Empathy: A Key Element to Peace Education

By

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Abstract

In this study, I look at empathy as a key element to achieve peace and how a sample of educators enact programming to foster empathic behaviour in children and youth, as a means to advance peace education. This is a qualitative research study, conducted by reviewing relevant literature and using semi-structured interviews with educators. Throughout the research process, my findings revealed that real peace and peace education cannot be achieved without fostering socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding in students. Fostering empathy has proven to reduce violence in schools, impacting children and youth’s lives in school environments and beyond. Empathetic students are tolerant, understanding, and caring individuals that can become responsible citizens of our interconnected world. Teachers and the educational community are called to recognize the relevance of fostering socio-emotional skills, like empathy and understanding, to enable students’ success and to promote a culture of peace for the betterment of our global community.

*Keywords*: peace education, empathy, character education, holistic education.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Education shall be directed toward the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (The United Nations, 1948, art. 26)

1.0 Research Context

In an increasingly violent world where people have to endure the consequence of war and senseless acts of violence on a daily basis, there is a call to action. About 4400 people die every day because of intentional acts of self-directed, interpersonal, or collective violence. Thousands more are injured or suffer other non-fatal health consequences as a result of being the victim or witness to acts of violence. Additionally, tens of thousands of lives are destroyed, families shattered, and huge costs are incurred in treating victims, supporting families, repairing infrastructure, prosecuting perpetrators, or as a result of lost productivity and investment (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg & Zwi, 2002). In 2002, the World Health Organization sounded the alarm by releasing the first World Report on Violence and Health and launching a Global Campaign on Violence Prevention (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, Lozano, Eds., 2002).

As a society we need to re-think our structures and find more effective ways to transform core values in order to prevent or at least mitigate such senseless and constant acts of violence at all levels of social interaction. As the World Health Organization affirmed (2002),
Violence is not inevitable. We can do much to address and prevent it. The world has not yet fully measured the size of this task and does not yet have all the tools to carry it out. But the global knowledge base is growing and much useful experience has already been gained. (p. 36)

Furthermore, peaceful understanding and coexistence between human beings, depends on more than deal-making between politicians. It requires a transformative process deeply rooted; a change in attitudes and behaviour, the disposition with which humans react and relate to each other (Shapiro, 2002).

Education plays a prominent role in the prevention of violence and the promotion of a culture of peace. Peace Education is a priority of the international community. In November 1995 the members of the 28th General Conference of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated that the major challenge at the close of the 20th century was the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. Following its mandate UNESCO developed a series of areas of action among which the first one is a Culture of Peace through Education (UNESCO, 2008b).

In order to address and prevent violence the Ontario Ministry of Education launched in 2012 a Safe and Accepting Schools program, affirming that a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment is a necessary condition for student success. The Ministry further stated that building a positive and inclusive school climate requires a focused effort on developing healthy and respectful relationships throughout the whole school and surrounding community, among and between students and adults. This involves a sustained long-term commitment to put this into practice and change school culture (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). In this regards in
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2012 the government of Ontario enacted the *Accepting Schools Act* to mainly address issues of bullying in schools. (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2012).

Furthermore, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) issued the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*. This document encourages making character development a foundation of our education system. Through it, the Ministry promotes the development of emotional intelligence and skills like empathy to form school communities in which respect for diversity is the foundation of all positive relationships. Further, the Ministry affirms in this document that

> a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities. It also means providing opportunities for students to understand deeply the importance of civic engagement and what it means to be productive citizens in an interdependent world. (p.2)

Empathy has a crucial role to play in a global world that is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent while also facing the ravages brought about by senseless violence and injustice against humanity (Masterson & Kersey, 2013).

1.1 Research Problem

In our country we might not be subject to territorial war, but we do not escape violence in schools, classrooms and in society in general. There is bullying and misunderstanding among students occurrences happening on a daily basis. According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2008), on an international scale of 35 countries, Canada has the 9th highest rate of bullying
among 13-year-olds. In CCL’s 2007 Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 38% of adult males and 30% of adult females reported having experienced occasional or frequent bullying during their school years. In addition, 47% of parents reported that they had a child who had been bullied while 16% indicated that this bullying was a frequent occurrence. Researchers studying bullying among Canadian students in Grades 6 through 10 have found that between 2 and 8% of students reported being bullied at least once a week. Between 4 and 10% indicated that they bullied others at least once a month, while 19 to 24% of students report being both a victim and a bully (Craig & Harel, 2004). Exposure to a harsh and aggressive behaviour in ‘‘model contexts’’ such as home and school, may have a strong impact on children’s emotional and behavioural development, making these children more likely to display aggressive behaviours. These learned behaviours and relational patterns would then be reproduced with other vulnerable peers, with whom aggression and perceived domination of power could be conceived as an acceptable way of conflict resolution (Bandura 1978). Bullying has become an important focus of attention and debate through the media and school authorities, but we wonder if enough is being done at an institutional level to prevent such deeply damaging acts of violence among the youth. A balanced approach of prevention is necessary, incorporating both preventative and reactive strategies (O’Neil, Kellner, Green & Elias, 2008).

In order to avoid or at least mitigate such constant and senseless violent acts, as educators we can foster in students certain skills and attitudes that can prevent violence and advance peace education; this approach has the potential to transform students into well rounded individuals who can regulate their emotions and display pro-social behaviour. Learning includes the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviour and values, which are necessary for non-violent conflict resolution and peace-building (Hicks, 1988; Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 276). Thus peace
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education is not only ‘education about peace’ (gaining knowledge), but also ‘education for peace’ (nurturing skills, attitudes, behaviour and values) (Bjerstedt, 1990; Hicks, 1996).

One of the major roots of all conflicts, disagreements and tensions between people, as affirmed by Salomon (2004), is the way each one of them see the conflict and its reasons from their own different perspective. As he pointed out, often times that perspective is based on the collective narrative of the group to which that individual belongs, its sense of identity and its belief systems. If ‘we’ are good and just, then ‘they’ are wrong and their claims are illegitimate. Maybe the most important derivative of the collective narrative is the de-legitimization of the other side’s perspective (Bar-Tal, 2000). Salomon stated that based on this argument, the ultimate goal of peace education is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view; which does not entail agreement with the other side, just seeing it as legitimate and therefore valid. As a consequence of viewing things through this lens, it will naturally follow changes of attitude; loss of prejudice and a more positive way of relation to the other side (Salomon, 2004). Being able to ‘see’ the other’s point of view is crucial to any healthy level of communication and understanding. It implies a mastery of one self’s emotions and a mature openness to relate to other people’s perspectives.

As expressed by Masterson and Kersey (2013), empathy is the active ingredient that fosters sensitivity toward other perspectives, supports the ability to appreciate and sympathize with the thoughts, feelings and desires of others and mediates emotional behaviour adjustment. Empathy has a crucial role to play in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, while facing the ravages brought about by senseless violence and injustice against humanity.
1.2 Research Purpose

The overarching purpose of this research is to learn how teachers support the empathic development of students to advance peace education. I analyze, how relevant is the role of empathy in the socio-emotional development of children and youth and how the fostering of such skill impacts peace education. Ideally, we want to prevent violent occurrences from happening in the first place. This research will try to address preventative methods that can help educate children and youth to become peacemakers and, therefore, responsible citizens of the global community. As affirmed by Sagkal, Türnüklü and Totan (2012), empathic skills which prevent marginalization, ostracizing from society, and violence will increase cooperation and altruistic behaviour. When parents and educators become role models and help students gain skills of empathy and obtain perspectives, positive conflict solution will have been implemented as well.

1.3 Research Questions

Following are the questions that guide (or will guide) the inquiry of this research project.

1.3.1 Main Question

- How a sample of educators enact programing to foster empathic behaviour in children and youth as a means to advance peace education?

1.3.2 Subsidiary Questions

Some sub-questions that derive from the main question are the following:

- What is the role of socio-emotional wellness in students?
- How do these educators conceptualize empathy and peace education in theory and in practice?
- What is the role that empathy plays in regards to peace education?
What outcomes do these educators observe from students?

Are there any obstacles that these educations encounter, and if so, what are the possible solutions?

### 1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

I am an internationally trained lawyer who has always been drawn to subjects of ethics, justice and peace. I decided to change careers and become an educator because I believe in the transcendence of this profession, one of privilege and profound responsibility since a teacher impacts students’ lives.

The half-life of content taught in a course can be short, as we all know; but great teachers change the way their students see the world (and themselves) long after the students have forgotten formulas, theorems, and even engaging illustrations of this or that proposition. (Bowen, 2013, p. 68)

I deeply believe in educating the whole person, not only by transmitting knowledge, but also by developing students’ character. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said at a speech at Morehouse College in 1948, “We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education” (“Good Reads”, n.d.).

### 1.5 Overview

In order to respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research using purposeful sampling to interview three educators who are committed to the development of character in students and who have fostered through different approaches empathy as a means to advance a culture of peace. They shared their experience and thoughts on the subject. Following this introductory chapter, in chapter two I review literature regarding peace education, emotional
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intelligence and empathy. Throughout chapter three I elaborate on the methodology of my research design. In chapter four, I report my research findings from the interviews and data analysis. Finally, in the fifth and final chapter I expose the conclusions that I have arrived to, in regards to the questions and problem stated. Furthermore, I will relate some of the possible implications of my findings in the educational practice.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature that addresses the role of empathy as part of efforts to foster pace makers and responsible citizens in a global community. I analyze if the explicit taught of empathy, as part of the development of emotional intelligence or socio emotional learning in students, encouraged by the Ministry of Ontario (2008) through the Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12 document, proves to be an effective method to prevent violence and to create a culture of peace in our schools and, hence, in society. I review literature regarding some effective programs to develop empathy among our youth. I begin this chapter by exposing the literature concerning peace education, its conceptualization, evolution and relevance. Then, I delve in the meaning and relevance of emotional intelligence (EI), also known as socio emotional learning (SEL) when implemented in educational programing. The development of empathy is one of the necessary skills to be emotionally intelligent or socio-emotionally proficient and well rounded. Finally, I analyze the significance of the development of empathy as an instrumental skill to achieve peace education in children and youth, making them responsible citizens of a global community.

2.1 Peace Education

In the aftermath of numerous and senseless acts of violence, which we have had to endure as a global community on a regular basis, as affirmed by Harris (2004), we wonder what can we do as a society to reach peace, to foster mutual understanding and compassion. In our role of educators we have the opportunity to greatly influence our students. We could foster in our youth skills that can help them be sensitive and attune to other people’s sufferings, as well as respectful to diverse cultural, religious and personal points of view. We can educate students holistically,
fostering in them intrapersonal and extra personal skills that are conducive to the development of a culture of peace, towards a more caring and constructive local and global community. As Fountain (1997), affirms: “By building children’s self-esteem, communication skills and respect for others, you can begin to “increase the peace” in your community. At the same time, you’ll be fostering learning in problem-solving, leadership skills, language arts and so on” (p. xiii).

2.1.1 Conceptualization and Historical Development of Peace Education

There is a variety of definitions and conceptualizations that refer to peace education. Within the conceptualization of peace education, different authors point out to particular elements that elucidate various aspects of the concept.

