

## **Peace Education in the School Context: A Reflection on Teachers' Perceptions and Practices**

Alessandra Priore, Università Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria, Italy

Federica De Marco, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", Italy

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### **Abstract**

Peace education entails moving beyond a reductive conception of peace understood merely as the absence of war and redefining it as a positive and relational process rooted in everyday educational practices (UNESCO, 2023). From this perspective, peace education is conceived not only as an educational orientation aimed at transforming educational and cultural relationships, in line with Galtung's (2019) distinction between negative and positive peace, but also as a practice directed toward the construction of critical dialogue, grounded in Freire's conception of education as a dialogical process oriented toward emancipation (Freire, 1970, 1996), and in democratic pedagogies that identify cooperation and reflective inquiry as generative principles of educational processes (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Consistent with this perspective, contemporary research on peace education highlights the need to rethink pedagogical paradigms capable of addressing the complexities of contemporary educational contexts (Guetta, 2024). Building on this assumption, conflict is understood as a structural dimension of educational ecosystems and as a resource for transforming educational and relational processes (Lederach, 1997, 2005). Accordingly, an exploratory study was conducted to investigate the professional representations and educational practices of 266 teachers regarding peace education and their connections with conflict management. Qualitative data analysis, conducted using MaxQDA software, reveals a conception of peace as a multidimensional and everyday educational process associated with the development of relational and social-emotional competencies and classroom well-being. The findings also highlight teachers' recognition of conflict as a pedagogical resource, intentionally employed to foster reflection, dialogue, and the transformation of relational dynamics.

*Keywords:* peace education, conflict management, teaching, classroom climate, educational relationship

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## Introduction

Peace education has assumed a central role in contemporary pedagogical debate, as it calls for a redefinition of the role of the school as a space for fostering democratic, inclusive, and coexistence-oriented relationships. Accordingly, within a context marked by social conflicts, cultural polarization, and relational fragility, peace cannot be understood merely as the absence of war but rather as a formative, relational, and transformative process that permeates the everyday life of educational settings. This perspective is consistent with the approach promoted by UNESCO, which, in its 1974 Recommendation, recognized the role of education in fostering international understanding, human rights, and cooperation, and which, in the more recent 2023 Recommendation, reaffirmed the centrality of peace education as a structural dimension of democratic education (UNESCO, 1974; UNESCO, 2023). From this perspective, peace studies have contributed to redefining the very concept of peace from an educational, relational, and transformative standpoint, providing theoretical frameworks that help explain the role of schools in fostering more equitable and inclusive contexts. A fundamental theoretical reference is provided by Johan Galtung, who distinguishes between negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, understood as the active construction of conditions of justice and equity aimed at counteracting structural and cultural forms of violence (Galtung, 1969, 1996). Accordingly, educating for peace entails not only recognizing the dynamics of exclusion and inequality but also promoting competencies oriented toward the transformation of relationships. This perspective is further developed by John Paul Lederach (1997, 2005), who conceives conflict as a generative dimension of relationships and as a potential opportunity for transformation. Within this framework, peacebuilding requires the creation of dialogical spaces grounded in mutual recognition and moral imagination, understood as the capacity to transcend immediate representations of conflict and open oneself to alternative relational possibilities. In continuity with this perspective, François Jullien (2026) introduces the concept of *dé-coïncidence*, referring to the possibility of distancing oneself from one's own representations without negating them. This cognitive displacement, which recalls the relational dimension, makes it possible to suspend the rigidity of one's own positions and to open a relational space in which the Other can emerge in their alterity. From this perspective, the transformation of conflict requires a reflective engagement with one's own positions. Applied to educational contexts, this perspective underscores the centrality of reflexivity within the teaching profession. As highlighted by Donald A. Schön (1983), professional practice cannot be reduced to the technical application of predefined procedures; rather, it entails the professional's capacity to critically interrogate their own representations and to re-elaborate them within practice. Accordingly, conflict management and the construction of peace-oriented educational contexts also depend on the meanings through which teachers interpret relationships, make sense of conflict situations, and conceptualize peace education. Consequently, the transformation of conflict depends not exclusively on educational situations themselves but also on the meanings through which those situations are interpreted. Within school contexts, teachers interpret conflicts, attribute meaning to relationships, and guide their actions on the basis of specific professional representations, which concretely influence the ways in which coexistence is fostered and relational dynamics are managed. The literature highlights how these interpretative frameworks profoundly shape educational practice. For example, Ingrid Hakvoort, Karin Larsson, and Anna Lundström (2020) show that teachers understand conflict through different interpretative lenses, ranging from rule transgression to relational vulnerability, and that these perspectives significantly influence their educational responses. Consistent with this line of research, Buchori et al. (2021) found that teachers' peace capacity develops through the interaction of knowledge, attitudes, and competencies oriented toward nonviolence, thereby confirming the centrality of the professional dimension in

