

307 | Grounds for Peace | Making Soldiers out of Children: Is there Space For Peace in Schools | Ellis Brooks

Josh Mangelson 0:17

Welcome to the Project Zion podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Ryan Comins 0:33

Hello everyone and welcome to Project Zion: The Restoration Caffeinated. Grounds for Peace is a new international podcast that comes from the work of peaceprojects.edu. In this series, we're asking what are the grounds you might say the foundations for a new peaceful humanity. I'm your host, Ryan Comins, a friend of Community of Christ and a member of the Community of Christ, European Peace and Justice team. According to Steve Veazey, President of Community of Christ, "No matter where we start from as individuals are calling our purpose as a human species is to be a peaceful humanity." The phrase peaceful humanity is another way of saying Zion, God's vision or dream for the world. Today, our guest is Ellis Brooks, who's just done a webinar for us on making soldiers out of children. In his webinar session, Ellis posed and helped answer the question, is there space for peace in schools. It was an engaging and thought provoking webinars to take part in, and a video recording of it will soon be uploaded to the Community of Christ Europe YouTube channel. Ellis is a Peace Education Coordinator for Quakers in Britain. Having worked as a teacher and a campaigner, Ellis has been delivering Peace Education since 2005. Working with Quakers in Britain, Ellis also works with partners like the Peace Education Network to strengthen peace education in Britain. This is important and challenging the militarization of education while also advocating for positive alternatives, including conflict resolution education, and global learning. Ellis has also been active volunteering for peace and human rights in Palestine and Afghanistan, and Peace Boat, a Japanese initiative. So Ellis, welcome. It's so great to have you with us.

Ellis Brooks 2:33

Hi, Ryan, nice to be with you.

Ryan Comins 2:35

If you just tell us a little bit more about yourself. Is there anything I missed out?

Ellis Brooks 2:41

Why I don't know what's interesting to people. I'm quite boring. I'm a sort of middle class white boy from Shropshire, Shropshire lad, and I studied English at university trained to be a teacher. So we have that in common you and I.

Ryan Comins 2:55

Yeah.

Ellis Brooks 2:56

then but while I was in university, I also read about a young woman called Rachel Corrie, an American activist who was volunteering in Gaza at the time. And she stood in front of a bulldozer to try and protect her Palestinian in the family and the bolster, the bulldozer ran her down, I realized that there was stuff happening in the world that I didn't know much about that I hoped perhaps I could do something about. And with a lot of them, sort of white person hubris, perhaps, I got a plane ticket to and spent my university summer in Palestine trying to support nonviolent peace work there. So I guess that's, that's kind of where I caught a bug, interesting part of the world, I guess, when, when the podcast introduction talks about Zion, and, you know, I was in these places like the Old City of Jerusalem, and this very kind of boring junction in the middle of Israel called Megiddo Junction. But I think that's where the, the book of Revelation says, the final battle is going to be at all there. So like, which is not something I particularly believe in, but it's, it's a very resonant place for so many people, you know?

Ryan Comins 4:06

That's, that's fascinating. So, I guess, obviously, your your work at the moment is with Quakers in Britain. And can you explain a little bit more for listeners out who the Quakers are? Maybe some of our listeners might not be familiar with them or might only know them as a random breakfast cereal or something like,

Ellis Brooks 4:26

Yeah, I'll do my best. I think the first thing to say is that Quakers are probably so many and various that no one person could be their spokesperson or fully sum it up, and that as a branch of Christianity, they started in the 17th century, growing out of the Reformation. So they did believe that priests, the clergy, were kind of forming a barrier between people and God. So actually, they would have no clergy, no ministers, or put another way, everyone as the clergy, everyone is a minister because everyone can have that that connection with God. So in a Quaker meeting in Britain, people gather in silence or stillness. They say, you know, wherever two or more are gathered, and then you could call it a Quaker meeting. And in that stillness, sometimes someone is moved to speak, or share some kind of a testimony. And which, you know, is very often about something that's happening in the world about social justice, maybe it's more personal to them and their experience. Maybe it's more spiritual. Sometimes people do read from the Bible, but they might also read from another text that they think is important, and in including sometimes other texts of other religions. So it's, it's it's a very sort of plural and inclusive space, which means there are even Quakers today who would describe themselves as non theist. And still a Quaker. So it is, in that sense, a broad church, although not, not numerous.