The United Nation’s renowned program and specialized agency, correspondently, UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) have immensely contributed to peace education around the world. Peace Education as defined by UNICEF (1999), refers to the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level. UNICEF explained that the definition previously stated includes the representation of ideas that have been developed through practical experiences of UNICEF peace education programmes in different countries. UNESCO (2008b) stated that education for non-violence and peace includes training, skills and information to cultivate a culture of peace based on human rights. Furthermore, this education not only provides knowledge about a culture of peace, but also imparts the skills and attitudes necessary to defuse and recognize potential conflicts, and those need to actively promote and establish a culture of
peace and non-violence. Further, the document affirmed that there are two fundamental concepts of peace education – respect and skills. Respect for self and for others and skills to specific communication, cooperation and behavioural skills used in conflict situations. As we can see, there is a strong support to the importance of fostering certain skills to achieve peace education.

For some, like Salomon (2004) a key aspect of peace education is making peace and living in peace with an adversary. He affirmed that peace education refers to relationships between groups involved in conflict or tensions, whereas conflict resolution pertains to relations between individuals in conflict. He also considered peace education as peace with a particular party instead of peace as an abstract concept. As he explained, we learn, to see things from the perspective of an opponent instead of from the perspective of somebody with whom we agree. Salomon (2002) stated that in the absence of a specific adversary with whom to make peace, peace education programs are programs about peace instead of education for peace. He remarked the importance of education about peace to cultivate a bystander concern for peace in order to avoid indifference to violent acts that take place in other regions. In addition, there is a distinction between peace studies and peace education. Peace studies began as a discipline after the Second World War with the objective to analyze human conflicts in order to find the most peaceful ways negatively peaceful to turn unjust relationships into more just ones positively peaceful (Ian Harris, 2002). Harris added that peace studies have a geopolitical focus and further explained that peace education has been practiced by humans who want to live in peace for generations; peace education is more generic than peace studies, which focuses on the causes of war and alternatives to war. Peace education attempts to foster people’s natural inclinations to leave in peace. Another important proponent and tireless worker for peace education distinguishes peace as negative peace and positive peace, Johan Galtung (2012) a pioneer of
peace research, affirmed that negative peace consists of the absence of forms of violence and positive peace includes mutually beneficial cooperation on an equal basis and mutual learning to heal past violence and prevent future violence. Galtung argued that peace studies like health studies are clearly value-oriented, they save and promote life for all, meet basic needs for security, well-being, freedom, identity and liveable environment. He answered to those who argue that peace studies are not scientific because they are not ‘value free’ that if one was to use that same argument, one would have to conclude that doctors are unscientific when they try to protect people’s health, or that an engineer is unscientific if he wishes to design a bridge that will not collapse. There is a definite need to apply value-oriented sciences that seek to promote desirable goals. Furthermore, Galtung affirmed that the goal of peace studies is to train not only theorists but also practitioners who can apply what they have learned. Finally, there are those who affirm that Care theory and peace education go well together. According to Noddings (2008) Care theory displaces the lonely, principled moral agent with a dyadic relation – carer and cared-for. She further explained that we as human beings are in relation and our own individuality arises in relation. In every facet of life we encounter the living other. Care theory describes caring relations and gives guidance on how to establish, maintain, and enhance such relations. Noddings affirmed that to teach for caring relationships is to teach for peace in communities, our individual lives, and in the world. As we can see, peace education is a rich concept which includes diverse elements. It is not only a theoretical field of study, but a practical one that needs to be implemented to achieve its goals: reaching an internal, communal and global peace that not only solves and avoid conflict but also actively establishes mechanisms to achieve dignifying conditions of life for all human beings.
The most important development of peace education has relatively recent historical origins. The world was shaken by dramatic acts of violence and as a result a collective resolve for action arose. Between World Wars I and II, social studies teachers started to teach international relations so that their students will not make war against foreigners. Peace education became part of the general education reforms and schools promoters of social progress. International studies were used to draw citizens of the world together and to contribute to a more cooperative and peaceful world (Harris, 2002). At that time, the Italian Maria Montessori stated that peace as the cessation of war and the resolution of conflicts between nations through nonviolence cannot adequately describe a genuine peace. Just as Galtung (2012) and Harris (2002) distinguished between positive and negative peace, Montessori stressed the need for a positive interpretation of peace, which is important to show the triumph of justice and love among humans around the world where harmony reigns. In Montessori’s view, there are two things important for peace in the world; first, to have better people and second, to live in an environment where humanity can realize its aspirations. Montessori had a determined effort to bring peace through education (Baligadoo, 2014).

After the scar of World War II, a new interest in education for World Citizenship aroused. The first academic peace studies program was established in 1948 at Manchester College in Indiana and the field of peace research developed as a science of peace to counteract the science of war. Furthermore, in 1949 Herbert Read proposed the promotion of peace education through art; he argued that humans could use their creativity to escape destructive violence. In the 1980s, the threat of nuclear war prompted educators to warn of impending devastation. In 1988, Betty Reardon pointed out that societies not at war were not necessarily peaceful societies because they still had considerable domestic violence. She argued that the core
values of schooling should be care, concern and commitment and the key concepts of peace education should be planetary stewardship, global citizenship and humane relationships. In 1988, Ian Harris stated that the ten goals of peace education should be to appreciate the richness of the concept of peace; to address fears; to provide information about security systems; to understand violent behaviour; to develop intercultural understanding; to provide for a future orientation; to teach peace as a process; to promote a concept of peace accompanied by social justice; to stimulate a respect for life; and to end violence. He emphasized that a peaceful pedagogy must belong to teach peace. Such pedagogy’s elements are cooperative learning, democratic community, moral sensitivity and critical thinking. At the beginning of the 1990s, peace education saw a shift from a global perspective to a humanist one. Peace educators became more concerned about civil, domestic, cultural and ethnic forms of violence. Peace educators tried to heal some of the wounds of their students who have been raised in violent cultures (Harris, 2008).

At the dawn of the new millennium, conflict resolution education is one of the fastest growing school reforms in the West. Conflict resolution educators provide communication skills, the skill of creative conflict resolution to school violence. In 1996, Lantieri and Patti added the components dealing with anti-bias and multicultural education. Peace educators are now promoting the teaching of affective skills so that children will be more cooperative (Harris, 2008). In November 1995, the members of the 28th General Conference of the United Nations UNESCO stated that the major challenge at the close of the 20th century was the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. They affirmed that a culture of peace and sustainable development are at the heart of UNESCO’s mandate. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution promoting the culture of peace, declaring the year 2000 an
International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the decade of 2001 to 2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. UNESCO, whose purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture; as the lead agency within the UN system, was in charge of implementing activities that promoted the objectives of the decade. Following its mandate UNESCO developed a series of areas of action among which the first one was Culture of Peace through Education (UNESCO, 2008b).

In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014, (DESD) ‘emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development’. It also designated UNESCO as the lead agency to promote and implement the Decade (UNESCO, 2008a). Through its mandate UNESCO issued a document in which it is stated that without peace no model of development will be possible. Fostering peace is working towards sustainable development. UNESCO’s Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura stresses: “Education – in all its forms and at all levels – is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2005). More recently, in this past year, the United Nations has mobilized the world to define the post-2015 development agenda. In this process, UNESCO and UNICEF have been working with a wide array of stakeholders to reflect on education beyond 2015. Broad consultations with governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and research institutions are currently under way to shape the post-2015 development agenda (UNESCO, 2015). One of the topics included in the agenda of consultations is to build a culture of peace at all levels by promoting democratic governance, global citizenship, cultural diversity, pluralism and social justice; as well
as to promote the practices of mutual respect and understanding, tolerance, reinforced through intercultural dialogue and a commitment to non-violence and reconciliation for the rapprochement of cultures and everyday peace (UNESCO, 2014).

The international community clearly has a priority for the promotion of peace and peace education around the world and in the particular communities through different means. An effective way to address the achievement of the everyday peace is through peace education.

2.1.2 Relevance of Peace Education

Through centuries of education, schools have been concerned with forming the next generation of members of society. Our society in this century is global, and naturally our schools have to be concerned with preparing its students for a global society. Teachers in the twenty-first century are attempting to make students global citizens in order to make education relevant, equipping their students with the consciousness and competencies needed to prosper in a tolerant, just and peaceful global world. This educational task demands teaching moral commitment and empathy beyond the individual and her or his own interests, with a strong moral commitment to a global humanity (Dill, 2012). Furthermore, as pointed out in UNESCO’s publication Prospects, focused on learning and competences for the 21st Century, education systems are expected to convey values that will help develop more just and inclusive societies. Further, there is an urgent need to return to fundamental questions about the goals and purposes of education and to a more holistic, integrated and humanistic vision of learning. In that publication, authors like Rama Mani, Scilla Elworthy, Meenakshi Gopinath, Jean Houston and Melissa Schwartz considered that some of the key concepts and competence needed for 21st-century education are what they call Whole Mind education which means: transformed educational institutions, curricula, and methodologies that focus on integration, creativity and
peace. Drawing on the expertise of educators around the world, it is argued that a genuinely holistic education, one which arms learners with the dispositions to make the world a better place, must educate the heart and soul as well as the mind. Among other values, such education must be dynamic, deeply inclusive, life-long, grounded in universal values, and focused on interpersonal skills (Marope, 2014).

Peace educators have attempted to provide students with an image of a world in which humans work together to resolve their differences and live in a way that sustains our planet. Nonviolence education can help counteract a violent culture that often affects our schools, our community and our families; a culture of pervasive violence that impacts us through the media, entertainment and politics (Harris, 2002). However, studies alone do not bring peace. As Johan Galtung (1996), considered by some the father of peace studies, stated, studies alone do not stop violence, nor do they build structural or cultural peace. Another important peace education proponent, Paul Freire (1971) a Brazilian educator, talked about an education that develops a conscientization, a mental process that brings to light the assumptions and contradictions underlying conflicts. Further, in a Manual prepared by UNICEF to help educators implement peace education programs in their classrooms, schools and communities, Fountain (1997) affirmed that with each passing year, more and more of the power to determine peace within families, communities, and between countries is passing into the hands of individuals. This greatly increases the importance of education. She added that education, formal and non-formal, institutional and family-based, is the key to preventing conflict and intolerance. Furthermore, she explained that although history tells us that education is no guarantee against hatred, education can enlarge people’s choices in dealing with conflict and help break prejudices.
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We have come a long way in the development of peace education, but the slaughter still continues. There is yet a long path to transit in the endeavor of transforming people’s mentalities and attitudes in order to achieve peace in a global sphere, as well as at the communal and individual level. Having analyze what different authors say about the means to achieve peace education, it can be concluded that the development of certain skills that foster better control of students’ emotions, the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities, as well as communication competence; can transform lives, one student at the time.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Socio Emotional Learning

As it has been exposed, there are strong theoretical foundations for peace education. Prominent theorists’ efforts to establish inner peace, as well as interpersonal, intergroup and international peace have increased. Further, Johnson and Johnson (2005) have emphasized that in order to build and maintain sustainable peace; children should acquire specific skills and values at schools. Various programs have been designed to address peace education; however, in this research project I particularly explore the fostering of the skill of empathy, as a crucial ability to foster peace in students and promote a culture of peace in schools and societal environments. Empathy forms part of a set of skills of what is known currently as emotional intelligence, embraced by the educators through programs of socio emotional learning. The development of empathy can foster in students the capacity to have internal peace and sensitivity to the needs of others, even to a degree in which they would actively seek to promote peace. As stated by Sagkal, Türnüklü and Totan (2012), empathy skills which prevent marginalization, ostracizing from society, and violence will increase cooperation and altruistic behaviour. These authors further affirmed that when parents and educators become role models and help students gain
skills of empathy and obtain perspectives, positive conflict solution will have been implemented as well.

