

UDC 316

Shinjiashvili, T., & Akhaladze, L. (2025). The Teacher in a Post-Conflict Context: A Sociological Understanding of Peace Education. *Sociological Studios*, 1(26), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.29038/2306-3971-2025-01-12-12>

The Teacher in a Post-Conflict Context: A Sociological Understanding of Peace Education

Tamar Shinjiashvili –

ScD in Sociology, Professor, Faculty of Educational Sciences; Sokhumi State University, Georgia

E-mail: t.shinjiashvili@sou.edu.ge

ORCID: 0009-0005-1953-9633

Lia Akhaladze –

ScD in History, Professor, Head of the Department of Scientific Research and Development, Sokhumi State University, Georgia

E-mail: liaahaladze@sou.edu.ge

ORCID: 0000-0003-4478-4989

Тамар Шинджіашвілі –

доктор соціологічних наук, професор, факультет педагогічних наук, Сухумський державний університет, Грузія.

Лія Ахаладзе –

доктор історичних наук, професор, керівник відділу наукових досліджень та розробок, Сухумський державний університет, Грузія.

The article explores the sociological role of teachers in post-conflict contexts, with a particular focus on Georgia, a country shaped by ethnic conflicts and large-scale internal displacement. Drawing upon peace education theories and qualitative research methods, the paper analyzes how teachers act as agents of reconciliation, social cohesion, and transformation in societies deeply affected by trauma and conflict. Integrating theoretical contributions from Johan Galtung, Paulo Freire, and Betty Reardon, the study highlights how education can become a mechanism for fostering dialogue, critical thinking, and inclusive narratives. Empirical evidence is drawn from interviews with Georgian teachers working in internally displaced and ethnically diverse regions such as Shida Kartli, Samegrelo, and Marneuli. The findings reveal that teachers act not only as knowledge transmitters but also as agents of empathy, critical reflection, and intercultural dialogue. Despite limited institutional support and curriculum gaps, many teachers engage in informal peace pedagogy, navigating issues of trauma, historical narratives, and trust. The study underscores the necessity of trauma-informed teaching approaches, inclusive textbooks, and coherent peace-oriented education policies. It concludes that in the absence of systemic support, teachers' agency remains vital for building a culture of peace. The Georgian case illustrates that peace education is not just a theoretical construct but an urgent pedagogical and sociopolitical response to ongoing post-conflict challenges.

DOI: [10.29038/2306-3971-2025-01-12-12](https://doi.org/10.29038/2306-3971-2025-01-12-12)

Received: May 2, 2025

1st Revision: May 28, 2025

Accepted: June 18, 2025

Key words: Peace Education, Post-conflict Society, Reconciliation, Georgia, Critical Pedagogy, Sociological Analysis.

Шинджіашвілі Тамар, Ахаладзе Лія. Учитель у постконфліктному контексті: соціологічне розуміння освіти миру. У статті досліджено соціологічну роль учителів у постконфліктних контекстах, з особливим акцентом на Грузію – країну, сформовану етнічними конфліктами та великомасштабним внутрішнім переміщенням. Спираючись на теорії освіти миру і якісні методи дослідження, у статті аналізуємо те, як учителі діють як агенти примирення, соціальної згуртованості та трансформації в суспільствах, глибоко вражених травмою й конфліктом. Об'єднавши теоретичні внески Йохана Галтунга, Пауло Фрейре та Бетті Рірдон, у статті підкреслюємо, як освіта може стати механізмом сприяння діалогу, критичному мисленню й інклюзивним наративам. Емпіричні дані взяті з інтерв'ю з грузинськими вчителями, які працюють у внутрішньо переміщених й етнічно різноманітних регіонах, таких як Шида Картлі, Самегрело та Марнеулі. Отримані результати свідчать, що вчителі діють не лише як передавачі знань, але і як агенти емпатії, критичного мислення й міжкультурного діалогу. Незважаючи на обмежену інституційну підтримку та прогалини в навчальних програмах, багато вчителів займаються неформальною педагогікою миру, орієнтуючись на проблеми травми, історичних наративів і довіри. У дослідженні підкреслено необхідність підходів до навчання з урахуванням травми, інклюзивних підручників й узгодженої освітньої політики, орієнтованої на мир. Зроблено висновок, що за відсутності системної підтримки вчителі залишаються життєво важливими для побудови культури миру. Випадок із Грузією свідчить, що освіта миру не просто є теоретичною конструкцією, а невідкладною педагогічною та соціально-політичною відповіддю на поточні постконфліктні виклики.