Ryan Comins 6:03

Right? And how many Quakers would you say roughly that there are in the world or, or in Britain, if you,

Ellis Brooks 6:10

In Britain, I think we're around 20, thousands? Quakers, so and I think probably more people walk up to a Quaker meeting from time to time, but that that's kind of a number we, we can work with and I am sorry, I can't tell you off the top of my head, the number in the world. There is there an organization called the FWCC, which people can look at, which will be able to tell them about Quakers around the world?

Ryan Comins 6:37

No, that's absolutely fine. How how one of the questions that we had at the webinar that you did was to do with your involvement in the Quakers, and how you came to sort of be involved with them. And I think that's a good question that some of our listeners might be interested in as well. So would you mind talking a little bit about that?

Ellis Brooks 6:57

Yeah, it's, um, I think when it came up in the webinar, and still for me, now, it's a slightly challenging question, because ironically, for someone who works for the Quakers, also known as their religious Society of Friends, I'm not actually that religious a person. So I, I was raised in the Church of England. And I think that informs a lot of how I sort of see morality and the world around me, and that my mom is a priest in the Church of England nowadays, that was very important to me. But I think what became more important to me is rather than sort of what faith someone professes whether they do have access to the kind of peace and dignity which goes with being a human being, and I think that's sort of a more important witness to me. So and, and the Quakers are partly because they are so inclusive, and kind of not kind of judgmental of others in that way. And partly because they are very focused on that kind of active witness in the world, they do feel like a comfortable home for me to live that out. That image of, of Zion, like a kind of the kingdom of heaven on earth. And it being like our responsibility to to work for that and not wait for, you know, a cosmic force to to bring it about is, is very important to me, because I think we have the evidence and the tools in front of us to at least move towards justice.

Ryan Comins 8:30

Thank you for sharing that. In your presentation, I think be good to get stuck into some of the stuff that you talked about in your webinar. presentation, you brought up the name of an influential sociologist called Johan Galtung, and his research into peace and conflict. So could you maybe just explain a couple of Galtung's key ideas around peace and conflict and how they relate to peace education?

Ellis Brooks 8:55

Sure, I'll do my best in the webinar, I talked about his breakdown of violence as more than just one thing. So he would draw this as a triangle diagram. So you have direct violence, you have cultural violence, and you have structural violence. And often when we watch the news, the direct violence is what is most apparent most visible, most eye catching. So we're talking about the war, the bullets flying or, you know, if if people are physically violent to each other, that that's direct violence. But Galton was sort of saying there's a depth to violence. And if you interpret it as people doing things which hurt other people, that goes beyond just that. There's

structural violence, which is about I guess you could put it simply as inequality. Inequality sounds like it could be just a passive thing that some people end up with less than others. And framing it as violence means that no, we are building the world in unjust ways that include some people and exclude other people. So you might say when there's a famine, oh, that's because not enough food was grown, but even in the, you know that like the famous Ethiopian famine, there was enough food, but it wasn't distributed, people weren't able to like access their rights to that food. So he can characterize that as a violent choice by the people who did have agency there, you could even be quite literal about the structure and say like, if you do not build in disabled access to a building, that's a kind of structural violence, right? Because people can't access whatever's in that building, then cultural violence, I think, is the most slippery concept. But it's, it's a useful one. So I would describe it as what's going on in our heads and our kind of collective consciousness. And the classic example was, I guess, would be like racism, or misogyny or homophobia, where there's some kind of group of people that you stigmatize that you are there. And then that allows you to perpetrate structural violence or direct violence against that group. Or to be less concerned when you witness violence against that group. Because it because if you go them, it's less of a concern to you. I think cultural violence, it takes lots of different forms. And it's internalized. And it's hard, because you've got to have something going on in your head to sort of understand the world and you know, other people's choices. One thing I was reading about recently was in the Vietnam War, how they calculated success or failure. And they were using so many statistical indicators to measure victory, including, you know, how many villages bombed and how many, South Vietnamese said that they were kind of loyal and supportive, and how many enemy combatants have been killed, but they were reducing everyone involved to numbers, and also the numbers were being manipulated. So, you know, if we killed someone, they must have been the enemy. Otherwise, why did we kill them? That was kind of a cultural violence as well, because they they built a kind of intellectual construct for why the direct violence was okay, kind of minimizing the humanity of, of the people in Vietnam.

