings, beliefs, experiences, and pedagogical assumptions in their social and educational context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Thematic content analysis was employed for the interviews' material analysis. The revised analysis is based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and reporting. This procedure provides the analysis with a more transparent and defensible form than just organizing the results of the interviews around the questions.

Participants and Sampling

The subjects were secondary school teachers who were selected by using snowball sampling technique. This sampling was appropriate for the study because the researchers needed teachers who would have first-hand experiences in the classroom regarding violence, discipline, peace, the content of textbooks, and teacher preparation. Prior to final submission, the author should include the number of participants, gender profile, experience in teaching, subject areas, type of school, district and inclusion criteria.

As snowball sampling does not create a statistically representative sample, the results should be interpreted as a qualitative understanding that is contingent to the particular context. The quality of the design is in the elaboration of teachers' accounts and the themes' interpretations.

Data Collection Tool

Data were gathered by using unstructured face-to-face interview. This method enabled teachers to give their own definition of violence and to define the relationship between violence, peace, religion, ethics, lessons in textbooks, and classroom discipline. The interviews addressed issues of teachers' definition of violence, examples teachers use in the classroom, gaps in the textbooks, religious/ethical references, need for training, and situations in the classroom where peace education is difficult.



Unstructured interview was appropriate due to the fact that this study did not require a fixed response measurement. It rather involved paying attention to the ways teachers make sense of violence and the ways these sense-making processes become a part of their teaching (Greeff, 2005).

Data Analysis

The interview data was transcribed and read multiple times, and line by line coded. Interviews were coded and compared initially and then coded into larger interpretive categories. The questions of the interview were not used as pre-established themes for the analysis. Themes were created in relation to the repeated patterns found in the data and in relation to the connections between teachers' understandings of violence and the approaches they reported in relation to teaching peace.

The researcher should have an audit trail of coding decisions, hold on to anonymized excerpts, and peer or supervisory review of the theme structure, as far as possible, to enhance the trustworthiness. Before submission to the journal, it would be better if there were at least one quotation from the text under each theme.

Ethical Considerations

Before the data collection, the data was given ethical clearance by the appropriate institutional review body. Participants were told the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, that the information would be kept confidential and that they could leave the study at any time. To ensure confidentiality, names of participants and schools were coded. This ethics approval number and date should be included prior to submission.

Safeguarding had to be given special attention given the topic of the study – violence and child protection. If a current or serious harm to a child was revealed during an interview, the researcher would be expected to follow the appropriate institutional and legal procedures and not only these as research data.

Table 3 *Methodological Alignment and Trustworthiness Checks*

Quality area	How the revised manuscript addresses it	Information still to verify
Design alignment	Interpretive qualitative design matches the purpose of understanding teachers' meanings and pedagogical assumptions.	Confirm exact participant number, school context, and inclusion criteria.
Sampling transparency	Snowball sampling is acknowledged as context-specific rather than statistically generalizable.	Add recruitment route, stopping point, and participant profile.
Analysis procedure	Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis phases provide a defensible coding pathway.	Keep coding notes and insert illustrative quotations.
Credibility	Themes are linked to teacher accounts, literature, and the research questions.	Add participant quotations or member-checking/peer-review details if available.



Dependability	The analysis should show how codes moved into themes.	Include an audit-trail note or appendix if the journal permits.
Ethical safety	Confidentiality and referral responsibilities are explicitly acknowledged.	Insert ethics approval number and safeguarding protocol reference.

Note. This table also functions as a submission-readiness checklist for the author.

Findings and Interpretive Analysis

Analysis resulted in four themes. They demonstrate that teachers could recognise some of the visible instances of violence, but that they also required a broader understanding and pedagogical approach to link violence recognition to peace education.

Theme 1: Teachers Recognized Common Forms of Violence but Needed Wider Conceptual Clarity

Teachers seemed more at ease when talking about acts of violence that are obvious or well known, such as physical aggression, emotional abuse, sexual misconduct or conflict that is expressed in terms of religion. While this awareness is important, it is not all-encompassing of the harm that may manifest in schools. The more challenging question is whether teachers can identify normalized practices, like degrading discipline, repeated humiliation of students by students or staff, exclusion, intimidation, silence about harassment, or classroom practices that make some students feel unsafe.

The theme thus implies a lack of recognition and understanding of concepts. Teachers can have an aversion to violence, but may not have the words to describe other types of violence. This gap is significant because peace education requires the teacher to be able to clearly identify harm and articulate the reasons why it is a violation of dignity, safety and fairness.

Theme 2: Textbook Content Did Not Give Teachers Enough Practical Material

The results of the analysis showed that textbooks were perceived as inadequate in explaining the relationship of violence and peace. Peace related content is frequently presented in the form of moral advice, and moral advice does not necessarily lead to understanding about violence in everyday school life. Students require age-appropriate examples, questions for reflection, and classroom examples of how peace relates to real-life examples of bullying, verbal humiliation, social exclusion, discrimination, corporal punishment, harassment and unsafe use of digital media.