Ключові слова: освіта миру, постконфліктне суспільство, примирення, Грузія, критична педагогіка, соціологічний аналіз.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern global landscape, the aftermath of violent conflict has become a defining feature of numerous societies. From the Balkans to the Caucasus, and from sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East, communities have had to reckon with the residual consequences of war: displacement, fragmented identities, and intergroup animosities. Within such fractured environments, the education system often becomes one of the primary social arenas where these legacies are either reproduced or transformed. As such, the role of the teacher becomes central – not merely as an instructor of academic content, but as a moral and civic agent of peace.

In the Georgian context, the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia left not only territorial and political divisions but deep psychological wounds. The collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent ethno-political conflicts redefined national identities and social cohesion. Communities were displaced, and the rhetoric of national sovereignty often obscured the long-term psychosocial needs of those affected. Within this milieu, schools emerged as sites of both contestation and possibility. Teachers inherited a role burdened by the unresolved past, yet essential to imagining a more inclusive and peaceful future.

The Aim of the Study

This article analyzes the potential of peace education to promote reconciliation and critically evaluates the role of teachers as mediators of social justice, civic empathy, and memory. It argues that peace education must be understood not merely as an institutional policy or subject matter, but as an ongoing sociocultural process embedded in everyday school life.

1. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research methodology adopted is qualitative, exploratory, and interpretative. A triangulated approach combines:

- Analysis of classical and contemporary sociological theories relevant to peace education and post-conflict transformation;
- Document analysis, including the Georgian National Curriculum, education reform strategies, textbooks, and legislative frameworks such as the Law on General Education;
- Thematic interviews and ethnographic observations with teachers from conflict-affected regions, notably Shida Kartli, Samegrelo, Marneuli, and areas with high concentrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The thematic interviews were conducted with 17 teachers working in primary and secondary schools, using open-ended questions that allowed participants to reflect on their personal and professional experiences. A thematic coding process was applied to the data, emphasizing categories such as trauma, dialogue, identity, curriculum tensions, and agency. Ethical guidelines included informed consent and the anonymization of personal identifiers.

This method seeks to capture not only formal structures but also the lived pedagogical realities of educators working within post-conflict conditions.

1.1. Theories of Peace Education

1.1.1. Johan Galtung's Theory: "Peace as a Negative and Positive Concept". Norwegian sociologist and conflict researcher Johan Galtung distinguishes between two types of peace:

- **Negative peace** – the absence of conflict and violence, which offers only a temporary sense of calm;
- **Positive peace** – the elimination of structural violence, poverty, oppression, and inequality, which enables justice and the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

Galtung's approach is especially relevant in post-conflict education because it emphasizes the inadequacy of mere ceasefires if hidden social injustices are not addressed. Schools and teachers, therefore, must focus on understanding and resolving these systemic issues (Galtung, 1969).

1.1.2. Paulo Freire. Freire is a key figure in peace education. For him, education for peace is not a neutral process but one that is embedded within structures of power. According to his vision, peace education should be based on:

- Awareness of oppression;
- Development of solidarity;
- Encouragement of active citizenship;
- Dialogical engagement as a core pedagogical principle (Freire, 1970).