promoting peace-oriented educational practices. Returning to the centrality of professional representations, this perspective is particularly evident with regard to the social-emotional and relational dimensions that characterize educational contexts. Indeed, Taylor et al. (2020, 2022) demonstrate that empathy and the quality of intergroup contact significantly influence attitudes and prosocial behaviours, showing that the construction of relationships also depends on the ways in which the Other is perceived and interpreted. Complementing this perspective, O'Driscoll et al. (2020) found that specific beliefs may hinder these processes by limiting relational openness, thereby confirming the influence of representations in shaping social dynamics. These dimensions are inevitably reflected in educational and instructional practices. Paradoxically, López et al. (2022) highlight the complexity of the relationship between classroom management and school climate, demonstrating that even strategies perceived as punitive may be interpreted by educational actors as functional to coexistence. This suggests that the meaning of educational practices lies not solely in their implementation but also in the effects they produce and in the ways they are interpreted, negotiated, and legitimized within specific cultural and professional frameworks. Consequently, the construction of peace-oriented educational contexts requires critical and reflective engagement with the representations that shape educational practice. In light of these theoretical perspectives, the present study aims to explore Italian teachers' professional representations of peace education, considering the definitions and meanings they attribute to it as key elements for understanding how relationships, conflict, and coexistence are interpreted within school contexts. Although this contribution forms part of a broader research project also addressing classroom climate and conflict management, it presents a preliminary exploratory analysis focusing on the semantic and interpretative themes emerging from the participating teachers. Specifically, the analysis seeks to identify the interpretative categories associated with the concept of peace and to examine the main factors and dimensions that characterize educational practices aimed at fostering positive relationships and promoting democratic coexistence.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Objectives**

The present study is designed as an exploratory qualitative investigation aimed at eliciting the professional representations of a group of Italian teachers and examining their definitions of peace, the meanings associated with it, and the educational and instructional strategies they adopt. The data presented in this paper are drawn from a broader research project that also investigated classroom climate and conflict management within school contexts. This contribution focuses on the first phase of the study, which was devoted to collecting teachers' perspectives, implicit theories, and professional practices developed around the concept of peace.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The study involved 266 Italian teachers and therefore employed a non-probability, self-selected convenience sample, consistent with the exploratory and descriptive purposes of educational research (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The aim was to identify the main representations associated with the meaning of peace education and the educational dimensions related to it.

From a descriptive perspective, the sample consisted predominantly of teachers working in Italian public primary schools (74.1%), while the remaining participants were teachers from

other educational levels or employed in private schools. With regard to teaching experience, 50.4% of the participants reported more than 10 years of professional experience, 34.6% had between 4 and 10 years of experience, 10.9% had between 1 and 3 years of experience, and 4.1% were certified teachers who had not yet entered professional service. The participants' teaching areas reflected a heterogeneous disciplinary background, ranging from the humanities to the sciences. The largest subgroup (15.8%) consisted of special education teachers working with students with special educational needs. Although the sample is not statistically representative of the Italian teaching population, its non-probability and self-selected nature includes teachers from different Italian regions and educational levels, with the highest concentrations of participants coming from Lazio, Campania, Lombardy, Veneto, Sicily, and Calabria. The socio-demographic and professional information collected was used exclusively for descriptive purposes and to contextualize the sample and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the Italian teaching population.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

Data were collected through the online administration of a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of socio-demographic questions, structured closed-ended items using a Likert scale, and open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' professional representations of peace education, encouraging the emergence of definitions, meanings attributed to peace, perceptions of conflict management, and reflections on the educational resources and practices considered effective within school contexts. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the study and the procedures for data processing, and their explicit informed consent for the use of the collected data was obtained. Before the analysis, the dataset underwent a process of data screening and cleaning, during which questionnaires completed by individuals who were not members of school staff or were otherwise inconsistent with the objectives of the study were excluded.