Ryan Comins 12:10

That's really fascinating. I also liked another part of Galtung thoughts that you brought up in the in the webinar, which is a distinction between negative peace, which is just the absence of violence, and positive peace, which I think he defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. How important is the concept of justice to this idea of positive peace?

Ellis Brooks 12:36

I think it's inextricable justice from peace. And I think that is a mistake that often political leaders make and perhaps one of the things that that leads our society into militarism, is a preoccupation with negative peace, that we will control and quash any direct violence, any any kind of resistance, but not actually think about what a just society looks like. I think in the webinar, I made the analogy of perhaps the armed forces, or blue helmets in the United Nations go into a country that's experiencing armed conflict and try to keep the peace and say we, you know, we've got a bigger stick now. So you need to stop fighting. And then it will, there'll be peace, but that that doesn't explain why people were fighting before why people

were aggrieved before, what was the injustice, or the fear or the need that led people into that conflict or trapped people into that conflict? So you need to go back a step and say, what was the cultural violence? What was the structural violence that they were experiencing? What was the the lack of justice, if you like, and how could that be addressed? And you can use some slightly different language around peace for that. And so the blue helmets of the peacekeepers, but then if you're trying to actually address the grievances, and the needs of the people involved in conflict, you might be a peacemaker, during the conflict resolution, but if you want to kind of go back to the root causes, like even before, you're in that place of saying, like, we're in a confrontation here, but you know, there's injustice, then you might say, where peace builders, we're doing it from a very fundamental what, what makes things fair, and I find that a useful concept both at the level of, of a state and the level of the school or community, because you have lots of schools who are very preoccupied with peacekeeping, you know, the children will not speak unless spoken to, they will walk on this side of their corridor or their uniform, be impeccable, and they will get detention if these things these requirements are not met. But that probably doesn't feel that peaceful for the students in that environment. If they feel you know, under constant threat of sanction.

Ryan Comins 14:55

Yeah, for sure. It's interesting that you brought up the the example of United Nations and sort of international interventions, because sometimes, when we're faced with so much evil and so much injustice in the world, it can feel like we have a sort of moral obligation to protect people who are suffering and to stop these injustices from happening. Is there ever a place for military action in situations like these? Or do you think there are more effective ways of confronting evil?

Ellis Brooks 15:25

I think there are more effective ways. But I recognize the difficulty of that dilemma. I think the dilemma often comes from the timescales that we use, you know, we say on the eve of violence, or in the midst of violence, well, aren't you going to do something, and if we'd been doing the peacebuilding 10 years before, then we wouldn't have been on in the horns of that dilemma. We can look at governments around the world now and say that they invest a lot in preparing for war, and their military budgets, or they might call it their security budgets. But perhaps they're not really investing in true security, which would make that kind of need for force as a last resort, less necessary. There's a really good project called Rethink Security, which I direct people to, it's a good website and accessible videos, and it looks at those kind of root violences, we could be addressing now, from climate breakdown to inequality, to the the sort of xenophobia can kind of racialized violence around the world and saying, if we were working on those more actively, then we wouldn't need \$1.7 trillion per year spent on on weapons. But I do, returning to that sort of dilemma that you posed, me and the United Nations itself, you've probably know, grappled with it under the responsibility to protect doctrine of like this kind of Rwanda Darfur style scenario where, like, we know that massacres are happening. So I'm going to speak for myself here, and not as any, any institution. And so I think what we're missing in that kind of scenario is a meaningful sense of a police presence. And I mean, a true police presence, not not a kind of, you know, another group of thugs with weapons, but people who

are part of the community and helping to protect people, in that circumstance, that dilemma of like, what does non violence mean, in that scenario, where violence is already part of the context? is something I think everyone needs to addressing our unconscious. I would like to say that I would not resort to direct violence in order to address that. But I think it's very hard to demand that of another person who is witnessing it.

Ryan Comins 17:55

Thanks. Your webinar focused a lot on militarization, specifically within the context of schools. So let's talk about that for a minute. So what is militarism? Or militarization? And how does it show up in schools?