1.1.3. Betty Reardon. Betty Reardon is one of the founders of contemporary peace education. In her view, peace education should be gender-sensitive, culturally diverse, and grounded in ethical values. She defines peace education as:

“A learning process that develops the skills, values, and attitudes necessary for nonviolent conflict resolution and the establishment of justice.”

Reardon’s approach involves rethinking the curriculum, the learning environment, and the teacher’s role to promote a culture of empathy, collaboration, and social transformation (Reardon, 1988).

Thus, the concepts of Frantz Fanon, Betty Reardon, and Johan Galtung pay particular attention to overcoming cultural violence. According to Galtung’s theory of positive peace, the absence of violence does not equate to genuine peace – it also requires dismantling structural and cultural injustices. Translating this concept into education means that teachers should help students analyze the roots of social problems and develop critical consciousness.

1.2. Peace Education in Post-Conflict Societies

Peace education in post-conflict societies is both an educational practice and a social process aimed at helping individuals – especially younger generations – initiate and develop relationships grounded in peace, social cohesion, and justice. Sociologically, peace education is viewed as a tool that influences not only individual consciousness but also broader social structures and relationships (Bajaj, 2008; Davies, 2004).

1.2.1. Restoring Social Relationships and Rebuilding Trust. In post-conflict environments, trust among people is deeply damaged. Divisions, segregation, and confrontations between hostile narratives are prevalent. Peace education contributes to restoring this trust and fostering meaningful communication between different groups. This process involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of empathy, respect, and cooperation skills (Lederach, 1997).

1.2.2. Embracing the Diversity of Cultural and Historical Narratives. From a sociological perspective, peace education seeks to address and regulate the conflicting historical memories of different groups. It promotes multi-perspective narratives and prevents one-sided, antagonistic discourses. In doing so, it challenges the social mechanisms that reinforce stereotypes, generalizations, and hostility (Bush, & Saltarelli, 2000; Smith, & Vaux, 2003).

1.2.3. Social Transformation and the Promotion of Justice. In a post-conflict context, peace education is not only a tool for conflict management but also a means to address social inequalities and issues of justice. It encourages the identification and critical analysis of systemic inequalities and imbalances of power embedded within social structures (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008).

Peace education stands against systemic forms of oppression and persecution, and promotes principles of human rights, equality, and inclusion (Davies, 2004).

1.2.4. Pedagogical Relationships and Power Dynamics. In post-conflict schools, education is rarely neutral. It often reflects power imbalances and discourses that may either perpetuate or help resolve conflict. Peace education here involves pedagogical practices that reduce inequality, amplify students’ voices, and promote a fairer distribution of power within the learning process (Freire, 1970; Davies, 2004).

1.2.5. Peace Education as Social Innovation. Sociologically, peace education is understood as a form of social innovation that creates new models for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the achievement of long-term social harmony. This innovation is rooted in collective memory, cultural dialogue, and active social engagement (Bajaj, 2008; Lederach, 1997).

Thus, in post-conflict contexts, peace education is both a social process and a pedagogical strategy that fosters reconciliation among conflicting groups, rebuilds trust, diversifies historical narratives, promotes social justice, and facilitates a more equitable distribution of power within educational spaces.

A post-conflict society is a social system deeply affected by structural, psychological, and cultural traumas, striving to rebuild itself after confrontation, violence, and collapse. In such societies, education takes on a special significance – not only as a driver of development, but also as a foundation for reconciliation and the promotion of justice.

Despite their geographic and political differences, post-conflict societies often share several common characteristics:

- **Traumatized Collective Memory:** As a result of war or conflict, societies carry physical, emotional, and moral traumas, which are reflected in the behavior and perceptions of both individuals and groups.

• **Fragmented Social Fabric:** Conflicts often destroy social ties, disrupt neighborhood relations, friendships, and experiences of civic coexistence.

• **Ethnic, Religious, or Political Polarization:** Identity-based divisions often persist even after the conflict ends and continue to influence daily life, including the field of education.