### **Data Analysis**

During the analysis process, quantitative data relating to the characteristics of the sample were analyzed using descriptive frequency statistics, while the textual data collected through the open-ended responses were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis with the support of MAXQDA software. Thematic analysis was adopted as a flexible method aimed at identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within a textual corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). The analytical process was structured into several closely interconnected phases. In the first phase, familiarization with the textual corpus was achieved through repeated readings of the responses, with the aim of identifying semantic recurrences, conceptual themes, and recurring ways of representing peace. Subsequently, units of meaning were identified, and initial codes were generated based on the elements considered relevant to the objectives of the study. The codes were then progressively compared, reorganized, and grouped into broader thematic clusters through a recursive process of review and refinement aimed at verifying the internal coherence of the groupings and the distinctiveness of the emerging categories.

This process involved a continuous interpretative movement between the empirical data, the relevant literature, and the adopted theoretical framework, allowing the interpretative categories to be progressively refined. Consistent with the reflexive thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021), themes were not regarded as elements that emerged neutrally from the data; rather, they were understood as the outcome of a process of

interpretation and progressive conceptualization, constructed through the interaction between the researcher, the data, and the underlying theoretical framework. Accordingly, the analysis focused not only on the frequency of lexical occurrences but also on the meanings that participants attributed to peace, relationships, and school coexistence.

MAXQDA software was used to support the organization of the empirical material, the coding of textual segments, the retrieval of coded occurrences, and the progressive development of thematic groupings, thereby facilitating a systematic and recursive management of the analytical process. Data coding was structured into three levels, in accordance with the analytical approach supported by MAXQDA. The first level was lexical and concerned the analysis of the terminology used by teachers to define peace education. Recurring words and expressions were coded into lexical groupings (*lexical families*) according to the criterion of semantic homogeneity, while preserving participants' original wording through in vivo coding (10 lexical families).

The second level was thematic-categorical and involved the identification of broader thematic clusters derived from the previous lexical groupings. These clusters were generated by aggregating units of meaning that either co-occurred or belonged to the same conceptual domain.

The third level was interpretative and consisted of assigning broader conceptual labels to the thematic clusters and developing a theoretical interpretation of the collected data.

Accordingly, this analytical structure made it possible to progressively connect the lexical dimension of participants' responses with broader interpretative dimensions, thereby revealing the ways in which teachers semantically and pedagogically construct the meaning of peace education.

## Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses made it possible to explore the ways in which teachers attribute meaning to peace education, revealing articulated and multidimensional professional representations. Indeed, the definitions provided by the participants were not limited to generic or abstract descriptions; rather, they reflected different levels of interpretation of peace, in which value-based, relational, educational, and experiential dimensions were intertwined. In particular, the analysis of the textual corpus revealed a dual representational framework through which teachers semantically construct the meaning of peace. Two distinct levels of analysis emerged: a definitional level and a descriptive level.

On the one hand, the definitional-lexical level is characterized by concise responses and stimulus words through which teachers attribute an immediate semantic status to peace, using expressions such as *necessary*, *fundamental*, and *indispensable*.

On the other hand, a descriptive-thematic level emerges, in which responses assume a more elaborate and narrative form, explicitly articulating the pedagogical, relational, and educational meanings associated with peace education.

Building on this distinction, the thematic coding process identified five main thematic clusters, reflecting the complexity of the professional representations that emerged. The first theme conceptualizes peace as a primary educational need or necessity. This cluster includes