But that doesn't imply that textbooks ought to be graphic or fear-based. That they should provide teachers with language and examples that they can use. Students can be made to see how peace is practiced when the presence of conflict, power, anger and peer pressure are present through a short story, classroom scenario, dialogue prompt, or reflective question.

Theme 3: Teacher Training Was Not Sufficient for Violence-Informed Peace Education

Teacher preparation was identified as a major weakness. Teachers may be asked to teach peace, but many receive limited preparation in recognizing violence, de-escalating conflict, using non-violent communication, applying restorative discipline, identifying bullying patterns, responding to harassment, or following referral procedures. Without these skills, teachers may present peace as a lesson while relying on classroom practices that produce fear or humiliation.



A practical teacher-training module should therefore include violence recognition, child protection, classroom communication, restorative response, and safe referral. It should also invite teachers to examine their own language, discipline routines, use of authority, and assumptions about what counts as normal classroom control.

Theme 4: Peace Education Needed Both Moral and Practical Pedagogy

Teachers' accounts also showed that peace education cannot be reduced either to moral preaching or to technical procedures. Religious and ethical examples can enrich peace education by emphasizing dignity, compassion, justice, restraint, and respect. However, these examples become more useful when they are connected with concrete classroom scenarios and with child-protection principles.

Students should learn the value of peace, but they should also learn how to identify harm, ask for help, manage anger, refuse participation in bullying, speak respectfully, and protect the dignity of others. In this sense, violence-informed peace education combines moral purpose with practical school safety.

Table 4 Theme Matrix Showing the Link Between Findings and Pedagogical Implications

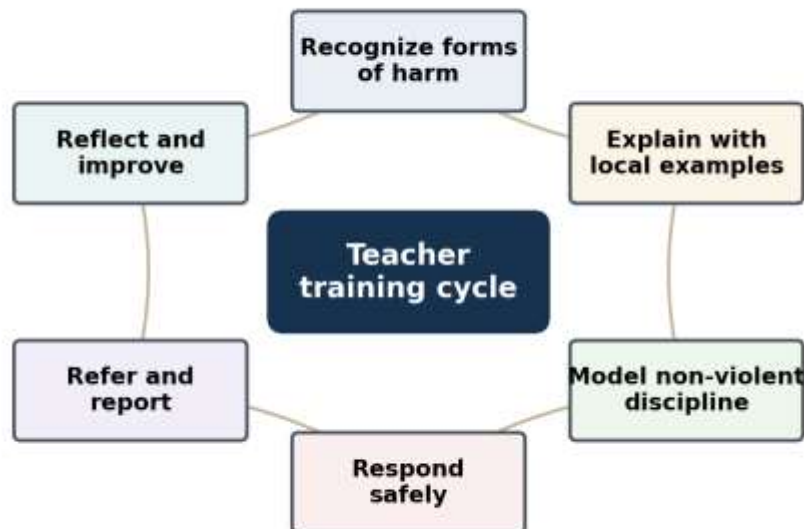
Theme	Interpretive meaning	Pedagogical implication
Teachers had partial recognition of violence.	Visible forms of harm were easier to identify than normalized or indirect forms.	Teacher education should provide a clear typology of school-related violence and examples from local classrooms.
Textbooks were too general.	Peace was often presented as a broad moral value rather than a response to identifiable harm.	Textbooks should include age-appropriate scenarios, questions, and action steps.
Training was insufficient.	Teachers needed skills for recognition, de-escalation, reporting, and restorative response.	Pre-service and in-service programmes should include a compulsory module on violence-informed peace education.
Moral teaching needed practical grounding.	Religious and ethical values were meaningful but became abstract without real school examples.	Peace lessons should connect dignity, justice, restraint, and compassion with actual classroom conduct.

Note. Before journal submission, short anonymized participant quotations should be inserted to strengthen the evidentiary base of each theme.

Figure 2

Practical cycle for preparing teachers to implement violence-informed peace education

A practical cycle for teacher preparation



Note. The cycle illustrates the process by which teachers can recognise, explain, model, respond, refer and reflect to improve in the classroom.

Discussion

The study reinforces the case for the need of school based peace education to be incomplete if it teaches peace without explaining violence. Peace education can't be only with the desirable words. It also needs to assist teachers and students to recognise practices which are harmful to dignity, safety, trust and fairness in school life. For this reason, the more general concept of violence provided by Krug et al. (2002) is helpful in teacher education as it encompasses more than just the obvious injury, such as power, threat, psychological harm and deprivation.

The results align with literature that indicates that school violence is a multi-layered phenomenon, and can be perpetrated by students, teachers, other school staff, family members and other members of the community (UNESCO, 2017, 2019). They also resonate with prior research that indicated that school violence has to be clearly defined since the definition of violence dictates what schools see and what they don't see (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Henry, 2000). Many of the harmful practices will continue to be referred to as discipline, teasing, tradition, peer culture, or silence, if teachers are only trained to identify fighting.