Unknown Speaker 18:11

Militarism, I call the ideology, I suppose it's the ideology of war, to an extent is the ideology that military that armed forces are kind of the best solution to any given problem. And militarization is about the process about the direction of travel of a society and moving in that direction. So people often talk about, say, Germany in World War One or Imperial Japan as militarized societies, which no doubt they were, but I think we can still see a lot of militarism in our own society and in society in the USA and lots of other countries around the world. It's not a kind of some some places have and some just don't. And, albeit there are countries like Costa Rica, like Iceland to sort of have made an active choice, not to have kind of a military agenda. So where does militarisation start, you could picture someone right at the top of the pyramid to sort of saying, you know, I want a big army, let's spend my Kingdom's money to have a big army. But we were talking about cultural violence and what's in our heads at the beginning as well. militarism can start from our kind of collective consciousness and the way we see the world. And education is part of that as part of how that is constructed. The phrase military industrial complex is one we get from a speech by Eisenhower when he was leaving office, obviously, a very powerful war general and then a president and he had noticed that the war was over. And yet the military of the United States was still huge and kind of encompassing the world and lots of money was being spent on it. But there was a point at which his Traitor, actually called it the military industrial, educational complex, because they had noticed that the the education system was kind of part of that kind of network of reproducing the kind of architecture, the infrastructure of war, again and again, particularly the universities they were thinking of, but I think what we can talk about today, as well as his schools, it's a deliberate policy, as well to bring more exposure, about the armed forces into British classrooms. that's being done through programs like Troops to Teachers through programs like the expansion of cadet forces into state schools, and other military ethos organizations, they're called, it's being done through education resources, prepared by the government, that kind of uncritically celebratory of the armed forces on Forces Day as a thing that schools do as well as, as communities. So there are lots of ways and it's not, it's not just the kind of passive like, oh, let's do a bit more of this. The government commissioned reports and strategy on this. So the Military of Defence in Britain has a youth engagement strategy. In that strategy, they say that there are two primary goals. One is to recruit. So by getting young people excited about the armed forces, they will have more people joining the armed forces. And the other is to build up the support of the population for the armed forces. The third, that level goal that they talk about is to like support

education, citizenship for young people, but it's very much a second tier objective for them. And I think that's a sort of glimpse behind the curtain a little bit that that a document like that exists. So it's not just this will be a bit of fun for the kids. It is like we want their support. As I said in the webinar, none of this is a sort of attack on people who are engaged in the armed forces, or are the military industrial complex, like like, like I said to them, my father was in the Royal Air Force, and it's gonna be a very personal thing, but lots of people, but it is a critique of the war system, and how it kind of insinuates itself into our lives. So I think we can be in schools much more alerting critical to these things that will will influence the minds of young people.

Ryan Comins 22:33

Yeah, as a teacher, this sort of problem of militarizing young people is something that concerns me, it may also well be a concern for other teachers or educators who might be listening. So what can we do as educators or as teachers to help counter this culture of militarism in our own schools or our own classrooms?

Ellis Brooks 22:55

It's very hard to do it at the sort of structural level, because there it's a very well resourced agenda that's going on. But you know, your to your classroom, Ryan is your classroom. No, so the conversations you have in there are kind of sacred, and they are between you and those young people. So if whether it's like, a war from history that you're discussing, or whether it's, you know, a careers talk from the British Army, in the school, those are moments when those conversations might become really, really important. Or it might be something that's just happening in the news that day. And it's worth talking about when I was a teacher. And I was a foreign teacher, I remember a young man coming to me, and he was in year 11. So 16 years old, not great grades. And he was thinking very strongly about joining the army. I did feel a bit trapped because I I knew what my heart told me about that. But I also knew like, the policy of the school was, you know, just provide the kind of careers information about that, that there are good resources available to provide information like that. So there's a good website called before you sign up, great activists corder, David G, helped set up and what that website provides is like the real facts about life in the army, about what your rights are, what you might be asked to do, what you wouldn't be asked to do, what the outcomes for you are, like I said in the webinar, often the life outcomes are pretty poor for people who go through the armed forces and for physical and mental injury, increased risk of substance abuse, increase use of relationship break down, homelessness, more difficult kind of career progression. It's There are definitely, you know, people who say, the army was really good for me. But the, the statistics do not bear out that it is, on average better for you to join. But I think that's not information that works works that way into most classrooms, teachers can definitely be providing that kind of truth to young people.