expressions such as *necessary, fundamental, indispensable, essential, unavoidable, a priority, a foundation, a mission, an opportunity*, as well as *everyday, useful, and meaningful*. The recurrence of this vocabulary indicates that, from the teachers' perspective, peace education is not perceived as an ancillary or marginal aspect of schooling but rather as a constitutive dimension of educational experience and of the very purpose of education. A second theme conceptualizes peace as an intrapersonal or individual dimension of the person. In this case, participants referred to concepts such as *self-respect, serenity, inner growth, personal responsibility, self-awareness, emotional regulation, self-determination, and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong*. Peace education is thus situated at the level of the individual and, therefore, within an intrapersonal dimension. Before becoming a relationship with others, it entails work on oneself, one's emotional, ethical, and relational disposition. Peace is therefore interpreted as an inner balance and a condition of personal well-being. A third theme interprets peace as an educational process. This cluster includes references such as *continuous education, education for life, education for listening, education for choice, divergent education, training the mind, mediation, an educational pathway, the acquisition of cultural, emotional, and social competencies, and the promotion of nonviolent attitudes*. These responses indicate that peace is perceived as a continuous and cross-cutting educational practice, one that cannot be reduced to isolated activities or occasional interventions but rather permeates the entire educational process. Peace is therefore understood as an intentional educational pathway aimed at fostering relational, emotional, and cognitive competencies. The fourth theme concerns peace as an intersubjective and communal dimension. The recurring vocabulary includes terms such as *respect, inclusion, integration, interaction, sharing, active citizenship, respect for others' freedom, empathy, solidarity, justice, tolerance, kindness, collaboration, care, recognition of the other, coexistence, and collective well-being*. Within this cluster, peace takes the form of a relational and communal space. It concerns not only the individual but also the way in which individuals inhabit relationships with others. Accordingly, peace education can be understood as a social practice grounded in reciprocity and coexistence as constitutive dimensions of building positive relationships. Finally, the fifth theme conceptualizes peace as an ideal and value-oriented horizon. Alongside the vocabulary of necessity and everyday life, participants used expressions such as *beautiful, wonderful, harmony, utopia, ideal, abstract, victory over evil, and ideology*. This cluster reveals a significant semantic tension: peace is represented simultaneously as a concrete need and as a symbolic, desirable, and aspirational horizon. It therefore oscillates between a practical dimension and an ideal one, between everyday experience and a value-oriented projection. The five themes identified do not emerge as isolated categories but are instead strongly interconnected. Together, they are organized around a shared conceptual framework in which peace is understood as a dimension that simultaneously encompasses both the individual and the social spheres. Indeed, on the one hand, a tension emerges between peace as a primary necessity, rooted in everyday lived experience, and peace as an ideal horizon, associated with images of harmony and ethical aspiration. On the other hand, a polarity can be observed between the intrapersonal dimension, centred on the self and inner growth, and the social dimension, centred on relationships, coexistence, and reciprocity. These dimensions are unified by a strong process-oriented perspective, in which peace education is conceived as an intentional and continuous educational practice. Moreover, several excerpts provide direct insight into the participants' voices and illustrate the semantic richness of the representations that emerged. One teacher defines peace education as “*a form of everyday education that is reflected in the way one relates to students, colleagues, and all members of the school staff.*”

Another participant states that educating for peace means “*managing the contradictions and the inherently human conflicts of life in a conscious way.*”

In another response, peace is described as the ability to *“live together without hurting one another—neither with our hands, nor with our words, nor with our ideas.”*

These excerpts demonstrate that the representations collected extend far beyond an abstract appeal to nonviolence. Rather, they refer to the relational, communicative, and everyday practices through which peace is constructed and negotiated within educational contexts. Taken together, the findings portray peace education as a multidimensional process in which educational need, personal development, intersubjective relationships, social competence, and a value-oriented horizon are closely intertwined. In the teachers' accounts, peace does not appear as an isolated curricular topic or merely as a moral exhortation to “be kind to one another”; rather, it is understood as an everyday practice that permeates the ways in which teachers and students interact in the classroom, build relationships, address conflict, and promote well-being. These findings are consistent with Galtung's perspective (1969, 1996), as they demonstrate a shift beyond a purely negative conception of peace. Indeed, many teachers define peace not merely as the absence of war or conflict, but as the presence of respect, listening, dialogue, empathy, justice, coexistence, and responsibility. This understanding is also consistent with Patel (2022), who argues that living together harmoniously requires the integration of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social dimensions. Furthermore, the centrality attributed to everyday experience confirms Montanari's (2023) argument that peace education, particularly in early childhood and primary education, cannot be reduced to an occasional intervention but must become an ordinary educational practice embedded in routines, language, relationships, and the everyday management of school life. From this perspective, peace emerges as a lived educational culture rather than as content that is merely transmitted. Particularly noteworthy is the role attributed to conflict. Several responses indicate that teachers do not interpret conflict solely as a problem to be resolved, but rather as an inherent aspect of relational life. This finding is consistent with the work of Lederach (1997, 2005) and Hakvoort et al. (2018), who argue that the ways in which teachers understand conflict directly influence the educational strategies they adopt. When conflict is interpreted as an opportunity for learning, dialogical and transformative possibilities emerge; conversely, when it is perceived as a threat to order or authority, containment-oriented or punitive responses tend to prevail. In this regard, Schön's (1983, 1987) work provides a useful framework for interpreting the findings through the lens of teachers' reflective professionalism. Indeed, educating for peace requires the capacity for reflection-in-action: teachers must be able to interpret educational situations, recognize the complexity of emotional and relational dynamics, critically examine their own responses, and select educational practices that are consistent with a nonviolent perspective. Teachers' professional representations therefore become a decisive component of their professionalism, as they shape the ways in which they interpret relationships, conflict, discipline, and coexistence. Overall, the interpretative model that emerges may be summarized as a conception of peace education as educational, intersubjective, and social reciprocity. At the core of this model lies the dimension of reciprocity: individuals contribute to the construction of peace through respect, responsibility, listening, care, and mediation; at the same time, this participation generates a formative return for the individuals themselves, expressed in terms of serenity, well-being, inner growth, and the attribution of meaning to their own experience. Surrounding this core is a methodological and practical dimension, consisting of practices such as dialogue, mediation, education for choice, the cultivation of thinking, the collaborative construction of solutions, and the nonviolent management of conflict.