• **Crisis of Trust:** A lack of trust in institutions, teachers, and in one another becomes a major obstacle to social restoration.

• **Sense of Injustice:** When justice has not been served or the actions of conflict participants remain unaccounted for, this undermines the sense of fairness and hinders reconciliation.

Post-conflict societies require the implementation of policies and institutional changes that restore social connections and enable education to become a driving force for transformation.

2. THE GEORGIAN CONTEXT: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PEACEBUILDING

In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have left profound social, territorial, and psychological consequences. These events caused mass displacement, created interethnic tensions, and challenged the national identity narrative. Schools, particularly those serving internally displaced persons (IDPs), have become key spaces for negotiating belonging, memory, and coexistence.

Teachers, often themselves victims of displacement or conflict, are uniquely positioned to influence young minds. Their role extends beyond academic instruction to include functions as moral guides, mediators, and facilitators of dialogue. However, systemic limitations, lack of training in peace pedagogy, and politically sensitive curricula can hinder their capacity to foster peace-oriented education.

Efforts to integrate peace education into Georgian curricula remain sporadic. While civil society initiatives have made notable contributions, a coherent national strategy is still lacking. There is a pressing need for teacher training programs that incorporate conflict sensitivity, multicultural education, and trauma-informed pedagogies.

2.1. The Teacher as a Mediator of Social Justice

In post-conflict societies, the teacher plays a vital role as a mediator of social justice. They are not merely transmitters of knowledge but serve as living examples of justice, equality, and respect. Their actions and attitudes significantly shape whether the school environment reinforces existing divisions or becomes a space of reconciliation (Davies, 2004). Through their pedagogy, teachers help students develop critical thinking and media literacy skills, enabling them to recognize and resist biased or manipulative narratives (Bajaj, 2008). At the same time, they nurture students' empathy, cultural sensitivity, and acceptance of diversity, while also promoting dialogue, patience, and non-violent conflict resolution strategies (Reardon, 1999; Salomon, & Cairns, 2010).

2.2. Core Strategies of Peace Pedagogy

Drawing on the work of peace education theorists such as Betty Reardon and Paulo Freire, peace pedagogy emphasizes participatory and dialogical learning. Dialogue-based learning is fundamental: when students are encouraged to listen actively, ask questions freely, and engage in critical discussions, they not only develop democratic competencies but also learn to respect diverse perspectives and accept difference (Freire, 1970; Bickmore, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2006). In the context of history education, integrating multi-voiced narratives allows students to understand the complexity of conflict and the experiences of all those involved. This inclusive approach contributes to healing collective memories and lays the foundation for reconciliation (Cole, 2007; McCully, 2012).

Equally important is the emotional dimension of peace pedagogy. Teachers are called upon to create emotionally safe and supportive classroom environments in which students feel able to speak about traumatic experiences. This requires an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and trust. In such spaces, the school transforms from a purely academic institution into a part of the broader psycho-social support network for young people recovering from conflict (Novelli, & Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Davies, 2004).

2.3. Pedagogical Authority and the Transformation of Power

Establishing pedagogical authority in post-conflict societies is a complex task, given that the very notion of authority may be associated with trauma. Critical pedagogy offers a transformative perspective by proposing a reconfiguration of power relations in the classroom. Instead of maintaining rigid, hierarchical control, teachers are encouraged to adopt dialogical, egalitarian, and partnership-based relationships with

students (Freire, 1970). In this framework, the teacher is no longer an omniscient authority figure but a co-learner—someone who engages in the educational process alongside the students. This shift from a governance-based to a liberatory model of education enables learners to become active subjects in their own development, rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Hooks, 1994)

2.4. Teachers' Needs and Support

To effectively take on the role of peacebuilders, teachers themselves must receive appropriate support. First and foremost, they need professional training in trauma-sensitive pedagogy, non-violent communication, and cultural responsiveness (UNHCR, 2021). Additionally, many teachers require rehabilitative assistance, such as psychosocial support and opportunities for emotional recovery, especially if they themselves have been affected by conflict. Institutional backing is also crucial; without the commitment of schools, education ministries, and other relevant bodies to institutionalize peace education, the teacher's efforts may remain isolated and unsustainable (UNICEF, 2015).