Emotional Intelligence is a term that has emerged in the last twenty-five years as a crucial component of emotional stability, personal well-being, life success and interpersonal relationships in various contexts. According with Petrides (2004), the roots of emotional intelligence can be traced back to E.L. Thorndike's (1920) social intelligence and Gardner's (1983) intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. However, the term emotional intelligence was first formally defined by 1990 by Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey and later popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995). Mayer and Salovey’s model considers that emotional intelligence is conceptualized through four basic skills:

- The skill of accurate perception, appraisal and expression of emotions, the skill of taking on and/or generating feelings which facilitate thinking; the skill of understanding emotions and emotional knowledge and the skill of regulating emotions, thus promoting emotional and intellectual growth. (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10)

Goleman (1998) identified five social and emotional competencies which comprise emotional intelligence: self-awareness: being alert to your feelings; self-regulation: managing your feelings; motivation: using feelings to help achieve your goals; empathy: turning into how others feel; social skills: handling feelings well in interactions with others. He defines emotional intelligence as the ability to consciously recognize our own feelings and those of others, and for consciously managing our emotions, beliefs, decisions, actions, and relationships (Goleman, 1995).
In 2005, within the introduction to the 10th edition of his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman related that the concept of emotional intelligence has been embraced by educators in the form of programs in “social and emotional learning” (SEL). Currently, in the United States many districts make SEL a curriculum requirement, mandating that just as students must attain a certain level of competence in math and language, they too should master these essential SEL skills. It is suggested that based on the brain’s neuroplasticity, emotional intelligence can be taught, and it is especially crucial to lay the foundations of these skills during childhood and adolescence. The child’s brain goes through a major growth that does not end until the mid-twenties. Neuroplasticity means that the sculpting of the brain’s circuitry during this period of brain growth depends to a great degree on what a child experiences on a daily basis. During this window, these environmental influences are particularly powerful in shaping the child’s social and emotional neural circuits (Goleman, 2008).

Cognitive scientist Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak and Hansenne (2009), investigated whether emotional intelligence can be improved among young adults, with an average age of 20.5 years old. In their study they divided roughly 40 students into two groups. One attended four two-and-a-half hour training sessions over a four-week period in order to learn techniques for improving their emotional intelligence; the other didn't take the training. The goal of these emotional intelligence sessions was to increase the participants' skills in understanding, analyzing, expressing, and regulating their emotions. Each session included short lectures, role playing exercises, discussions, and readings. For example, in a role playing exercise, two participants pretended to be co-workers in the thick of a disagreement; after their interaction, the group discussed how well they handled the disagreement, then the participants ran through the exercise again to find more positive ways of expressing their emotions. All participants were also
given a diary in which they wrote about their daily emotional experiences. They then had to analyze these experiences in class in light of what they had been learning in the training. The participants in both groups were tested before, directly after, and six months after the training to see if their emotional intelligence had improved. Nelis and her colleagues found that members of the group that received the training showed a significant improvement in their ability to identify their feelings and the feelings of others, as well as to manage and control their emotions. What's more, these improvements were apparent not only right after the training but also six months later.

Although this study was a small pilot with a somewhat homogenous group of participants, the findings suggest that it is possible to increase emotional intelligence in the short and long term (Goldsmith, 2009). A study from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, shows similar results. In this study, 213 school-based programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students indicates that students developing emotional intelligence through socio emotional learning instruction improved by 11 percentage points on standardized tests compared to their counterparts who did not receive socio emotional learning instruction. Students with greater social and emotional competency are less likely to be aggressors, targets of bullying or passive bystanders (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Massari, 2011).

There are ample scholarly works, as mentioned by Singh (2013), and practical cases that suggest making emotional intelligence a top priority in education. The international community agrees on the benefits of teaching socio-emotional skills and promotes it. In 2003, in an effort to advance the teaching and learning of those skills, UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education, published a booklet about the social-emotional skills students need for success in school and in
life with practical advice for teachers to teach such skills. (Elias, 2003). Following suit, the Ontario the Ministry of Education (2008) issued the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*. Through this document the Ministry recognized the importance of developing skills like honesty, adaptability, and respect to prepare students for their future lives. The document expressly sites Daniel Goleman’s research on emotional intelligence, emphasising the importance of social and emotional literacy which can improve students’ overall school performance.

As we can see emotional intelligence’s abilities to recognize and express one’s own emotions, to perceive and understand the emotions of others, to utilize emotional information into decision making, to manage one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to control strong emotions, can be taught and implemented in our classrooms. The development of these abilities in students can prove to be extremely beneficial, as it enroots habits that are the basis to truly achieve peace education. Fostering students abilities to self-manage emotions and develop social skills including communication through empathy, is indispensable to educate caring students who are attune to other people’s points of view, that can understand diverse cultures and believes, and that can feel for the needs and sufferings of other’s. These abilities ultimately could empower and help our students to become well-balanced, happy, and mature global citizens.

There are powerful ways in which we could create a positive atmosphere in our schools and equip our students with emotional management tools that will serve them for life and serve our global community to move towards a more peaceful and compassionate world. As Maria Montessori envisioned education as a task to help individuals change themselves for the better; it is about unleashing the potential of the child, the development of human values, and the spiritual life of human kind (Bagliadoo, 2014).
2.3 Empathy

There is a growing body of theory and research regarding the importance of emotional intelligence or socio emotional learning, which comprises the skill of empathy (Salmon, 2003). Daniel Goleman (1995) described empathy as intuiting another’s feelings, the ability to read nonverbal messages and to demonstrate those skills. Further, Goleman affirmed that empathy builds on self-awareness; the more open people are to their own emotions, the more skilled they will be in reading feelings. Alike, the field of emotional intelligence and development of socio emotional learning is fairly new, on this regard research and field studies have been done in the United States. However, Canadian literature on the topic is not as extensive. Through this study I review how these emotional intelligence skills, and particularly empathy, are fostered in our schools, as a means to advance peace education. As I report in chapter 4, I investigated how a sample of educators conceptualize empathy as a skill to advance peace education and how are they enacting specific programming that fosters empathy to achieve a culture of peace among students. As Masterson and Kersey (2013) stated, empathy has a crucial role to play in our global world, which is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent while also facing the ravages brought about by senseless violence and injustice against humanity.

Undoubtedly, empathy is a highly contested term employed by a diverse group of educational thinkers (Verducci, 2000). Theorists consider empathy from different ideological premises and thus define it in different ways and for different purposes. Consequently, empathy cannot be considered a unitary concept. Zemblyas stated that an understanding of empathy that can be used to help identify its significance for peace and coexistent education programs and pedagogies is the ability to incorporate other people’s perceptions and see the experience with their eyes (Zembylas, 2007). As Salomon (2004) affirmed, the ultimate goal of peace education
is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view; which does not entail agreement with the other side, just seeing it as legitimate and therefore valid. Goleman (2013) distinguishes empathy in three varieties: cognitive empathy, the ability to see the world through others’ eyes; emotional empathy, the ability to feel what the other person does, tuning into another person’s feelings; and the third variety is empathic concern, which arises when someone expresses their caring about another person. Empathy, explained Goleman (1995), builds on self-awareness; the more open we are to our emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings. He argued that that people’s emotions are really put into words; they are more often expressed through nonverbal cues. An empathic person is attune to those cues. Once students have their own behaviours in focus, affirmed Massari (2011), they can then widen the lens to the more complex world of tolerance, appreciation and acceptance of others. They learn to step outside their developmentally egocentric selves to experience the ultimately grown-up emotion of selflessness. Massari cited a research conducted in 2007 by Swearer and Cary, which suggests that bullies and passive bystanders typically lack empathy for their victims, and that they view being different from the social norm as the justification for bullying. A study done by Wanda Dobrich and Steven Dranoff (2003), suggested that empathy failure can increase the risk of victimization and implementation of aggressive acts against peers among adolescents. They discussed the importance of teaching empathy to students. Further, they predicted that “aggression management” will be vital in the future worldwide. They also stressed the correcting empathy failure in adolescents in order to provide reduction in aggression and to promote positive social skill development.

In addition to the socio emotional learning programs before mentioned, through programs like PEACE Curriculum in Colorado (Salmon, 2003) and Roots of Empathy, a program born in
Toronto (Gordon, M. 2007), educators have fostered empathy in students as part of conflict resolution programs, preventative measures to conflict and holistic education within schools. In Ontario, educators across the province have the mandate to foster the development of empathy in schools as part of the emotional intelligence education encouraged and promoted through the document issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) entitled: *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*, for application throughout Ontario Schools. Through this document, the Ministry promotes the development of emotional intelligence and skills like empathy to develop school communities in which respect for diversity is the foundation of all positive relationships. The Ministry affirms that

a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have *empathy* and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities. It also means providing opportunities for students to understand deeply the importance of civic engagement and what it means to be productive citizens in an interdependent world. (p.2)

In conclusion, after reviewing the literature surrounding peace education, emotional intelligence and empathy, we can conclude that fostering empathy in children and adolescents is crucial to the task of developing well-rounded individuals that will be tolerant, understanding and active promoters of a culture of peace at a personal, societal and global level. As educators we have a definite mission to cultivate peace and make of our students peacemakers and peace activist. As Gandhi wisely said, “A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history” (Prabhu & Rao, 1946).
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this Chapter, I describe the research methodology. I begin by reviewing the research approach and procedures, followed by the instruments of data collection. I specifically elaborate on the participant’s sampling criteria and recruiting procedures. I also explain the data analysis procedures and review ethical considerations that needed to be considered while conducting the research. In addition, I identify a range of methodological limitations, as well as strengths. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of important methodological decisions and the rationale for such, given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This is a qualitative research study, conducted by reviewing relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with educators. Given the nature of my research study, a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach is most appropriate. Qualitative research is conducted to explore an issue within a group or population, where variables cannot be easily measured, and voices that are usually silenced can be heard (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research renders a complex and detailed understanding of the issue to be studied; this understanding could only be achieved by talking directly to people (Creswell, 2013). To reduce all individuals to statistical measures overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in a study. The idea with qualitative research is to empower individuals to share their stories and hear their voices. This humanistic approach emphasizes the need to understand the actors’ perspective (Alasuutari, 2010). A qualitative approach is the correct fit for the study of my research problem, the educational phenomenon of
educating on empathy to advance peace education, since I want to learn from educator’s lived experience of such phenomenon.

According to Creswell (2013), there are five qualitative approaches to inquiry. Using a specific approach gives the research scholarly structure and consistency. Due to the nature of this research study, I apply some of the characteristics of a phenomenological research approach. A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon, in order to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence, the grasp of the nature of the thing (van Manen, 1990). According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological approach puts emphasis on a phenomenon to be explored, conducting such with a group of individuals who have experienced it. A phenomenological study also includes a philosophical discussion about the basic ideas involved in conducting it related with the lived experiences of individuals, that are both subjective and objective, of something in common. Further, in some forms of phenomenology, the researcher places herself or himself out of the study but not completely; this serves to identify personal experiences with the phenomenon and to partly set aside so that s/he can focus on the experiences of the participants. The data collection procedure in a phenomenological study typically involves interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and a data analysis that normally follows systematic procedures. A phenomenological study ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals.