**Table 1**

*Analytical Levels and Interpretative Themes Emerging From the Data Analysis: From In Vivo Coding to Theme Development*

| Representative Quotation                                                                                                                                                           | Lexical Family (In Vivo Coding)              | Category       | Theme                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| "Fundamental and indispensable."                                                                                                                                                   | Educational necessity                        | Need/Necessity | Peace as a primary educational need or necessity      |
| "Peace education is a form of everyday education that is reflected in the way we relate to students, colleagues, and all members of the school staff."                             | Educational necessity                        | Need/Necessity | Peace as a primary educational need or necessity      |
| "Educating each individual to be at peace with themselves and with others."                                                                                                        | Inner awareness and self-understanding       | Individual     | Peace as an intrapersonal dimension of the individual |
| "Peace education is the ability to manage one's positive and negative emotions in order to respect oneself and those around us."                                                   | Inner awareness and self-understanding       | Individual     | Peace as an intrapersonal dimension of the individual |
| "Educating for peace means educating my students about the importance of serenity and peace of mind."                                                                              | Affective and emotional education            | Process        | Peace as an educational process                       |
| "A continuous process aimed at developing a culture of peace through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes."                                                         | Education and educational process            | Process        | Peace as an educational process                       |
| "Educating for peace means teaching and learning how to deal consciously with disagreement and the inherently human conflicts of life."                                            | Dialogue, listening, and mediation           | Process        | Peace as an educational process                       |
| "A cross-curricular educational pathway aimed at improving listening to others' perspectives, dialogue, communication, and mutual respect."                                        | Dialogue, listening, and mediation           | Process        | Peace as an educational process                       |
| "Peace education is the ability to live together without hurting one another—neither with our hands, nor with our words, nor with our ideas."                                      | Coexistence and relationships                | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Educating for peace means providing the tools to make this world a better place for ourselves and for all living beings."                                                         | Coexistence and relationships                | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Educating for peace means promoting respect for others, embracing what is different from us, and engaging in dialogue to find common ground."                                     | Respect and recognition of the other         | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Educating individuals to take responsibility for creating environments in which everyone feels respected and free."                                                               | Respect and recognition of the other         | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "A commitment to building a climate that fosters peace, sharing, and acts of kindness, where collaboration replaces competition."                                                  | Inclusion, collaboration, and cooperation    | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Educating people to resolve conflicts without seeking confrontation, but by constructing solutions that satisfy everyone."                                                        | Inclusion, collaboration, and cooperation    | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Peace education is education for coexistence, justice, and respect for life in all its forms."                                                                                    | Justice and nonviolence                      | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "There can be no peace without justice and without rights. Educating means fostering constructive dialogue, not teaching people to bow their heads in order to avoid controversy." | Justice and nonviolence                      | Social         | Peace as an intersubjective and social dimension      |
| "Peace education could be described as a glimpse of hope for a better world, especially in these times."                                                                           | Peace as an ideal and value-oriented horizon | Ideal          | Peace as an ideal and value-oriented horizon          |
| "Peace is harmony, music, and colours."                                                                                                                                            | Peace as an ideal and value-oriented horizon | Ideal          | Peace as an ideal and value-oriented horizon          |

