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Whose peace? Why context and local voices matter in reimagining peace education

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This conceptual analysis examines the fluidity of peace as both an idea and a practice, and the shifting positionalities of those who teach and study it. While peace education is often promoted as a global model for social cohesion, its meanings and the legitimacy of those who invoke them shift with changing political climates. Drawing on critical and decolonial peace education scholarship and interpretive reflection on the Turkish case, the article conceptualizes peace as a fluid discursive terrain shaped by power, censorship, and appropriation. As regimes redefine what may be spoken in the name of peace, educators and researchers are continually re-positioned, sometimes as dissenters, sometimes as representatives of the state. The article introduces the concept of “fluid context,” as a theoretical lens for analyzing peace education under shifting regimes of speech and legitimacy.

KEYWORDS

accountability, appropriation, authoritarian regimes, censorship, collective memories, conflict prevention, contested discursive terrain, context-responsive

Introduction

In recent years, the global landscape has been increasingly shaped by deepening polarization, the resurgence of authoritarian regimes, and the steady erosion of democratic imaginaries. Data from [Freedom House \(2024\)](#) illustrates a persistent 18-year regression in global liberty, revealing that while a mere 20% of the global population resides in ‘Free’ societies, a significant 38% are subject to ‘Not Free’ regimes, a category that includes Türkiye in Freedom House’s assessment. The remaining 42% of the world’s population lives in countries classified as “Partly Free,” characterized by constrained civil liberties, uneven political rights, and fluctuating conditions of public expression. Similarly, the [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\) Institute \(2023\)](#) notes that the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen has fallen to levels last seen in 1986. Yet, as [Galtung \(1969\)](#) and [Addams \(1907\)](#) remind us, democracy alone does not guarantee peace; formal political freedoms often coexist with structural violence, exclusion, and the quiet normalization of fear.

The primary concern for peace education in this regard is not merely the absence of democratic structures, but how authoritarian shifts trigger a ‘fluid context’. As democratic imaginaries erode, the state increasingly gains the power to monopolize the moral vocabulary of peace, turning it into a tool for securitization rather than social transformation. This suggests that the decline of democracy creates a volatile terrain where the meanings of peace are perpetually re-authorized or censored, undermining the pedagogical stability required for transformative work. This distinction matters for peace education because the conditions that regulate speech, dissent, and public memory often determine not only whether “peace” can be taught, but what it is allowed to mean. These trends have significant implications for education, and particularly for peace education, which is often promoted as a universal tool for fostering

social cohesion and preventing conflict, yet is frequently implemented in politically sensitive or authoritarian contexts (Bajaj, 2019; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021).

This article offers a conceptual intervention in peace education debates by theorizing the fluidity of both peace and the positionalities of those who teach or study it. Rather than treating peace as a stable moral endpoint and peace education as a transferable set of pedagogical techniques, I conceptualize peace as a contested discursive terrain whose meanings are continually re-authorized, censored, and appropriated. Drawing on critical and decolonial peace education scholarship and interpretive reflection on the Turkish case, the article develops the concept of “fluid context” defined as a political and discursive environment in which what may be spoken “in the name of peace,” and who may speak it with legitimacy, can shift rapidly with changing state narratives, alliances, and moral concepts. Following Schultze-Kraft (2022), this article views peace and historical memory as inextricably linked contested terrains. Schultze-Kraft’s distinction between conventional and critical orientations helps clarify how peace education is pulled between universalist and emancipatory, politically engaged approaches, each facing different constraints in violence-inflected settings. Building on this, I argue that when these terrains become discursively unstable over time, that is, in fluid contexts, the conditions for sustained pedagogical work can be repeatedly disrupted as meanings and legitimacy shift. While conventional orientations that rely on universal, prescriptive models risk becoming obsolete as state narratives shift, critical orientations face heightened risks when engaging with “dangerous” memories that may be disruptive to the status quo (Schultze-Kraft, 2022; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2008). This article extends these insights by theorizing how such dual fluidity destabilizes the very possibility of sustained pedagogical work. This state-led redefinition can be understood as a form of ‘epistemicide’ (de Sousa Santos, 2014), where the diverse, lived understandings of peace held by marginalized groups are systematically suppressed or replaced by a singular, state-authorized discourse that serves national security interests.