In previous chapters, I have set the grounds for this research, which takes on some elements of the phenomenological approach. I established the research context, problem, and purpose, as well as reviewed pertinent literature. Within this and the following chapters, I establish the parameters to conduct interviews among a sample of educators; I draw on their
experience of the phenomenon (educating for peace through the fostering of socio-emotional
competences among students and in particular the skill of empathy), and finally I attempt to
arrive to the essence of the reality being studied.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured
interview protocol. Semi-structure interviews are conducted with an open framework which
allows for focused, conversational, two-way communication, giving the opportunity to learn
about participant’s lived experiences. This format comprises a planned interview which takes in
consideration the research’s focus and questions, while giving participants the opportunity to
elaborate on their experiences and bring to the attention issues previously unforeseen (Creswell,
2010). Semi-structured interviews provide a clear set of instructions and provide reliable,
comparable qualitative data. The inclusion of open-ended questions provides the opportunity for
identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).
Within semi-structured interviews the interviewer still has a clear list of issues to be addressed
and questions to be answered. However, the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in the order in
which the topics are consider and to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on
the issues raised. There is an emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest
(Denscombe, 1998).

In this research three semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from
experienced educators regarding the fostering of empathy in students as a means to achieve
peace education. I recorded the interviews with a digital voice recorder, transcribed them, and
then coded the transcripts according to themes that have raised form the literature reviewed on
the topic, as well as from the interview questions and the participants’ responses.
3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria that I used for the recruitment of participants to my study, as well as the different methods used for participant recruitment. To end the section, I introduce each of the participants, giving the reader an overview of the individuals who provided the data for this study.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The criteria established to select participants to this research is the following:

- Educators that have shown a strong commitment, leadership and/or expertise in the area of character development or socio emotional learning, and specifically in the development of empathy as a component of a peace education program.

- Experienced educators: participants to this research have a minimum of 3 years of experience in education. I consider that in order to be able to reasonably implement an empathic or socio emotional learning program and to observe results, participants need a minimum educational experience and contact with the community of students that are to develop such socio-emotional skills.

- Educators that participate in the interviews must have or have had, within a year, direct involvement with students either in a role of teacher, counselor, chaplain, principal or external education partner. For the purpose of this qualitative research the educators’ recent or current direct experience with students is absolutely relevant since my interest is to interview participants that have implemented tools of socio emotional learning in a concrete community of students.
3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

Social researchers are frequently faced with the fact that they cannot collect data from every person in the category researched. Therefore they rely on evidence from a portion of the whole, which represents the rest of the population. There are two basic types of sampling techniques used by social researchers, *probability* sampling and *non-probability* sampling. Probability sampling relies on the notion of the probability that the researched has that the participants will be representative of a cross-section of the population studied. Non-probability sampling is conducted without such knowledge. However, it is not a random selection, a different set of criteria come into play, in terms of how and why people or events get included in the study. Within the non-probability sampling there are different ways of sampling. There is *purposive* sampling in which the researcher deliberately selects particular participants that are seen as individuals that are likely to produce the most valuable data; they are selected with a purpose in mind, and such purpose reflects the qualities of the people chosen and their relevance to the topic of study. Then there is the *snowballing* sampling through a process of reference, this process can be useful for developing the numbers involved in the sample. The next type is the *theoretical* sampling in which the selection of instances follows a route of discovery based on the development of a theory grounded in evidence; at each stage, new evidence is used to modify or confirm the theory. Finally there is the *convenience* sampling which is built upon selections that suit the convenience of the researcher (Denscombe, 1998).

For the purpose of this research, I considered suitable to use a non-probability purposive sampling as well as a convenience sampling, since I had viable access to the resources that characterize these types of sampling and are appropriate to the nature and scope of this study. To recruit participants I had contacted educators in roles of leadership, as well as organizations that
collaborate with schools in fostering empathic behaviour in school communities. I had provided them with an overview of my research study, as well as the criteria of participants, and I had asked these individuals and organizations to distribute my information among educators that they believe fulfill the criteria. I provided my information to those individuals and organizations rather than asking them to provide me with information of people who they consider to be suitable. This has been done to ensure voluntary participation without pressure to any individual to participate in this study.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

In this section, I present the pertinent information of all the participants in this research. I conducted three semi-structured face to face interviews with the following educators of whom I refer to by pseudonym names to protect their identity:

a) Lisa is a high school vice-principal in an Toronto Catholic District School Board inner city school deemed ‘at risk’ with a population of nine hundred and sixty students. Lisa has held that position for the last three years. Lisa began her career ten years ago as a special education teacher. Then she became an English and Religion teacher; she was also involved with Student Success and following that she became a chaplain. She has always worked at the high school panel.

b) Emily became a kindergarten teacher twenty two-years ago. Four years ago she became a program leader with Roots of Empathy. She is a liaison between Roots of Empathy and the TDSB one of the main school boards in the city of Toronto. She was trained to teach the program that Roots of Empathy delivers in schools and now she also trains other instructors that will deliver such program. The Roots of Empathy program has its origins in Toronto and now it is a program used around the world. The organization has the
mission to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy, through a program for elementary school children. The program is centered around the presence of a neighbourhood infant and a parent who visit the classroom every three weeks. An instructor coaches students to observe the baby’s development and to label the baby’s feelings. In this experiential learning, the baby is the “teacher” which gives the opportunity for the instructor to help students identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others.

c) Sarah is the co-founder of a not-for-profit and free ed-tech organization. Through their internet site, they help K-12 educators, locally and around the world, to create authentic, engaging, and profound global learning experiences for their students; this is done within a safe space where a diverse international community of students can share perspectives on questions raised in the classroom.

3.4 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them. These steps are interconnected and form a spiral of activities related to the analysis and representation of data. This study, as previously mentioned, takes a methodological approach that borrows from a phenomenological tradition. Traditionally, this approach involves a method of analysis that includes first the description of personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. Then, the researcher will develop a list of significant statements about how individuals are experiencing the topic. The following step is to take the significant statements and group them into larger units of information, called themes. The researcher will then write a description of what the participants experienced with the phenomenon, “textural
description”. The next step is to write a description of how the experience happened, “structural description”. Finally, the researcher will write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating the textural and structural descriptions, which is the essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2010; Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Riemen, 1986 & van Manen, 1990). The data analysis procedure I used for this study involved a preliminary reading of the entire data gathered from the participants to my interviews, the codification of such data, as well as the look for common themes and divergences in the data relevant to the research focus and questions. I compared the transcripts of the different interviews conducted in order to synthesize themes where appropriate. I also identified the relevant null data, that of which participants did not speak to. Finally, I made meaning of the identified themes in light of the research questions and purpose of this study.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Regardless of the research approach, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection and the analysis of such. A researcher needs to consider the protection of anonymity of the participants; she or he must explain the purpose of the study to participants and does not engage in deception (Creswell, 2010). In this research study, all participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identities. Further, in order to assure the confidentiality of their identities, any identifying markers related to their schools or their students were excluded. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from their participation on the study at any stage of the research. Every effort was made to ensure their comfort and confirm their willingness to participate in the interview and to have the resulting data included in this study. All the data is stored on my password protected computer and iPad; these information will be destroyed after five years. All participants were asked to sign a Consent
Letter (see Appendix “A”) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio recorded. This letter gave an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications and specifies expectations of participation. Finally, there are not known risks to participating in this study.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There are some limitations to the methodological design of this study. The purpose of this Master of Teaching research project is to further my knowledge regarding the possibility to advance peace education through the fostering of socio-emotional skills, and in particular empathy, in students. This research project is meant to inform my future practice and not to generalize. Provided the scope of this research project, I was limited as to the number participants that I could interview, there were time constrictions to perform the interviews and I could only interview educators, no parents or students, which leaves a void of information that could be obtain if this research had a bigger scope. However, having addressed some of the limitations of this research study, I need to point out its strengths. Interviewing educators in their context renders the opportunity to validate their voices and experiences. It also gives them an opportunity to reflect on their own practices, on their pedagogical decision making. We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, to hear their voices, when we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants address an issue (Creswell, 2010). This research study gives me the opportunity to deepen in what I deemed to be a very important aspect of holistic education and it opens a window for me to learn how the theory of peace education and socio emotional learning and the fostering of empathy are implemented in concrete cases.
3.7 Conclusion

Through this chapter I have set the methodological parameters of this research, a qualitative research study conducted by reviewing relevant literature and using as a primary instrument of data collection semi-structured interviews with three educators that fulfill the required criteria and who were recruited through a purposive and convenience sampling. Important ethical considerations have been given to ensure the protection of the participants’ confidentiality and their voluntary participation. In the following chapter, I will report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the findings from three face to face interviews with educators. These educators shared their conceptualization of peace education and empathy; they shared their experiences regarding the fostering of socio-emotional capacities, with a particular emphasis on empathy and understanding, in order to achieve peace education. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to literature regarding socio emotional learning, empathy, and peace education.

This chapter is structured in six overarching themes and some subthemes in which the data collected through the interviews has been categorized. I first discuss the importance of socio-emotional wellness to achieve peace and to enable learning, and the special relevance of socio-emotional programing for the most vulnerable students. Then I review the conceptualization of empathy by different educators, the expressions of empathic behaviour, empathy not only as theory but as practice, and the importance of educators as role models. Following, I explore the key role that empathy plays to achieve peace education, and particularly its importance in reducing school violence. Further, I review different programing that point to the particular importance of the development of care, understanding and the capacity to see different perspectives. Furthermore, I identify some of the obstacles that educators face to foster empathy and peace education. Finally, I review some suggestions to overcome obstacles, change mentalities, and to move forward in the development of empathy and understanding in order to achieve peace.
4.1 Socio-emotional wellness is an important element to achieve peace and to enable students’ learning

As it has been explored in previous chapters of this research project, empathy is an important competency within what is known as ‘emotional intelligence’. Its implementation through school programming is known as ‘socio emotional learning’. What, then, is the relevance of socio-emotional wellness in our students? The Ontario Ministry of Education (2015) affirmed that a safe, inclusive, and accepting school environment is a necessary condition for student success. Two of my participants agree with the notion that emotional stability and a safe feeling is crucial for students to be able to focus and learn. Lisa, a vice-principal at an inner city school, said that sometimes her students “did not have the socio-emotional competencies or the self-regulation capacities to be able to focus on the academic piece.” Further, talking about the support that the boards of education are providing in this respect she stated, “If we don’t provide these types of supports we are going to be … sitting in minefields of socio-emotional disasters and conflict.” In addition, she shared her experience of seeing students “who are intellectually very attuned and high achievers, [but] have anxiety issues…socio-emotional issues.” In agreement with Lisa, Emily, a program coordinator and instructor of Roots of Empathy affirmed, “If a child doesn’t feel safe…, they can’t learn. If they…. worry about what happened on the playground or at home… they are not free to learn. If you address these… emotional issues… it makes them available to learn.”

In recent years, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) has promoted a holistic development of students, recognizing the importance of developing skills like empathy to achieve an integral development of children and youth. Through the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* the Ministry states that
a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities... (p. 2)

As educators we cannot focus solely on teaching the curriculum, ignoring the most important aspects that are essential in educating a child. As the participants affirmed, a child that does not have socio-emotional stability is a student that is not available to learn. Emotional stability includes the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills like empathy, understanding, and self-regulation to achieve internal peace, avoid conflict, and be ready to learn.