Ryan Comins 25:19

Thanks, that's really helpful. I think there's also probably many of our listeners who are parents or who have young children. What's something that parents can do if they're concerned about militarism in their child's school,

Ellis Brooks 25:33

we have quite a few examples of this. Like a Quaker parent might contact us in the Peace Education team with, you know, saying like, my child is going on this school trip, and I'm not comfortable with it, or they're to complete their Duke of Edinburgh, they have to do this military activity. And I don't think that they should have to do that. Parents can feel very intimidated and disempowered in that kind of situation. But actually, they do have more power than they might think schools are very sensitive to what parents say to them. I say that with some awareness that there's not full equality of that certain some duty class and social status, social capital, some parents will have more kind of impact than others. And that's a kind of existing injustice. But talk to the parents, talk to your children about it, I think you definitely have the right to request an alternative. Some Quakers have framed this, as, you know, an issue of conscience or conscientious objection to them, that they should have that that rights not to support an institution of militarism, and kind of opt out of it. But I think talking to the young people, as well as the school is very important that because young people will not want to have been gone over the top of in that conversation. They are definitely part of the conversation. In say, in Community of Christ, there are already some peace education initiatives that work with young people. Like the young peacemakers clubs, there are peace mobiles, which helps children to develop peacemaking skills through play. What else can local congregations do if they want to help counter this trend of militarization among them?

Well, I think what you're talking about is really good, because you're kind of modeling it, because not everything is about the kind of head to head debate of militarism, or not militarism, or like is war a good idea or not just kind of building up the skills and child development with young young people and building up kind of capacities like empathy, and communication skills is part of people being able to sort of develop nonviolent capacities, I think so. So that's already really worth doing. We've got some nice resources to do some of this. So you can go to [quaker.org.uk slash teaching](http://quaker.org.uk/teaching). In the webinar, we use that poster of a British streets with various kind of examples of how war might affect our everyday lives, for young people to discuss. I think one challenge for young people, perhaps in one of your Peacemaker clubs, is that they might also be going to a mainstream school where that isn't so valued, though. If you have adults who are kind of learning activities and trying them out in that kind of safe space, then perhaps they can then having incubated that move it into a school in their community and kind of say, this is something that we could offer, we could offer a circle time, where we're you were developing conflict resolution skills for half an hour per week, or where we're going to be discussing issues like refugees. And there are some Quaker projects like in Mid Wales, in Birmingham, in Cheshire, where local people who just had this kind of concern that there could be more peace in schools took it to school there, and actually, not every school, but some of them, you know, basically bit their hand off there was there were so keen to have that kind of content. So there's kind of a shared need there.

Ryan Comins 29:11

That's really encouraging. But there are those sort of positive examples, trying to educate people about peace in such a militarized world must sometimes feel like you're fighting an uphill battle. What keeps you going?

Ellis Brooks 29:25

I think contact with young people is a big motivator for me because and I think in in the other world, it can feel like wading through treacle, you know, the kind of systems and barriers we've kind of built up. But when when you're actually talking to young people about their experience of conflict, about their experience of peace, there, they're really up for it. And a lot of my work has been training young people in mediation and mediation is basically about listening. to people in conflict and trying not to judge them, children, young people get that so quickly, I would train children so much more happily than training adults in mediation, because I think adults have built up all these kind of other ideas about how they should win and dominate. But children are just going to resonate with the idea like, Oh, we want it to be fair. And they know what it feels like when they're not listened to. When an adult goes overhead, they know what it feels like when they're not treated fairly. For example, if a teacher says just Oh, say sorry, without really paying attention to what was happening, so that that gives me kind of the nourishment with a pandemic, and lockdown everything that that renourishment has been a bit detached, I'm sure you've had the same kind of dilemma. And then you can do online activities and resources, but they're, they're not quite as human in some ways. Although, I have heard about some good projects where they have been finding new and innovative ways for young people. Because it's where young people have been lately, right, is on their smartphones in kind of the social media space. And organizations have often resisted that because there is this premium on human to human in person contact. But forced into that digital space, they've actually found they can do a lot of good work there. So that's perhaps a stretching thing for me now. But yeah, I think I think I'm seeing and people resonate with it is what what keeps me going?

Ryan Comins 31:32

Yeah, I would really echo that sentiment of working with young people can be so nourishing and energizing sometimes it definitely is inspiring when you're talking about these topics of justice and peace to hear that their perspectives on these people who are interested in learning more about this topic and some of the things you've been speaking about, are there any resources that you would recommend? So, for example, any books or websites or documentaries that people should watch? or seek out?