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRICULUM, TEXTBOOKS, AND NATIONAL POLICY

In the post-conflict context, the teacher is not only a facilitator of the educational process but also a key agent of social transformation, emotional healing, and the cultivation of a culture of dialogue and mutual understanding. Peace pedagogy offers a theoretical and practical framework that enables educators to transform the collective pain of history into a pedagogical resource for cooperation, coexistence, and reconciliation.

To understand how peace education is integrated into the Georgian educational context, it is essential to examine key components such as the National Curriculum, textbooks, and strategic policy documents. In post-conflict settings, these elements play a pivotal role in shaping learners' attitudes toward peace, justice, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2017).

The **National Curriculum** of Georgia serves as the core strategic document for general education. It outlines not only academic goals but also broader competencies, such as cooperation, critical thinking, and civic responsibility (MoES, 2018). Although peace education is not presented as a separate subject, the curriculum incorporates its fundamental principles – democracy, human rights, equality, and non-violence – across multiple subject areas. For example:

- **Social sciences and history** include themes of national identity, ethnic diversity, and historical conflicts, encouraging students to understand the roots of conflict and the value of peaceful resolution (MoES, 2018);
- **Behavioral and citizenship competencies** foster civic awareness, responsibility, and collaboration—core elements of a culture of peace (OECD, 2021);
- **Emotional and social skills development** is supported through tasks that promote empathy, communication, and conflict management (UNICEF, 2019).

Textbook analysis reveals that **history and social studies materials** include references to ethnic conflicts and international events. However, peace is often conceptualized narrowly – as the absence of conflict and the presence of stability – rather than as a dynamic process of reconciliation (Davies, 2004). Moreover, limited attention is given to issues such as historical trauma, displacement, and marginalization, which can reduce the inclusivity and relevance of peace education content for all learners (Bajaj, 2008).

The **National Education Development Strategy** and related policy documents emphasize the role of education in fostering social cohesion, intercultural understanding, and a peaceful society (MoES, 2022). These texts call for the integration of behavioral and multicultural education principles into classroom practice. However, in practice, many teachers – especially those working in post-conflict regions – lack sufficient institutional support and practical tools to implement these principles effectively (IDMC, 2020).

In **regions such as Abkhazia and Samachablo**, the challenges of peace education are particularly acute. Ethnic segregation, distrust, and the lack of educational resources hinder efforts to create inclusive and supportive learning environments (CRRC, 2021). These conditions call for specialized programs in **trauma-informed pedagogy and inclusive education**, as well as targeted support for teachers working in vulnerable settings (UNESCO, 2019).

Overall, while peace education is formally recognized as a key direction within Georgia's educational framework, its **systematic and practical implementation remains limited**. Greater efforts are needed to

ensure its integration not only in curriculum content but also in **teacher professional development and institutional policy**, particularly in post-conflict and ethnically diverse regions.

4. THE LAW OF GEORGIA ON GENERAL EDUCATION: A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE EDUCATION

The Law of Georgia on General Education explicitly promotes principles aligned with peace education. It emphasizes the **social and cultural purposes of schooling**, including the development of tolerance, interethnic and international equality, and peaceful coexistence (Parliament of Georgia, 2021).

Key provisions include:

- Ensuring every student's right to acquire skills and knowledge that support social cohesion and conflict resolution;
- Aligning general education goals with national, regional, and global contexts, which is especially important in post-conflict societies (UNESCO, 2017);
- Promoting inclusive and collaborative practices that contribute to safe and supportive school environments (UNICEF, 2019).