## Conclusions

Overall, the findings indicate that the teachers who participated in this study conceptualize peace education as an everyday, relational, and multidimensional educational process. Indeed, the definitions collected reveal a conception of peace that integrates educational need, personal development, social-emotional competencies, democratic coexistence, and the nonviolent transformation of relationships. From this perspective, peace emerges as a pervasive practice of school life, embedded in language, behaviours, approaches to conflict management, and the

construction of a positive classroom climate. From a theoretical and pedagogical standpoint, the study reinforces the idea that teachers' professional representations constitute a crucial dimension for understanding how peace education is conceptualized and translated into educational practice. The findings show that the ways in which teachers define peace also implicitly shape the ways in which they interpret conflict, build educational relationships, and attribute meaning to coexistence. Consequently, peace education should not be regarded as an additional or peripheral curricular topic but rather as a cross-cutting dimension of teachers' professional practice. In this regard, the findings highlight the need to strengthen both initial teacher education and continuing professional development in the areas of peace education, constructive conflict management, and social-emotional competencies. As demonstrated by Buchori et al. (2021) and Diazgranados et al. (2014), the capacity to promote peace within educational contexts cannot be taken for granted but requires intentional, reflective, and experiential learning pathways. From a constructive and forward-looking perspective, the data further suggest that teachers' discourse and professional representations already provide fertile ground upon which more systematic and informed educational practices can be developed. Nevertheless, the study presents several limitations, which may also be considered opportunities for future research. First, the sample should be expanded in order to provide a broader and more comprehensive representation of the Italian teaching population. Accordingly, the present study should primarily be understood as an exploratory and interpretative investigation aimed at identifying the meanings, representations, and ways in which teachers conceptualize peace education within school contexts. Furthermore, the findings from this initial phase of analysis reveal two distinct levels of participants' responses: a definitional level, characterized by concise formulations and vocabulary strongly oriented toward value-based meanings, reflecting the semantic status attributed to peace education; and a descriptive level, in which responses assume a more narrative form, structured around pedagogical, relational, and experiential meanings. It is particularly within this latter level that potential tensions begin to emerge between the theoretical definitions attributed to peace education and the ways in which teachers describe the management of conflict and relational dynamics within the classroom. This aspect, which may also be interpreted in light of potential social desirability dynamics, nevertheless requires further investigation, which will be undertaken in the subsequent stages of the research. At the same time, the reflective process activated through the questionnaire also provided the participating teachers with an opportunity to develop greater professional awareness of their own educational practices. In line with Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, the study encouraged participants to critically reflect on their approaches to conflict management, their relational practices, and the meanings they attribute to peace in everyday school life. Within this framework, professional reflexivity may also be interpreted in relation to Bandura's (2001) concept of agency, understood as the individual's capacity to critically interpret their own educational practice and to consciously (re)orient it within complex and dynamic contexts.

Third, the present contribution reports the findings from the first phase of the analysis, focusing on teachers' definitions of peace education, whereas the dimensions concerning classroom climate and conflict management will be examined in greater depth in subsequent stages of the research. The analytical process was accompanied by an inter-coding phase conducted by the researchers through moments of reflective discussion, collaborative dialogue, and interpretative negotiation of the emerging codes. Consistent with the methodological literature on qualitative research, inter-coding was not conceived as a procedure aimed merely at mechanically verifying coding agreement. Rather, it was understood as a dialogical and reflective practice intended to refine the internal coherence of the analytical categories, deepen the interpretation of the data, and strengthen the interpretative credibility of the analysis.

Furthermore, this process made it possible to value the intersubjective dimension that characterizes qualitative inquiry, whereby dialogue among researchers contributes to the shared construction of interpretation (Cardano, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Mortari, 2007; Saldaña, 2021). The findings provide several promising directions for further investigation into the relationship between teachers' professional representations, educational practices, and conflict management within school contexts. In particular, the evidence gathered may offer useful insights for identifying specific professional development needs related to peace education, the construction of a positive relational climate, and the promotion of dialogical practices in everyday school life. Building on these premises, future developments of this research may contribute to the design of professional development programmes for teachers aimed at fostering reflective and transformative processes capable of strengthening teachers' educational agency in managing relationships and conflicts. Such a perspective is grounded in a conception of education understood not as the passive transmission of knowledge, but as a critical and generative practice that promotes awareness, participation, and shared responsibility.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve the linguistic quality of the English text, to support the translation of the original manuscript into academic English, and to assist with stylistic revision. The AI tool was used exclusively for language editing and writing support and did not contribute to the conceptualization of the study, the interpretation of the findings, or the scientific conclusions. The authors carefully reviewed and edited all AI-assisted outputs and assume full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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**Contact email:** f.demarco@uniroma1.it