Ellis Brooks 32:04

Definitely, and perhaps too many? So on the militarization question, especially if you're based in Britain, I would check out a documentary film called War School subtitle is The Battle for Britain's Children. And that that is basically looking at all these ways, militarization kind of affects young people in Britain. But also, a lot of the content is with veterans who have experienced what it was like to actually go through the old system, and an experienced war firsthand, that is available at the website, war.school. And there are accompanying education resources that we've made to go with that which can be used in secondary school classroom. So you know, you'd watch a clip from from the film and then do some activities to explore it with young people. And if you're in a context, where conflict resolution is what's really important for the young people, I would recommend the Peer Mediation Network, which is lots of separate

organizations around Britain, that provide training and support for that. And what's important about the way they do it is that it's, it's led by the young people, young people are the mediators. So it's not just adults learning other other kind of systems of keeping the pieces young people are the peacemakers. That's it the peacemakers. If you're more broadly want to explore peace education, as a topic, I'd recommend the Peace Education Network, which is a bit more kind of heterogeneous, like say, you've got Veterans for Peace, you've got the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. You've got ourselves but other religious groups, like Pax Christi, like Circles of Salaam in there, so it's a it's quite diverse. So if you're sort of, I know, I want something like to do with peace for young people, but I'm not sure what, that's quite a good kind of one stop shop.

Ryan Comins 34:09

That's really helpful. Thank you so much. It's interesting that you brought up this idea of children being energizing and inspiring to work with because in in the Gospel of Mark, there's this famous passage, which says that people were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them. And the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, let the little children come to me, do not stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these, Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and bless them. So what is it do you think about children that Jesus was encouraging people to emulate here? What is that special Something about young people when it comes to peace in your experience.

Ellis Brooks 35:03

Hmm. Yeah, it's a lovely quote, isn't it? And it reminded me of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. And one of the key principles of which is children and young people should be involved in any decisions that are made about them. I think, partly that's, that's reminding us of that, that we shouldn't be doing things to children, young people, we should be doing things with them, their their humanity is no less than ours as adults. And our understanding of their lives as adults is kind of imperfect. And actually, their insights and wisdom can actually sometimes lead us. And I think we're seeing that on it on a global scale. At the moment, young people being leaders in the climate justice movement in the Black Lives Matter movement, where my generation, I'm not sure to include in my generation, that, you know, the generations before have not fully addressed those, those challenges. So we're being led by the young. And as I said, right down to the individual level of a child who understands inequality in their own lives, or perceives that, even if they don't have the language to express it, they can see it. So that's something that a peace educator can in dialogue, help them to give voice to and say, that's, that's not fair. And this should change and scores where they do pupil voice, it's sometimes called, but that participation of young people in decision making in a genuine way and not a tokenistic way, you can really see the difference. It's a community when that happens.

Ryan Comins 36:53

I recently did a university course in education. And when you look at the research into pedagogy and things like that, there has been this shift from a very kind of teacher centered point of view, where the teacher is kind of imparting knowledge to children, a shift to a much more kind of partnership model, where, where the class and the teacher are sort of cooperating in this endeavor of learning. So I do think the research is kind of supports what you're saying and is heading in that direction

Ellis Brooks 37:22

That's good to know. The theory is there as well, or the research is there as well. I think Paulo Freire is someone who really influenced me as well, in Bali when I was saying he was a teacher, but since as a peace educator, because he talks about the pedagogy of the oppressed. That's the title of his collection of essays. And that idea that you need to actually be giving agency or people need to be claiming that agency, it's not for the teacher just to kind of impart, this is what peace is, people need to claim that piece that justice for themselves. And say that, if you're an educator, you are constantly trying to re empower, pass back the power to the community of learning.

Ryan Comins 38:08

Yeah, I think that's such an such an important aspect of that. I was really struck in your webinar presentation by a quotation that you shared from Advices and Queries, which I think is a Quaker book that says, "Stand firm in our testimony of peace, even when others commit or prepare to commit acts of violence, yet, always remember that they too, are children of God." And this phrase, children of God reminded me of the Beatitudes where Jesus says, Blessed are the peacemakers, but they will be called children of God. What does it mean to be children of God from a great perspective? Or do you have any thoughts on that phrase?