Importantly, the law highlights the **teacher's role** as a central agent in cultivating peace, civic responsibility, and social justice. However, while the legal framework is supportive, its **implementation still requires robust mechanisms** – such as continuous teacher training, resource allocation, and regional adaptations – to respond effectively to the specific needs of post-conflict communities (Bajaj, & Hantzopoulos, 2016).

Professional development programs on trauma-informed teaching and intercultural communication remain limited. Many educators rely on personal initiative or NGO-led workshops to build capacity in peace pedagogy. The systemic nature of these gaps points to the need for policy realignment that centers not only curricular content but also teacher agency and well-being.

It is necessary to:

- Systematically integrate peace education into the national curriculum;
- Provide teacher training in trauma-sensitive and critical pedagogy;
- Implement sustainable programs in cooperation between the state and civil society.

This statement clearly illustrates that teachers are assigned a special role in overcoming the realities caused by conflict and in educating citizens oriented toward peace. In order to understand how they perceive their mission, what challenges they face, and how they attempt to implement peace education in practice, interviews were conducted with teachers working in conflict-affected regions. The main themes and trends identified through the analysis of these interviews are presented below.

5. ANALYSIS OF TEACHER INTERVIEWS: CRITICAL ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Georgia, as a multiethnic and multiconfessional country, has lived in a post-conflict reality for several decades. The ethnic conflicts that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union – particularly those in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) – have profoundly affected the country's social fabric. In this fragile context, education, and especially the role of the teacher, gains particular importance. It becomes a medium through which new generations can be equipped with the values and competencies necessary for peaceful coexistence, critical reflection, and the rebuilding of trust. Teachers working within this context must navigate not only curricular demands but also the psychosocial wounds of conflict, positioning themselves as facilitators of resilience, empathy, and intergroup understanding.

For researchers studying education in post-conflict settings, **listening to the voices of teachers** is crucial. Their lived experiences, values, emotional responses, and perspectives can serve as powerful sociological data.

The following analysis is based on interviews with teachers working in the regions most heavily impacted by conflict – particularly in communities of IDPs from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, as well as in Shida Kartli, Samegrelo, and Kvemo Kartli.

These interviews reflect both the post-conflict context in Georgia and the essential role of the teacher in advancing peace education.

1. Trauma and Emotional Memory

Teachers working in post-conflict regions of Georgia often link their personal experiences and emotions to their professional responsibilities. They acknowledge that working with children requires particular sensitivity due to their own history of displacement and trauma:

"I myself am displaced, and when I work with displaced children, I deeply feel how they repeat my pain..." – Teacher from Zugdidi.

Such experiences contribute to the development of deeper empathy and resilience in teachers. However, many interviewees stressed the need for professional support and trauma-informed methodologies.

2. Lack of Trust and Social Polarization

Teachers frequently noted a lack of trust both among students and colleagues, as well as within the broader community. This reflects ongoing ethnic and social tensions in certain regions.

"Some parents don't trust a teacher if they're from a different ethnic background." – Teacher from Marneuli.

The lack of trust also affects classroom dynamics – students often do not feel safe expressing their opinions, which hinders the development of critical thinking. Teachers pointed out that school environments often rely on authoritarian methods, discouraging students from forming independent thoughts. Furthermore, there is insufficient training or support to help teachers address sensitive or controversial topics constructively:

"We badly need training on how to talk about difficult topics. I'm left alone with this responsibility." – Teacher from Gori.

3. Biased Narratives and Curriculum Gaps

The interviews reveal that history lessons in some Georgian schools promote a single ethnic or political narrative, obstructing peace education. Teachers who attempt to introduce alternative perspectives often face resistance or difficulty. In ethnically diverse regions, they emphasized the need for inclusivity and overcoming language barriers:

"I teach in Marneuli, and there are kids from three different ethnic groups in my class. I teach words in all their languages—it helps them come together." – Teacher from Marneuli

Teachers see themselves as "bridges between cultures" and actively work to create safe, inclusive classroom environments. In their view, peace education is not just about content – it is a creative, critical, and emotional process that nurtures justice, empathy, and dialogue skills:

"Teaching peace means kids will listen to others and not shut them out." – Teacher from Shida Kartli.