4.1.1 Special relevance of socio-emotional programing for students ‘at risk’ to prevent marginalization and violence.

Two of my participants highlighted the importance of offering socio-emotional programing to students that are ‘at risk’ or more vulnerable. Lisa has delivered a girls club program for “young ladies who are struggling in their life.” She explained that they are “deemed in risk, whether it’s because they’re experiencing personal conflict, whether they’re having adjustment issues, whether they are academically at risk…it was very important to cultivate these types of capacities [socio-emotional skills] in them.” She added, “They are beautiful students with a lot of heart.” Pointing out that it is rare that a child does not engage during the delivery of the programing that she imparts, Emily said,

One of the things that we hear and see often is that children who are often marginalized for various reasons…when the program plays out, those things [the reasons for
marginalization] become almost irrelevant, the children feel relaxed, and behavioural problems seem to dissolve away.

In these cases students feel included, finding a connection with the baby and an avenue to understand and express their own feelings. This connection is universal and profoundly human.

Socio-emotional programing, like programs that foster empathy, benefits all students. However, there are two groups of students that seem to particularly benefit from this programing. 

a) The first group is comprised of students that belong to minority groups and those who experience hardship in life and become vulnerable; those students seem to be an easy target of bullying. 
b) The second group are students that experience emotional imbalance. These students, for diverse reasons, become many times the bullying perpetrators. Exposure to harsh and aggressive behaviour in ‘‘model contexts’’ such as home, school, and other environments, may have a strong impact a child’s emotional and behavioural development; these children are more likely to display aggressive behaviours. These learned behaviours and relational patterns would then be reproduced with other vulnerable peers, with whom aggression and perceived domination of power could be conceived as an acceptable way of conflict resolution (Bandura 1978). It is important to foster socio-emotional capacities in all students to prevent bullying and violence, encouraging all students to be active agents of peace and not bystanders. In such way, more peaceful school environments and peace beyond the school grounds would be forged. As affirmed by Sagkal, Türnüklü and Totan (2012), empathy skills which prevent marginalization, ostracizing from society, and violence will increase cooperation and altruistic behaviour.
4.2 Educators conceptualize empathy as understanding.

The three participants conceptualized empathy in a similar manner. Lisa said that to her empathy “is about understanding… empathy is really encapsulated in having a deep understanding of who people are and where are they coming from.” Emily expressed that empathy is “basically being able to step into the shoes of another and see how they might be feeling about a situation and to understand why they feel that way and…a compulsion to want to help them if they need help.” Furthermore, Sarah, co-founder of an organization which is an educational internet platform that provides interaction between students around the world, said, “Empathy is about trying to understand what does it feel like being in somebody else’s position.” In addition, she said, “Empathy is being aware.” However, she makes a distinction between empathy and sympathy, “it [empathy] is not feeling badly for somebody.” All three participants conceptualized empathy as an understanding about another person’s experiences and feelings ‘putting oneself in someone else’s shoes’.

The way that my participants conceptualize empathy generally aligns with its conceptualization within peace education. According to Zemblyas (2007), an understanding of empathy that can be used to help identify its significance for peace and coexistence education programs and pedagogies is the ability to incorporate other people’s perceptions and see the experience with their eyes. Further, Salomon (2004) stated that the ultimate goal of peace education is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view; this does not entail agreement with the other side, but just seeing it as legitimate and therefore valid.
4.2.1 Different expressions of empathic behaviour highlight the dignity of every person.

Each of my participants has a personal view of what empathic behaviour looks like. They pointed out to various interpersonal skills that are necessary in the display of empathic behaviour. Lisa said that empathic behaviour is reflected when someone “honours the space [between you and the person that you are encountering]. It’s a recognition for who the person is…and what they might be going through at any given time… [It is] being present to them.” Empathic behaviour, according to Lisa, many times is reflected in body language; she said, “Empathetic people are present to the situation, they are making eye contact, they are using words that are affective…having an understanding between the two parties.”

An important part of the program that Emily delivers is that “the baby [that comes into the classroom to help deliver the program that fosters empathy in students] doesn’t judge the students.” Not being judgemental is an important element of empathic behaviour. Further, Emily said that feeling empathy is crucial, “if a child is only focused on their own feelings, on their goals [and therefore not empathetic towards others], it would be hard to resolve difficult situations in the classroom.” Finally, in Sarah’s view, you can tell empathic behaviour in a student looking at “the kind of listener they are, what kind of questions they ask…things like being patient, the way they interact in conversation, their communication style and their understanding outside themselves.” Sarah coincides with Lisa regarding the ‘understanding’ aspect of empathic behaviour, thinking of the other and acting in accordance. In addition, Sarah agrees with the ‘outside themselves’ aspect of empathic behaviour that Emily expressed; they agree that empathic people are other-centered as opposed to self-centered individuals.
All participants seem to agree that empathy is directly correlated with humanity. Being fuller or better human beings imply empathic behaviour. In this regard, Sarah stated, “Allowing this opportunity to be human, and then [see] how that humanity can lead to more empathy, collaboration and breaking down barriers between people.” When Lisa described some of the learning goals of a school’s girls club that she ran, she remarked that developing gratitude, listening skills, and conflict resolution are attributes that “move us to become more empathetic and grander, fuller human beings.”

My participant’s views regarding the characteristics of empathic behaviour, echoes some of the socio-emotional competencies identified by Goleman (1998) self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies need to be taught explicitly and implicitly in the classroom in order educate our students in a more complete manner to help them become, as Lisa said, “fuller human beings”. Only a caring civilization respects human dignity.

**4.2.2 Empathy is more than understanding, it calls for action**

Empathic behaviour is not just a theoretical understanding of ‘the other’, but it moves people to act when action is needed. On this issue, Lisa stated that a peace education program with empathy at its core “has to meet various facets. It has to speak to the intellect…to the heart and to the action…It would require a theoretical piece and a practical piece where students can engage their skills in the world.”

Narrating different aspects of the program that Emily delivers, in various occasions, she stated the importance of an action component to the fostering of empathy. She shared the following: “We encourage the children to express themselves and know their feelings, so if there
is a problem in the school yard, the program encourages them to do something to help.” Further, as part of her conceptualization of empathy, she said that empathy “[is] a compulsion to want to help them if they need help.” This particularity ‘if they need help’ is important to consider. My participants deemed the action part as an important component of empathy, provided that help is needed. Sarah deemed it as essential to take in consideration the person that might need the help. She said that help cannot be imposed, but offered within a framework of respect and dialogue. Further, on this regard, Sarah referring to her experience working with people from a rural community in Tanzania, narrated the following: “Often there were scenarios where problems were being solved for people, almost on their behalf and the people that would have been directly affected by whatever intervention was occurring, were not consulted in any meaningful way.” She said that it was very concerning to her, and that “a better way to do this is actually creating avenues for people to speak on their own behalf.”

Empathy calls for action. It is not enough to ‘feel for the other’. When help is needed, an empathic person acts to aid the other, always in a context of dialogue and respect. Masterson and Kersey (2013) expressed that empathy is the ‘active’ ingredient that fosters sensitivity toward other perspectives. It motivates individuals to help those in need. In order to achieve peaceful environments, educators as well as researchers seem to agree that understanding is an important aspect of empathy, but it is not sufficient. Action needs to be taken when needed.

**4.2.3 Educators are role models of empathic behaviour**

Two of my participants pointed out the crucial role that educators play as role models fostering empathic behaviour. Lisa affirmed that
empathy has to happen in the moment…you [the teacher] can make it happen, in conjunction with a more formalized approach in the classroom… it has to be what we [educators] breath, it has to be who we are. If you’re practicing it on a personal level, it would come through in the things that you do each and every day.

Emily reiterated what Mary Gordon, the founder of Roots of Empathy said, “Empathy cannot be taught, it needs to be caught.” Emily affirmed, “Students need to be in an environment where they see others acting in an empathetic way in order to build their own capacity for empathy and their own abilities to resolve conflicts.” Emily encourages educators to set a standard within their own behaviour. She said, “Setting high expectations in students’ behaviour and exemplifying that in themselves; showing compassion, showing kindness… in authentic situations, treating children with respect.” She continued, “It will go a long way to making a classroom where people care about each other. If children know they are care about, they will care for each other.” On this subject, Sagkal, Türümüklü and Totan (2012) affirmed that when parents and educators become role models and help students gain skills of empathy and obtain perspectives, positive conflict solution will have been implemented as well.

As educators we have to remind ourselves that we have the privilege and the enormous responsibility to impact our students’ lives. Students look up to their teachers and learn from them not just matters related to curriculum, but life lessons. As Bowen (2013) affirms,

The half-life of content taught in a course can be short,…but great teachers change the way their students see the world (and themselves) long after the students have forgotten formulas, theorems, and even engaging illustrations of this or that proposition. (p. 68)
4.3 The development of empathy is crucial for peace education.

My three participants pointed out to the direct correlation between empathy and peace education. According to them, real peace and peace education are impossible to achieve without empathy.

Without empathy, peace is an illusory goal that cannot be reached. Emily affirmed, “I don’t know that I have in my mind a defined line between peace education and empathy… I see the means being connected.” Similarly, Lisa spoke to the inseparability of peace with empathy, “When we look at the word ‘peace’ there are two people on either side of that peace, that’s where empathy comes in; it cannot be one party without understanding the other party.” The recognition of the other person in its own individuality, and the importance of mutual respect are essential elements to achieve peace, as Lisa affirmed, “There has to be a mutual understanding of who the other person is. Even if it’s not a deep awareness, just that it is another person, who has a varied experience… an understanding of mutual … respect.” Furthermore, according to Lisa, peace education is a key aspect of education, “there can be no other education, unless it’s founded on peace education… if we can’t understand the people who sit before us,…then everything would be for naught.” She adds, that the understandings of the humanity of the people who are in front of us, is “the foundation of everything that we do in the classroom.” Sarah also agrees with Lisa and Emily regarding the inseparability of empathy and peace education, “Empathy would have to be first and foremost in a peace education program. There wouldn’t be a lot of legs without it.” Further, she stated, “The biggest feature is empathy; when you have empathy it’s hard, in my point of view, not to have a more peaceful society.” All my participants agree that empathy and peace education are two inseparable concepts.
The link between empathy and peace highlighted the participants is also reflected in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Education shall be directed toward the full development of the human personality... It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” We are not loners, we constantly encounter the other, and as Care Theory conceptualizes it, there is a carer and cared-for. The theory affirms that we, human beings, are in relation and our own individuality arises in relation (Noddings, 2008). In every facet of life, we encounter the living other. Without empathy we cannot reach true peace. In order to achieve peaceful school environments and in order to make of our students peacemakers, we can foster in them skills of care and understanding like the skill of empathy.

4.3.1 The important role of empathy in reducing school violence.

It is interesting to see how only one of my participants, Emily, directly spoke to the issue of violence in the school environment. The other two participants addressed it in a more subtle or implicit manner as they pointed out solutions for a more peaceful world. Probably Lisa and Sarah presupposed violence in schools and in society in general, because, although they did not mention violence explicitly, they suggested solutions to reach peace. Regarding school violence, Emily shared the following story: “There was a girl in a classroom this year who doesn’t go out for recess ever because she said ‘all that happens when I go out for recess is that these girls fight with me’. It is heartbreaking to hear those stories.” Emily said that teachers should make it a priority to have their students be kinder to one another and not tolerate unkindness. She added that many times bullying happens “under the radar”; adults must be more aware and look for signs of it and not let it go. Emily expressed that Roots of Empathy has become an anti-bullying
program, without having been designed as an anti-bullying program. “Comparative studies [show] that the levels of aggression and anti-social behaviour for children who had [participated in] the program went down.” Emily shared that even three years after taking the program, their levels of aggression continued going down and pro-social behaviour went up. There is a direct correlation between the development of empathy and the decrease of violence. In this regard, there is literature that supports the correlation between empathy and violence decrease; Massari (2011) affirmed that bullies and passive bystanders typically lack empathy for their victims, they view being different from the social norm as the justification for bullying. In addition, Dobrich and Dranoff (2003) found that empathy failure can increase the risk of victimization and perpetuation of aggressive acts against peers among adolescents. They discussed the importance of teaching empathy to students. Further, they predicted that “aggression management” will be vital in the future worldwide.

