

# GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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In the midst of growing violence and political polarization around the world, it is crucial to critically examine whether our educational system is genuinely serving the common good. Research in contexts of violence shows that individuals often replicate aggressive behaviors learned early in life, perpetuating cycles of violence (e.g., Chaux, 2003, 2009; Fang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022; Maxfield & Widom, 1996). Moreover, famous studies, such as Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo's experiments, reveal that ordinary people, under certain conditions, can commit unthinkable acts of violence.

However, we must remind ourselves that ordinary people also have the power to change the course of history by breaking cycles of violence in their families, schools, and communities. As Margaret Mead stated, "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*"

I was born in Colombia, a country that has been immersed in diverse expressions of war for many decades, where this reminder is especially pertinent. When invited to be the guest editor of this issue, I eagerly accepted with the strong conviction that education can inspire and equip individuals with new perspectives

and tools for constructive coexistence, even in countries such as my own. Furthermore, it is our duty to reflect on what it means to educate for peace and to make successful experiences worldwide more visible.

This issue includes six articles. First, in the Empirical Articles section, Victoria Ackford and Roger Bretherton present a qualitative study illuminating the character strengths and virtues relevant to intergroup reconciliation work. Next, Tiffani Betts Razavi and Hoda Mahmoudi present a framework for moral education and peace for higher education using a unity-centered pedagogy informed by a Bahá'í perspective.

The Practitioners' Voices section includes three articles that present examples and lessons learned from peace education programs around the world. First, Sara Rojas, Enrique Chaux, Lina Saldarriaga, María Paula Rondón, José Fernando Mejía, Paula Ibáñez, and Yuly Calderón present the development of socio-emotional kernels with the *Aulas en Paz* program in Colombia, discussing implementation challenges, as well as successes and curriculum insights. Second, Jonathan Tirrell, Marc Gwamaka, Elizabeth Dowling, Sandra Shenge, Rebecca Altholz, Diane Ingabire Gasana, and Freddy Mutanguha share about the Aegis

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Trust peace-and-values education programs in Rwanda, which has helped to promote positive values through a listening and dialogue, storytelling approach after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Third, Gabriel Velez, Thomas Durkin, Kristin Haglund, and Sherri Walker present a community-engaged program in the U.S. that responded to the early needs of the COVID-19 pandemic by designing an online peace education toolkit.

Last, we conclude this issue with an Opinion article. James Fisher reflects on the costs of war-making and poses ideas for new paths forward, including investing in education for peace in order to prepare for peace. As with all our Opinion articles, we would love to hear additional perspectives and reflections, and invite you to add to the conversation on the Center for Character and Citizenship's website (please visit <https://characterandcitizenship.org/about-the-journal> to learn more).

May this collection of articles serve to inform and inspire us, as character education scholars and practitioners, toward a better future together.

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