One of the contributions of this article is that it is about teachers as peacebuilders and potential harms. This is not a reflection on the individual teachers. It's an acknowledgment of the power that is found in classroom roles. How teacher's correct mistakes, deal with noise, react to



conflict, use humor, deal with weak learners and deal with complaints can enhance or destroy peace. It is therefore important that teacher education should involve reflection on teacher language, power in the classroom, discipline procedures and responsibility in the context of safeguarding.

The article also demonstrates the need for textbooks to be more "real-world". This textbook is silent on the issue of bullying, humiliation, exclusion, harassment or fear, except for teaching students to be peaceful, which provides limited assistance to teachers. Peace education would come to life more if there were local examples, short scenarios, discussion questions and reflection tasks. Such materials should be carefully written to make sure that they protect children, do not sensationalize and encourage students to report rather than retaliate.

Pedagogically clear religious and ethical teaching can be used to support this work. Peace education can be meaningful in communities where there is a strong influence of moral and religious language, such as dignity, mercy, justice, restraint, truthfulness and care for others. But these values cannot be left in the abstract. They should be linked to classroom behaviour: how one pupil treats another, how a teacher handles a pupil's error, how pupils communicate online and how the school deals with a pupil's disclosure of harm.

Implications for Teacher Education, Textbooks, and School Policy

First, teacher education programmes should have a mandatory course on school violence, bullying, child protection, non-violent discipline, restorative classroom practice, harassment and referral procedure. The module should not consist of theory only. It should include classroom cases and role play, and review of school policy, as well as reflection on language and authority.

Secondly, textbooks should be age appropriate, and present peace and violence in parallel. Textbook language should reflect the meaning of respect, justice, empathy and tolerance when students are ridiculed, excluded, pressured, digitally harassed, and/or treated unfairly. It's not meant to frighten students, it's meant to provide them with words to be safe and dignified.

Thirdly, there must be clear reporting and referral systems in place in schools. Students need to feel safe, trusted, and know where to turn to and what will happen after disclosing in order to report harm. Teachers also require institutional support to ensure that serious cases are not dealt with informally and/or ignored.

Fourth, policy makers should link peace education to school safety, students' well-being and social cohesion. Peace education must not be just a moral education. Should be related to teacher standards, school discipline policy, child protection systems, textbook review and professional development.

Table 5 *Action Plan for Strengthening Violence-Informed Peace Education*

Area	Immediate correction	Longer-term development
Teacher education	Add modules on violence recognition, bullying, child protection, non-violent communication, restorative response, and referral.	Assess teacher competence through classroom cases, reflective tasks, and supervised practice.
Textbooks	Add short scenarios linking peace and values with real school harms such as	Develop grade-wise peace and safety content aligned with



	exclusion, humiliation, harassment, local school realities. and corporal punishment.	
School policy	Create clear, confidential, and child-sensitive reporting routes for students and teachers.	Link peace education with school safety, well-being, anti-bullying, and safeguarding policies.
Classroom practice	Use respectful correction, peer dialogue, role-play, and restorative conversations.	Build a classroom culture where dignity and safety are visible in routines, language, and discipline.
Monitoring and improvement	Document incidents and recurring patterns of harm.	Use school-level evidence to revise training, policy, and textbook examples.

Note. The action plan converts the study's conceptual argument into practical steps for schools and teacher education programmes.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations of the study. The sample was selected using snowball sampling method and therefore the results of the study cannot be generalized statistically. The specific characteristics of the participants (sample size) should be specified prior to submission, so that the reader may make a judgment as to the context and transferability of the results. The study is also based on teachers' accounts, there is no observation of classrooms and there are no students' experiences.

Future research needs to be conducted with larger qualitative samples from various districts, a comparison of teachers across subjects and school types, and should incorporate students' perspectives of the effectiveness of PE in identifying and minimizing harm. A mixed-methods design might also be used to explore if teacher training informed by violence increases confidence in reporting and a sense of safety in the classroom, as well as classroom climate. Observation in the classroom would be particularly useful as some types of violence are accepted in the practice and might not be fully apparent in the interview data.

Conclusion

Violence is important to understand for teaching peace, as peace cannot be practiced if violence is un-named, misunderstood or normalized. Teachers need more than general moral language. They need a clear conceptual and practical framework for recognizing physical, psychological, sexual and gender-based, relational, bullying-related, cultural, and structural forms of violence. They also need strategies for explaining these forms to students in safe, age-appropriate, and locally meaningful ways.

The article therefore argues that violence recognition should be treated as a foundation of peace education, not as a separate or competing topic. When teachers can name harm, model non-violent discipline, respond safely, and refer serious cases, peace education becomes more than a textbook lesson. It becomes part of the school climate. Teaching peace is therefore most



meaningful when students and teachers also learn how to recognize, prevent, and respond to violence.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Interview data are not publicly available because of participant confidentiality. An anonymized summary may be provided upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and institutional policy.

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