Violence and bullying in school environments can never be tolerated and should be proactively avoided. In order to address and prevent violence, the Ontario Ministry of Education launched in 2012 a Safe and Accepting Schools program, affirming that a safe, inclusive, and accepting school environment is a necessary condition for student success. The Ministry further states that building a positive and inclusive school climate requires a focused effort on developing healthy and respectful relationships throughout the whole school and surrounding community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Violence can dramatically decrease in school environments through the delivery of proactive programing. Empathy plays an important role in programing that is designed to bring about peace through mutual understanding and respect. We can see an example of this in the results mentioned by Emily regarding the reduction of violence in students who took the Roots of Empathy program.
4.4 Programming that foster skills of care and understanding, which are essential to the development of empathy and the promotion of peace in an interconnected world.

All three participants to my interviews are educators that are committed to delivering diverse programming that, in their own particular way, foster empathy and socio-emotional capacities to contribute to more understanding and peaceful school environments. Further, those programs stand to have a ripple effect in students’ lives, beyond the school.

Lisa has run some after school programs for girls ‘at risk’, as well as programing within her high school classroom context. These programs promote mindfulness, gratitude, heartfulness, and conflict resolution, among other interpersonal skills. Lisa shared that she had anxiety. That experience made her realize the importance of the development of socio-emotional capacities; she developed a personal commitment to instill these capacities in her students. She gave me an example on how through a lesson on heartfulness she fostered socio-emotional capacities in grade 12 students.

One extension of the learning was to have them go out into the world and practice this heartfulness… a lot of them took on the notion of random acts of kindness or paying it forward… they would come back and share their experiences with the group… you could tell that [the experience] fostered a deeper awareness of the other person [who] could have been a stranger for them, but it offered them a connectivity to another human being that they might not had have otherwise… [the program] engrained in them the notion of heartfulness of leading forward with the heart.
This lesson illustrates how an educator can encourage their students to think of others, and act to the benefit of others; to foster the understanding and *other-centered* characteristics of an empathic person.

A different programing is the one enacted by Emily, who is committed to fostering empathy in students through the delivery of the programing designed by Roots of Empathy. This programing has the goal to foster empathy in children around the world through the perspective of a parent and their baby. The programing that Roots of Empathy deliver “encourages children to express themselves and know their feelings.” She explained that this is done in order to understand themselves and others and be more able to empathize with what others might be going through and manage conflict.

Sarah, through her organization that virtually connects children and youth around the world, has formed a community of diverse learners who become open to others’ points of view and perspectives. This is a fundamental skill of every empathic person. Her free platform enables students, within the context of a safe environment, to access diverse perspectives and see a reality through different points of view. Within this context, students gain critical thinking capacities that enable them to develop 21st century skills (communication, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and collaboration). These are skills that have crucial role in solving the fundamental problems that our world faces, one of which is the constant and senseless acts of violence. As pointed out in UNESCO’s publication *Prospects*, focused on learning and competences for the 21st Century, education systems are expected to convey values that will help develop more just and inclusive societies (Marope, 2014). Lisa said that in order to develop programing that fosters empathy, peace education, and understanding among people, it is important to think about “what kind of skills and mind set are we [educators]
hoping to have, [as well as the] learning outcomes… Then working backwards from there in the change that we want to see in the world.” Lisa added that it is important to establish good “communication practices that could [be] built into the classroom.” Alongside with those communication practices, at a broader level and using tools like the virtual platform that she founded, students from different places within a country or around the world can be connected in a safe environment and can share different perspectives. These experiences help students develop understanding and empathy. Further, these conversations can help students learn about the problems that exist around the world, moving them to act and not remain passive bystanders. In that way, they can become responsible citizens of the global community.

Regardless of the programming that my participants have chosen to enact, they all point to the same goal -- the development of socio-emotional skills, particularly empathy and understanding, which enable students to succeed in an interconnected world. The three participants noted positive outcomes from the implementation of their programing. After being exposed to programing, the participants reported that students have become more caring and considerate; leaving a self-centered vision of the world to thinking of others, and better understand other people’s experiences, perspectives and needs. Another positive outcome of empathy programing has been the dramatic reduction in bullying. As Emily pointed out, “The levels of aggression and anti-social behaviour for children who had the program went down”, with long lasting results. In addition, students have taken action when needed, when they saw that people were in need of help. Further, the effect of socio-emotional programing has had a ripple effect. When students understand themselves and others, when they engage in dialogue, when they are able to see other people’s perspectives, their behaviour impacts others in an exponential manner. As Emily related this point, “If children know they are cared about, they
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will care for each other.” She further argued that if children learn the tools to be able to speak up about their emotions, and understand others peoples’ emotions, they will impact other children. She said that in the program that she implements, they “encourage the children to express themselves and be kind to one another.” Further, “the teacher works with the students to encourage that all day long… the kids who really get it, they will talk to their peers and encourage them. It’s like a snowball effect.” This reflects the relevance and the impact of programing that fosters socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding.

4.4.1 Breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions. How do we judge others?

In my participants’ diverse programing, the importance of breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions is very important. Emily related that through their programing, students have the opportunity to make predictions about how people react to certain scenarios. After, students hear from the person of whom they made the prediction, having then the opportunity to corroborate their predictions. Further, they reflect about this experience and extend the knowledge to their own life experiences. Students reflect on how do they feel and how do others feel; they learn to not judge others by the way they experience things, students “start seeing that feelings are universal,… but what [it] looks like is different [for different people], people react with different levels of intensity and not always [about] the same things.”

One of the most important goals of Sarah’s organization is to expose students to diverse perspectives. She pointed out, “Many times you are not … seeking out information that has a different point of view than your own… so it’s harder to… be exposed to different points of view.” Sarah shared an interesting example regarding misconceptions that one of the teacher and students participating on her platform told her.
The teacher asked the students to answer the question [posted on Sarah’s educational internet site] and write down what do you think these students [students from two different countries] would answer and then they would… go and investigate what did these students actually said, their real perspectives and then compare that to their assumptions. It is testing your assumptions and understanding that there are stereotypes. The interesting thing is that this educator was working at a school [where] the students felt that other people have stereotypes about them and they didn’t realize that they have stereotypes about others.

My research participants highlighted the importance of teaching students to recognize other people’s perspective and points of view; also to recognize misconceptions that disturb the way we see and judge other persons and other realities. This echoes what Salomon (2004) affirms that one of the major roots of all conflicts, disagreements and tensions between people is the way each one of them see the conflict and its reasons from their respective perspective. As he points out, that perspective is often based on the collective narrative of the group to which that individual belongs, its sense of identity and its belief systems. If ‘we’ are good and just, then ‘they’ are wrong and their claims are illegitimate. Maybe the most important derivative of the collective narrative is the de-legitimization of the other side’s perspective (Bar-Tal, 2000). Salomon (2004) stated that based on this argument, the ultimate goal of peace education is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view; which does not entail agreement with the other side, just seeing it as legitimate and therefore valid. As a consequence of viewing things through this lens, it will naturally follow changes of attitude; loss of prejudice and a more positive way of relating to the other side. Being able to ‘see’ the other’s point of view implies a mastery of one’s own emotions and a mature openness to relate to other people’s perspectives.
The work that my participants and their organizations are doing in promoting a pluralistic view, aligns with recent international policy. The United Nations has been mobilizing the world to define the post-2015 development agenda. In this process, UNESCO and UNICEF have been working with a wide array of stakeholders to reflect on education beyond 2015. Broad consultations with governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and research institutions are currently under way to shape the post-2015 development agenda (UNESCO, 2015). One of the topics included in the agenda of consultations is to build of a culture of peace at all levels by promoting democratic governance, global citizenship, cultural diversity, pluralism and social justice; also, to promote the practices of mutual respect and understanding, tolerance, reinforced through intercultural dialogue and a commitment to non-violence and reconciliation for the rapprochement of cultures and everyday peace (UNESCO, 2014). The development of perspective and mutual understanding is essential in creating peaceful environments. Helping students recognize other peoples’ experiences and perspectives, and avoiding stereotypes and misconceptions develops in them a true sense of understanding and empathic behaviour.

4.5 Factors like time constrains and lack of vision that hinder the development of empathy and peace education.

The three participants pointed out some of the road blocks to fostering empathy and peace education. One factor that my participants repeated often was the lack of time that educators have due to curricular and evaluation pressures. More than once, they mentioned that educators feel that there is no time to foster socio-emotional skills in students due to a concern to cover the curriculum established and evaluate students’ knowledge. Therefore, educators do not seem to have time to pause and instill in students the above mentioned skills. Some educators think that the task of fostering socio-emotional skills like empathy or being concern with peace
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Education is an extra weight to their overloaded day, as Lisa said, “We find ourselves always within these very strict time constraints that can often make us feel as [if] this is an ‘add on’ to what we’re doing.” Lisa related that at the beginning of her teaching career, she was “very curriculum focused. I noticed that, that couldn’t be my focus if the students didn’t have the socio-emotional competencies or the self-regulation capacities to be able to focus on that academic piece, so that became a focus of interest [for me].” Lisa, realized that to develop socio-emotional skills in students is not an ‘add on’ or a burden, but a necessary condition for students to be able to learn. Emily also observed that schools are “often so focused on assessments and evaluations and often… their emotional life is not something… directly addressed… It’s something that isn’t really a priority to all teachers, they are focused on their curriculum… not… on this social component.” Emily was concerned about this because teachers many times do not realized that by only addressing the intellectual development of the child, they miss a big aspect of education which is the personal, socio-emotional and social aspect of the child. On the time constraints issue, Sarah commented,

Teachers feel that they have very little time in their classrooms. The emphasis is in assessment. Teachers have so much on their plate, they have so many pressures. How students are assessed, how teachers are assessed is a big part [of the problem]… When you are emphasizing the grading system, [that] is going to have the biggest role. It is also whatever administrators are dealing with, a local issue, parents of the students, and society. It is [a] very value driven question.

Teachers decide how to allocate their classroom time responding to personal and systemic values that are often in contradiction. Educators frequently think that they do not have time to educate students in a holistic way due to time constraints, but at the same time the
Ministry mandates a holistic education (Ontario Ministry of Education 2008). This is a systemic contradiction that many teachers see themselves ‘trapped in’. Often, educators do not see the benefit of taking the time to foster empathy and other socio-emotional skills, as Lisa pointed out, “For me the greatest challenge is having other people see the merit in this type of educational practice [peace education and fostering socio-emotional skills like empathy]… People still feel uncomfortable with this type of material or this type of learning.”