Ellis Brooks 38:51

Yeah, I mean, for me, I think it's, it's saying that we are all children of God, we were talking just now about kind of that which isn't inspiring about the children in our lives, or the children we work with, I suppose that sort of reminds us of the child in ourselves and sort of listening out for, for that voice in ourselves. And I'm trying to listen to that voice in everyone around us. So when we're searching for peace, when we're seeking to resolve conflict, where we're listening to the, that sort of childish connection with God, that's, that's in everyone's heart. That's not to poetical, but yeah, I think it's nice to have things like those Beatitudes to fall back on sometimes when you're, you're struggling with how complicated things are to be able to say, No, we are all children of God. And what did where does that leave me today?

Ryan Comins 39:55

I think that's beautiful. So if you're a parent You're a teacher or you're a student, and you're concerned by this militarization in schools, and you're wanting to bring this to the attention of principal or a head teacher or senior leadership there. What are the kind of arguments that you can use to try and get them on your side to try and convince them to your point of view?

Ellis Brooks 40:22

So I think there were three main arguments, and they are balance, conscience, and safety. So first, with balance, what I'm talking about is educational balance, like, are you providing people with both sides of an argument? In England, the 1996 Education Act says that if you're talking about a controversial topic with young people, then the school has a responsibility to provide the different perspectives on that issue, you know, war, and what the Armed Forces do is a controversial topic. So if you are having a careers talk from the armed forces, then how is the school gonna meet that responsibility for balance? That's, that's just good education. That's good learning, in terms of conscience, and talking about the morality of it in all the sort of UK nations, there's some version of this in in England, the inspection framework talks about spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. So talking about moral questions is really important. But perhaps if you are a person of faith who believes in non violence, and you might even go as far as framing it as conscientious objection to say, I do not want to support these activities, which I believe are preparing us for perhaps the more sort of bureaucratic education world language that is choice, there's a lot of choice in education now. So you could say like, I should be able to choose to opt out of this, this visit to a military base for my child. And then finally, safety. If we're talking about the military, that can have a very obvious meaning. For example, we know that people who joined the army under 18 years old, which you can do in Britain, are at greater risk of death or injury, once they are actually deployed. But beyond that, there are all the other risks, which we've talked about of increased risk of homelessness, substance abuse, mental health problems in later life. And you could add, bringing, bringing the conscience and safety ones together, you could add the idea of moral injury. And this is a sort of idea of a kind of trauma that lots of people have experienced or have had, where it's very difficult to live with a sense that you have been involved with acts of violence. And lots, lots of people are living with that. And it's it's not, it's not an easy thing. So you can say like, these are three very good reasons to at least have a critical approach to militarization in your school.

Ryan Comins 43:04

Thanks, that's really helpful for people, I think, just before we finish, are there any special events or dates coming up, that would be a good time or a good opportunity for people to get involved in peace education, or peace activism?

Ellis Brooks 43:20

We're recording this in September, and on the 21st of September, it's the international death piece. And we have a resource on our website called peace week. So whether it's just for one day or for a whole week, there are lots of activities and ideas in there for a school to really get to the kind of questions we've been talking about. We don't really know how it's gonna feel in schools as the new term develops for pandemic or still during the pandemic. But that phrase that we've been hearing, "Build Back Better" definitely applies, I think, and there's a lot of fear, but there's also opportunity to piece build back better in schools now. And one of the thing people could look at is something called the Restore Framework from an organization called Peacemakers is a Quaker organization based in Birmingham, England. And that's about really thinking about peaceful relationships in your school, as you reopen as you start to unfold so that that's not one event. I think that's a kind of journey that a school community might want to undertake right now. If there are Quakers listening, we're planning a Quaker activist gathering

online for this autumn. We don't quite have a date yet. But if you keep an eye on quaker.org.uk, then that will be posted on there.

Ryan Comins 44:46

That's great. Thank you. Well, Ellis, thank you so much for being a part of this follow up podcast to the 2020 European peace colloquy webinar series. Thank you for your time and your important reflection. On peace and education as we continue to move towards becoming a more peaceful humanity. And thank you as well to all of our listeners. Join us next time to listen to Alexandre Christoyannopoulos share about the Leo Tolstoy's political thought as a remedy to nationalism, as we all continue to explore together on many different Grounds for Peace.

Josh Mangelson 45:32

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