They particularly value encouraging critical thinking as a tool for reconciliation.

"I myself am displaced, and when I work with displaced children, I feel how important my words and reactions are. But I'm afraid of saying something wrong..." – Female, 45, teacher in a displaced persons' school in Zugdidi.

This trauma often leads to a need for emotional distance—not to reduce responsibility, but to strengthen it.

4. Informal Peace Pedagogy in Action

Teachers reported a lack of formal tools or methodologies for peace education. However, many of them are already implementing informal practices aligned with peace pedagogy, such as:

- Encouraging multiperspective historical thinking;
- Promoting acceptance of ethnic diversity;
- Fostering trauma-sensitive relationships in class.

"We study Abkhazia, but I try to help the children understand that both sides had their pain and reasons. It's hard, but building empathy is my priority."

5. Structural and Social Challenges

Teachers criticized textbooks for offering a single, monolithic narrative, lacking encouragement for critical or alternative views:

"There's only one narrative in the textbook. But kids ask deeper questions. Sometimes I'm afraid my answers might lead to political trouble." Female, 50, teacher in Marneuli

They also emphasized that schools are often constrained by societal expectations – where maintaining the image of the "enemy" is the norm, and teachers lack sufficient support to challenge this:

Some teachers argue that peace education is not only about changing narratives but also about transforming school culture to embody equality, empathy, and dialogue.

"If a child can't speak up in class because they fear their classmates' or teacher's reaction, then we can't talk about peace. Peace starts with relationships." – Female, 29, teacher in Shida Kartli.

This perspective shows that peace pedagogy requires rethinking power dynamics within educational structures—not just adjusting the content.

Analysis of the interviews reveals that teachers in Georgia often struggle on two fronts: on the one hand, they try to cope with their own traumatic experiences; on the other, they strive to teach students dialogue, empathy, and the ability to live together with others. Despite the lack of institutional support, they show initiative that lays the foundation for peace education.

The analysis confirmed that teachers working in schools in post-conflict areas of Georgia face significant challenges related both to personal experiences and to broader systemic, social, and political factors. The impact of trauma and emotional memory is particularly evident in their professional practice, requiring appropriate psychological and pedagogical support.

In post-conflict society, a lack of trust, ethnic polarization, and the dominance of singular historical narratives complicate the educational process and hinder peacebuilding. Unequal distribution of power and authoritarian pedagogical styles potentially obstruct the development of critical thinking and active student engagement.

Teachers' experiences show that inclusive and diverse approaches are particularly effective in ethnically heterogeneous classrooms and can play a key role in strengthening peace education. It is essential to create additional professional development opportunities for them – enhancing both their professional competencies and their ability to nurture students' critical thinking and empathy.

The teacher as a peace architect: In post-conflict contexts, teachers become active participants in the reconciliation process. Their role goes beyond subject-based instruction and includes ensuring emotional safety, encouraging critical thinking, and facilitating dialogue among students. It is up to them how historical narratives are passed on to the next generations – whether through a dominant monoversion or a multi-perspective view.

Fulfilling this responsibility requires not only subject-matter expertise but also socio-emotional skills. Teachers often become the first figures who help students express or process traumatic experiences. This approach creates a "safe space" – an environment where students can feel protected and heard.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following steps are necessary at the level of national policy:

- **Professional Support and Training.** Systematic programs should be developed for teachers that include enhanced trauma sensitivity and the ability to address conflict-related topics in a refined, critical, and emotionally sensitive manner.