Undoubtedly, there are obstacles to the fostering of empathy and peace education. Time constraints and curriculum and evaluation-focused educators too often do not see the point or urgency to foster in students socio-emotional skills. However, creative educators and the educational community can implement feasible solutions to fulfill the very important goal of educating students’ minds and hearts. This has repercussions to every child and the whole society.

4.6 Opportunities to foster empathy and reach peace.

There are opportunities through which educators can instil in their students socio-emotional skills, particularly empathy, in order to create more peaceful environments. Lisa suggested, “If we look at each moment… in each encounter, each conflict as a learning opportunity, as a forum for which to include peace, include empathy, include socio-emotional competencies, then we gain ground in creating entire environments that are peaceful.” She also suggested that, through the curriculum, educators can easily instil socio-emotional, empathic and peace education competencies. Further, Lisa remarks that “it is very important that faculties of education begin this type of growth for educators,” that they convey to novice teachers the importance of socio emotional learning. “It begins at the teacher training level, then that comfortability becomes natural.” If faculties of education include programs that convey to their
teacher candidates the important of fostering socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding in students, and gives novice teachers the educational tools to foster such skills, then half of the battle would be won. In such way, the new generations of teachers would have a better understanding of the importance of developing in students skills that help them become socio-emotionally stable individuals, understanding and empathic persons that can be agents of personal and societal change, tolerant and peace making global citizens.

Even though, there are various challenges to fostering empathy and peace education, there are avenues to overcome those challenges. As educators, we can profit on the various opportunities that are present through the day in order to educate students to become empathetic, to become peacemakers and socio-emotionally stable individuals. Socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding are learned through daily life circumstances; for example, through educators’ role modeling attitudes or through the infusion of big ideas and enduring understandings in the curriculum. As Bowen (2013) remarked, “Great teachers change the way their students see the world (and themselves)” (p. 68).

The fostering of peace education, empathy and other socio-emotional competencies should not be perceived as an ‘add on’ to the busy schedules of teachers; they are crucial skills that enable students’ ability and disposition to learn any other curricular piece.

**4.6.1 The complexities of issues at schools and in the global community demand to move forward fostering socio-emotional skills, like empathy, in order to achieve peace.**

In order to achieve peace, to educate peacemakers, and socio-emotionally stable children and youth, educators are called to transform their mentalities and ‘think big’. Of course it is important for a teacher to follow the curriculum created by the Ministry of Education, but within
such curriculum there has to be room for the socio-emotional aspect of educating a child; part of a holistic education and an essential aspect of a proper education. Concerning this, the Ministry of Education, through the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* affirmed: “A quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person.”

On this issue, my participants have pointed out that transforming mentalities and practices are essential. Lisa talked about how her board of education has encouraged more and more socio-emotional learning; she affirmed,

The Board has no option but to move forward. With the nature of students and the complexities of issues that they’re engaged in the 21st century, if we don’t provide these types of supports, we are going to be sitting in minefields of socio-emotional disaster and conflict…It’s incumbent upon us as educators to become those type of educators [those who educate the whole child].

She suggested a shift in mentalities to see the fostering of empathy and other socio-emotional capacities as an integral part of what we do as educators every day. Lisa also expressed, “We need to open ground for people to become conversant with these types of issues.” She suggested, “Perhaps, we can address the importance of peace education at a staff meeting or at a professional learning community; that begins the conversation and the awareness that allows people to understand that this is where we need to move.” As Lisa points out, the first step towards the endeavor of fostering socio-emotional skills and peace education is to convince educators of its importance. This could be done in simple ways like rising awareness among teachers, as Lisa suggests, or at a more systematic level through professional development sessions and through faculties of education, as mentioned before.
Opportunities for change present themselves every day in the classroom, as Emily said change has to occur, “If more teachers made it a priority to have their children… be kinder to one another… not be tolerant to unkindness, it would help a lot [to reduce] bullying behaviour.” She also pointed out at the importance for teachers to pause for a second and get to know their students, this is also an important aspect of shifting mentalities in a way that educators are not only curriculum focused but focused on the ‘big picture’. Emily related that Roots of Empathy gives teachers the opportunity to

observe their students in a different light, because they are not worried about curriculum. It gives them the chance to hear stories that the children tell and what’s going on inside the child. Teachers really appreciate the opportunity to be able to see their students in a different way than they had before.

It is important that we as educators pause for a moment and see our students’ humanity and take the time to get to know them as they are. That will go a long way in our efforts to educate children and youth. Sarah also considers that change in educators’ mentalities is important. She affirmed,

Think of the change you want to see in the world and what are the activities and strategies behind that. What are the skills and mindset that we are hoping to have and learning outcomes and then work backwards from there. There needs to be a shift looking at all the 21st century higher order thinking and skills. A lot of people in the education system are talking about it and trying to change.

There are further ways in which change can occur; for example, through educational communities, direct teacher training and learning how to communicate. Sarah affirmed that
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[It is important to] build a teacher community, so they can communicate with one another and share and learn from each other… [it is necessary to] provide more opportunities of training for educators. There are [also] certain practices teachers can establish in their classroom… in terms of how they communicate with one another. That could be very powerful.

Consistent with the change suggested by my participants, at the Ontario Ministry of Education level, is the change in the school culture to prevent violence mandated through the *Safe and Accepting Schools*. The Ministry affirms that a safe, inclusive, and accepting school environment is a necessary condition for student success. The Ministry further states that building a positive and inclusive school climate requires a focused effort on developing healthy and respectful relationships throughout the whole school and surrounding community, among and between students and adults. This involves a sustained long-term commitment to put this into practice and change school culture (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, peaceful understanding and coexistence between human beings, depends on more than deal-making between politicians. It requires a transformative process deeply rooted, a change in attitudes and behaviour, the disposition with which humans react and relate to each other (Shapiro, 2002). Changing educators’ mentalities and school cultures to achieve peaceful environments is no longer optional – it is mandated by the Ministry of Education. Further, there is national and international consensus by the educational community on this regard. UNESCO’s Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura stressed, “Education – in all its forms and at all levels – is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2005).
Fostering empathy and other socio-emotional skills to achieve peaceful environments and emotionally stable students cannot be thought as an option for educators. All teachers are call to educate the whole person. Not only the intellectual aspect of students’ development, but their development as emotionally stable individuals, individuals who are empathetic, tolerant and understanding; individuals who are not passive to the injustice and violence around them. We are educating students to be responsible citizens of a global community and the leaders of the future. Faculties of education, ministries of education, boards of education, and school administrators need to support teachers in this crucial endeavour.

4.7 Conclusion

Teachers in the 21st Century are called to educate global citizens. In order to make education relevant, they need to equip students with the consciousness and competencies necessary to build a tolerant, just and peaceful world. As affirmed by Dill (2012), this educational task demands teaching moral commitment and empathy beyond the individual and her or his own interests, with a strong moral commitment to a global humanity.

Throughout this chapter, we have been privy to the experiences of three committed and passionate educators who have effectively enacted diverse programing to foster socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding in children and youth to advance peace education. With its particularities and individual focuses, all participants have the common strong commitment to foster empathy, understanding, and in general socio-emotional skills that help educate sensible and well-rounded global citizens, who could be agents of change that can transform the world into a more peaceful one. The attitudes, experiences, programing, and suggestions of these educators could serve as an example to other educators particularly and to the educational community at large in the endeavor of educating students to be peacemakers.
Our schools need to no longer be violent places where students feel at risk. As educators we need to shift our mentalities and realize that unless we address the socio-emotional needs of all our students and unless we instil in them a sense of respect, understanding and care for each other, we cannot educate students to be successful citizens of the world. Even though there are road blocks and time constrains to the holistic education of children and youth, change can happen. Ministries of Education, school boards, principal and teachers could find creative ways to support and accomplish the education of each student as a whole person, heart and mind; delivering academic curriculum, as well as fostering personal and interpersonal capacities.

The following chapter is the culminating section of this research project. There, I discuss the implications of my findings for myself and the broader educational community. Further, I make recommendations to school boards, school administrators, and teachers based upon these findings. Finally I will suggest areas for future research.
Chapter 5. Implications

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, I provide an overview of the main findings and its significance in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. Then, I will discuss the implications of the findings for the educational community, as well as for me, as a beginning teacher and an educational researcher. I also provide recommendations for boards of education, school administrators and teachers. Finally, I suggest areas of further research related to the topic at hand.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

The main question guiding this research is to learn how a sample of educators fosters empathic behaviour in children and youth as a means to advance peace education. According to my findings and to current literature, fostering socio-emotional skills, like empathy, in students is essential to promote a culture of peace in schools and in society at large. Further, a child that does not have socio-emotional stability, is a student that is not as available to learn. Every student needs socio-emotional stability to achieve internal peace, promote peace with others, avoid conflict, and be ready to learn. However, vulnerable students or students deemed ‘at risk’ particularly benefit from programing that fosters socio-emotional skills like empathy. As affirmed by Sagkal, Türnüklü and Totan (2012), empathy skills prevent marginalization, ostracizing from society, and violence, they increase cooperation and altruistic behaviour.

Empathy is a highly contested term. However, my participants conceptualize it as understanding, as seeing the other’s point of view, as ‘putting yourself in someone else’s shoes’. This aligns to the conceptualization of empathy in regards to peace education. As expressed by
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Zemblyas (2007) an understanding of empathy that can be used to identify its significance for peace education is the ability to incorporate other people’s perception and see the experience with their eyes. Further, Salomon (2004) affirmed that the ultimate goal of peace education is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view.

All my participants made a correlation between empathy and human dignity. They pointed out to different elements of what empathic behaviour looks like in practice, from honouring the space between two people, to the importance of being non-judgemental, being patient, being good listeners and being understanding. However, all of them remarked the direct correlation between empathy and humanity, the agreed that empathy makes us ‘fuller human beings’ and it enhances human dignity.

My participants pointed out that empathy has not only a theoretical element but it also has a practical one. One of my participants said that a peace education program with empathy at its heart requires a theoretical piece and a practical piece where students can engage their skills in the world. As Kersey (2013) affirmed, empathy is the ‘active’ ingredient that fosters sensitivity toward other perspectives. It motivates individuals to help those in need. All my participants agreed that empathy calls for action, it is not enough to ‘feel for the other’. When help is needed, an empathic person acts to aids the other, always in a context of dialogue and respect, without imposing that help but offering it. Furthermore, educators are role models of empathy, they cannot only teach empathy in theory, but they have to demonstrate empathic behaviour on a daily basis. As Mary Gordon (2007) said, “Empath cannot be taught, it needs to be caught.”
My three participants pointed out a direct correlation, practically inseparable, between empathy and peace education. According to them, real peace and peace education are impossible to achieve without empathy. We are not loners, we constantly encounter the other, as ‘care theory’ conceptualizes it, there is a carer and a cared-for. We, human beings, are in relation; our own individuality arises in relation. In every facet of life we encounter the living other (Noddings, 2008). One of my participants said that there has to be understanding of the humanity of the person in front of us and a mutual respect. Without understanding and empathy we cannot reach true peace.

Fostering empathy reduces violence and bullying in school environments, which has ripple effects that extend to other aspects of students’ lives and to our global society in general. As Masterson and Kersey (2013) stated, empathy has a crucial role to play in our global world, which is increasingly interconnected while facing the ravages brought about by senseless violence. Educators and researchers agreed that bullying in schools and violence can be dramatically reduced through programing that fosters empathy and understanding among students. Specific programming to foster empathy has proven to reduce violence in schools. Researchers like Massari (2011) affirmed that not only bullies but also passive bystanders lack empathy and they view being different from the social norm as the justification for bullying. Similarly, Dobrich and Dranoff (2003) found that empath failure can increase the risk of victimization and perpetration of aggressive acts against peers.

There are different programs that educators can enact to achieve the development of empathy and peace education. The three participants to my interviews have enacted diverse programs: The first was delivered through ‘at risk’ girl clubs and classroom programing that foster understanding and care for others. The second one, a program that explicitly fostered
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empathy through the understanding of one’s and other people’s feelings; taking the experiences of a baby and their parents as the tool for understanding. The third programing connected students around the world to enable dialogue, exposure and understanding of different perspectives. Through all these programs there was a special remark to the importance of understanding the ‘other person’s point of view’. As Salomon (2004) affirmed that the ultimate goal of peace education is to lead to the legitimization of the other side’s point of view. Regardless of the programing that my participants decided to enact, all of them have as a result the development of socio-emotional skills, particularly empathy and understanding. These skills help promote a culture of peace and enable students to succeed in an interconnected world as responsible global citizens.

Time constraints and lack of vision of some educators, regarding the importance of fostering socio-emotional skills like empathy, were recognized by my participants as some of the most significant factors that hinder the development of empathy and peace education. Further, they stated that given that nowadays many students lack internal peace and that violence in schools is on the rise, teachers and the educational community have no choice but to find ways to foster socio-emotional skills in students like empathy to reach internal and external peace. This cannot be seen as an ‘add on’ to the busy teacher schedules, but a crucial need. Fostering the development of socio-emotional skills like empathy enables students’ learning, results in peaceful environments and actively promotes a culture of peace and understanding for the betterment of our global community.

5.2 Implications

This section explores the implications of this research for different stakeholders.
5.2.1 Implications to the Educational Community

In a violent world that permeates our schools, the development of socio-emotional skills like empathy and understanding is not an option, it is a crucial necessity; as previously stated students cannot learn without such skills. In order to fulfill our commitment to the holistic education of students, we need to develop in them skills of understanding, respect and proactive action to foster a culture of peace in schools and in society in general.

Educating students holistically and fostering peaceful environments is not an option, it is mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education and strongly encouraged by the global community. In the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*. The Ministry of Education (2008) states that

> a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities… (p. 2)

Further, in the *Safe and Accepting Schools* program, the Ministry (2012) affirms that a safe, inclusive, and accepting school environment is a necessary condition for student success. The international community through organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF expect that moving forward in the 21st Century, education systems are expected to convey values that will help develop more just and inclusive societies. Further, these prominent international organizations have been working to establish their post-2015 agenda, which is very important for the international community. One of the topics of this agenda is to build a culture of peace at all levels by promoting democratic governance, global citizenship, cultural diversity, pluralism and social justice; as well as to promote the practices of mutual respect and understanding, tolerance,
reinforced through intercultural dialogue and a commitment to non-violence and reconciliation for the rapprochement of cultures and everyday peace (UNESCO, 2014).

Ministries of education, boards of education, faculties of education, school administration, teachers and all educational partners need to find viable and effective avenues to promote and achieve a culture of peace. All educators need to proactively seek peace in schools, which can be reached through the development of socio-emotional capacities in students, like empathy and understanding, enabling them to become 21st century responsible global citizens. As educators we need to equip our students with the tools that will allow them to experience peace and to be active agents of peace in their schools and in their communities, permeating in this way to the global community. This is an essential aspect of education that can no longer be seen as an ‘ad on’. Only a caring civilization is worthy for human dignity.

5.2.2 Implications to My Professional Identity and Practice

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter of this research, I am an internationally trained lawyer who has always been drawn to subjects of ethics, justice and peace. I decided to become an educator because I believe in the transcendence of this profession that impacts students’ lives. As Bowen (2013) said, great teachers change the way their students see the world long after they have forgotten formulas and theorems. I strongly believe in educating the whole person, not only by transmitting knowledge, but also by developing students’ character. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said in 1948 at Morehouse College: “We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education” (“Good Reads”, n.d.). As I begin my career in teaching, this research has helped me learn the transcendence of fostering in our students socio-emotional skills like empathy; skills that enable learning and that equips students with the tools needed to enjoy peace and to become
peacemakers, which has great repercussions not only on their personal lives, but on society in
general and further, given the interconnectedness of our world, it has repercussions on the global
community. As teachers we are not only deliverers of a lifeless curriculum; we need to educate
the whole child, mind and heart. I learned that it is important to awaken the humanity in our
students, to foster in them caring and understanding skills, to make them realize about the dignity
with which each person should be treated. I learned that it is important present student with
opportunities to see different perspectives, to recognize and respect other people’s points of view
and experiences. Further, I learned the importance of being a role model in the fostering of
empathic and caring behaviour. I also learned that it is important to make our students
peacemakers and help them recognize when action and help is needed and to provide it in a
climate of respect and dialogue. All these attitudes in students and educators have the potential to
make of our schools, our local and global communities places of peace and justice.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed in this research project and on the data collected through
interviews with educators, I would like to make the following recommendations pertinent to
different stakeholders.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Boards of Education

Boards of education, as some are already doing, need to ensure that all teachers have
enough training and support to be able to foster in students socio-emotional skills, like empathy.
School boards, through professional development sessions, could help educate teachers on the
importance of fostering these capacities and remind them that a holistic education, one that
fosters skills like empathy and promotes peace, is not an optional aspect of their work as
teachers, it is Ministry mandated. The boards of education, can help teachers find time to ensure
a holistic education and help them find ways to infuse curriculum with socio emotional learnings and profit from their everyday encounters to foster in students socio-emotional skills like empathy. Finally, boards of educations should work with some external educational partners to support teachers and students in the endeavor of socio emotional learning.

5.3.2 Recommendations for school administrators

School administrators have an important role to support and put forward initiatives and programing that foster socio-emotional skills, like empathy. They need to make sure all teachers have the support they need to instill in students those skills. School administrators can work with teachers to find, amidst teachers’ busy schedules, time to foster socio emotional learning, empathy and peace education. They can allocate resources and partner with community resources to train and support teachers on this topic.

5.3.3 Recommendations for teachers

Teachers are the ones that are in direct contact with students. They are the ones that make the decisions that crucially impact students’ lives. Teachers can find viable ways to instill in students socio-emotional skills, like empathy and understanding to foster a culture of peace.

Creative teachers can find opportunities to instill such skills in students through the day, in implicit and explicit ways. They can be role models who leave what they teach. They can also infuse the fostering of socio-emotional skills throughout the curriculum; fulfilling in such way curricular demands and, at the same time, educating students in a holistic manner.

5.4 Area for further research

I focused this research to the study of empathy as a socio-emotional skill that is essential to the achievement of peace education. However, there are other socio-emotional skills that
could be investigated, as for example communication. Further research can be conducted to investigate the role that effective communication skills might play to achieve peace education. I believe that empathy is an important beginning to peace education but other skills can also enhance its attainment.

This research project used semi-structure interviews with three educators as a means for data collection. Although I attempted to select educators with varied experiences and who enacted different programing, it would be interesting to conduct a research with a wider variety of participants and experiences that might enrich the scope of the research.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The ravages of violence in schools and in society in general call for justice and peace. Our students need a safe, caring and accepting environment to be able to succeed. As educators we have a special role in the development of tolerant and understanding individuals, who are active promoters of a culture of peace at a personal, societal and global level. Fostering socio-emotional skills, like empathy, in children and adolescents gives our students the tools that they need in order to recognize and respect other people’s perspectives and experiences; also to be caring and understanding and to act when help is needed in a context of dialogue and respect. These skills make our students socio-emotionally stable and caring individuals who can become responsible citizens of our 21st century global society. Empathy recognizes the dignity of every human being. Only a civilization of care is worthy of human dignity.

We can no longer be passive bystanders to violence and injustice. We are called to educate our students in a holistic way, caring to educate their heart the same way we care to educate their intellect. As it is remarked in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human
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Rights, “Education shall be directed toward the full development of the human personality... It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship… and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (The United Nations, 1948, art. 26).
References


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Date: __________________

Dear __________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how teachers foster empathy to advance peace education, for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.
The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Maria del Pilar Martinez Salgado.

Phone number: (647) 391-5331.

E-mail address: pilar.martinezsalgado@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: _____________________________

Phone number: _________________ Email: _______________________
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Maria del Pilar Martinez Salgado and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________

Name (printed): ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Thank you for participating in this interview. This research aims to learn how educators create opportunities to foster empathy in order to advance peace education. This interview should take approximately 60 minutes. I will ask you questions related to your experience on the topic. I want to remind you of your right to choose not to answer any of the questions that I will ask you. Please feel comfortable through the interview. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to let me know. I want to remind you that I will record the interview in order to recall what you said. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. Can you tell me what position you currently hold?
   a. For how many years have you worked as an educator?
   b. Where do you currently work as an educator? How long have you been at this school?
   c. What grades/subjects do you teach? What grades/subject have you previously taught?
   d. Can you tell me more about the school you currently work in? (size, demographics, programming priorities)
   e. Do you fulfill any other roles in the school alongside your role as classroom teacher? (coach, advisor, councillor, leader)
2. As you are aware, I am interested in learning how teachers foster empathy in students. Can you tell me more about how you developed a commitment to this learning goal? (personal, professional, educational experiences)

3. Can you tell me more about your involvement in peace education? How did you develop this interest? (personal, professional, educational experiences)

4. Are there any ‘formally’ implemented programs in your school that encourage the development of empathy? (socio emotional learning programs, peace education programs) If yes, what are these programs? What are their learning goals? How do the programs operate?

Section 2: Beliefs/Values

1. What does empathy mean to you? How would you recognize empathy if you saw it being exhibited by a student? What types of knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours would you see being exhibited?

2. How do you locate this understanding of empathy within your understanding of peace education? What does peace education mean to you? In your view, what should a peace education program entail?

3. What do you believe students and the school community can gain from learning to feel and practice empathy? Why is it important to you to teach empathy? And to teach peace education more broadly speaking?

4. How do you see the development of empathy fitting within the school curriculum?
Section 3: Teacher Practices

1. What range of instructional strategies and approaches do you enact to foster empathy in your students?

2. What are your learning goals when fostering empathy? What kinds of opportunities for learning do you enact to meet those goals?

3. Can you give me an example of a lesson that you have conducted that included fostering empathy as a learning goal?
   a. What grade/subject was this?
   b. How did you create opportunities for learning and demonstrating empathy?
   c. How did your students respond to this lesson? What indicators of learning empathy did you observe?

4. What does your peace education curriculum look like in your school and/or classroom?
   a. What are the learning goals of your peace education program/curriculum?
   b. What opportunities for learning are included in this program/curriculum?
   c. Who else, if anyone, is involved in implementing this program/curriculum in your school? (listen – then probe if necessary re: colleagues, parents, administrators, community members)
   d. How do students respond to the peace education program/curriculum? What indicators of learning do you observe from them?

Section 4: Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

1. What range of resources and factors support your capacity to teach empathy, specifically, and peace education programming, more broadly, in your classroom and school?
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2. What challenges do you encounter, if any, with this work? How do you respond to these challenges? What resources could help you better respond to these challenges?

3. Do you have any recommendations for how the school system can further support the development of empathy as a curricular priority? And what about peace education?

4. Do you have any advice for a beginning teacher who is committed to fostering empathy and peace education in her/his own teaching practice?

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtful responses.