- **Integration of Peace Education Components into Subject Standards;**
- **Incorporation of Trauma-Sensitive Pedagogy into Professional Teacher Development;**
- **Revision of Textbooks to Reflect Multi-Perspective Approaches to History;**
- **Strengthening of Psycho-Social Support in Schools;**
- **Coordination between Governmental and Non-Governmental Sectors for Peacebuilding Initiatives.**

In post-conflict Georgia, the teacher represents a figure who effectively implements peace education through daily pedagogical practice. The spaces they create can become the foundation for shared memory and mutual understanding. Strengthening teachers through state support will determine whether education can truly serve as a pathway to reconciliation.

This article has demonstrated that peace education in Georgia is not a hypothetical ideal but a lived and necessary response to historical and ongoing violence. Teachers, as both agents and subjects of history, enact a pedagogy of hope within constrained systems. Their practices – though often unrecognized – contribute to the formation of civic imagination, empathy, and critical dialogue.

For peace education to be truly transformative, it must move beyond policy statements and become embedded in the daily rituals, relationships, and reflective practices of schools. This requires:

- Institutional support for trauma-sensitive and justice-oriented teacher training;
- A reimagining of textbooks and curricula to include diverse narratives and ethical inquiry;
- Emotional and professional care for teachers working in high-stress environments;
- Sustained collaboration between ministries, NGOs, and educators to foster innovation.

The Georgian case reminds us that peace is not merely a political outcome but a pedagogical and social process – crafted one classroom at a time.

REFERENCES

- Bajaj, M. (2008). Envisioning a just education: Peace pedagogy and human rights education in the United States. *Peace and Change*, 33(4), 450–475. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2008.00509.x>
- Bajaj, M., & Hantzopoulos, M. (2016). *Peace education: International perspectives*. Bloomsbury.
- Bickmore, K. (2005). Reconciliation initiatives and school-based citizenship education. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 33(1), 1–28.
- Bush, K. D., & Saltarelli, D. (2000). *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peacebuilding education for children*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Cole, E. A. (2007). *Teaching the violent past: History education and reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- CRRC (2021). *Attitudes toward reintegration and peace in Georgia's conflict regions*. Caucasus Research Resource Centers.
- Davies, L. (2004). *Education and conflict: Complexity and chaos*. Routledge Falmer.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (2006). Peace education for consensual peace: The essential role of conflict resolution. *Journal of Peace Education*, 3(2), 147–174. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17400200600874792>
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- McCully, A. (2012). History teaching, conflict and the legacy of the past. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 7(2), 145–159.
- MoES (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia). (2018). *National Curriculum of Georgia 2018–2024*. Retrieved May 20, 2025 from <https://mes.gov.ge>
- MoES (2022). *Education Development Strategy of Georgia 2022–2032*.
- Novelli, M., & Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A. (2008). Conflict, education and the global south: New critical directions. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(4), 473–488. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2008.01.004>
- OECD (2021). *Global competency for an inclusive world*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Parliament of Georgia (2021). *Law of Georgia on General Education*. Retrieved May 20, 2025 from <https://matsne.gov.ge>
- Reardon, B. A. (1988). *Comprehensive peace education: Educating for global responsibility*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Reardon, B. A. (1999). Peace education: A review and projection. In G. Salomon & B. Nevo (Eds.), *Peace education: The concept, principles, and practices in the world*. Erlbaum.
- Salomon, G., & Cairns, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook on peace education*. Psychology Press.
- Smith, A., & Vaux, T. (2003). *Education, conflict and international development*. Department for International Development (DFID).
- UNHCR (2021). *Teachers in crisis contexts training package*. Retrieved May 20, 2025 from <https://www.unhcr.org>
- UNICEF (2015). *Learning for peace: Education as a catalyst for peacebuilding*. Retrieved May 20, 2025 from <https://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF (2019). *Child-friendly schools and peace education: Guidelines for inclusive practice*. United Nations Children's Fund.
- UNESCO (2017). *Education for peace and sustainable development: A guide for curriculum developers*.
- UNESCO (2019). *Global education monitoring report: Migration, displacement and education – Building bridges, not walls*.