This produces a paradox for peace education: it is frequently framed as a local and stable instrument for cohesion and conflict prevention, yet it is practiced in settings where “peace” is fragile, politicized, and unevenly distributed (Bajaj, 2019; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021). What is at stake, then, is not simply how peace is taught but which understandings of peace are legitimized and whose are suppressed. While it is widely acknowledged that peace and peace education are context-dependent, the dominant frameworks continue to travel under the banner of universality, carrying with them the epistemologies of the Global North (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016). These models often arrive as parachuted pedagogies; designed elsewhere, translated everywhere, without attending to the political grammars of the places they enter. Even when programs are locally authored, they are often built on assumptions about language, legitimacy, and safety that can become obsolete when political conditions shift.

In such volatility, educational frameworks quickly lose stability, and the very notion of peace becomes a moving target rather than a consistent value. The tension, therefore, is not only between “universal” curricula and “local” realities, but between curricular claims to stability and contexts that continually redefine the terms of public speech. Beyond the challenges of localizing curricula, a more fundamental question emerges: can peace education preserve its

conceptual integrity when operating within a discursive terrain where ‘peace’ is a fluid, continually subject to state-led re-authorization, censorship, and appropriation? I argue that peace education must be understood as a dialogic and reflexive praxis: contextually grounded and locally voiced, yet also context-responsive and capable of continual reinterpretation as political discourses, risks, and permissions change.

This emphasis on responsiveness extends a familiar claim within critical peace education namely, that “the local” matters, by insisting that “the local” itself is not stable (Bajaj, 2019; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021), “the local” itself is not stable; it is continually reshaped by political transformations, shifting alliances, and discursive redefinitions of legitimacy. Therefore, peace education cannot rely on a fixed understanding of context but must begin with the ongoing work of reading, listening to, and interpreting the political climate before any program is designed or any word of peace is spoken.

The politics of peace: contested meanings

Peace is not a neutral concept; it is deeply entangled with political histories, ethnic conflicts, and national narratives (Galtung, 1969; Richmond, 2013; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2018). Rather than a fixed condition or moral ideal, peace is a discursive and fluid field shaped by historical contingencies, ideological struggles, and collective memories understood as socially and politically mediated interpretations of the past that inform present claims to legitimacy. As Assmann (2006) notes, collective memory is not a passive storage of the past but an active cultural construction that provides groups with a sense of identity and temporal continuity, often serving as a foundation for political mobilization. In many contexts, the word “peace” carries meanings that extend far beyond interpersonal harmony or conflict resolution (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016; Richmond, 2013), and is instead becoming woven into national projects, political agendas, and competing visions of justice. In Türkiye, for instance, “peace” (*barış*) is strongly associated with the Kurdish peace process, formally known as the Solution Process (*Çözüm Süreci*), represented a sustained effort to reach a negotiated settlement and facilitate the demilitarization of the long-standing conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish groups, making the term itself politically charged and at times stigmatized (Yeğen, 2015). At certain political moments, uttering *barış* could be read as an act of dissent; at others, it becomes co-opted by the state as a slogan of unity. The meaning therefore oscillates depending on who speaks it, when, and for what purpose.

Elsewhere, “peace” evokes similarly contested associations: in Israel/Palestine, it is bound to the legacy of the Oslo process and debates over the two-state solution (Halper, 2015); in Sri Lanka, it recalls post-war reconciliation with Tamil communities (Orjuela, 2003); and in Colombia, it is closely linked to the 2016 peace accords with the FARC and to struggles over historical memory, victimhood, and accountability (Fernández-Osorio and Pachón-Pinzón, 2019). Schultze-Kraft (2022) demonstrates that the UN’s Sustaining Peace agenda deliberately departs from earlier, more prescriptive and universalising models of peacebuilding by adopting a normatively restrained and less directive orientation. However, his broader point is that both conventional and critical orientations to peace education operate within contested terrains of peace and historical memory, where meanings and legitimacy remain politically charged and subject

to competing claims. This highlights that peace education is not merely a transfer of skills, but a deeply political engagement with historical memory, an engagement that becomes especially precarious in ‘fluid contexts,’ where meanings of peace and memory are continually re-negotiated and, at times, strategically appropriated by the state.

The contestation over the meaning of peace aligns with theories of ‘hybrid peace’ (Mac Ginty, 2010; Richmond, 2013), which highlight the tension between liberal, internationalist peace models and the local, often illiberal, realities of state-building. In a fluid context, this hybridity is not static; it is a site of constant negotiation where the state attempts to co-opt local peace narratives to consolidate power. In a fluid context, both conventional and critical orientations to peace education face unique challenges: conventional models risk becoming obsolete as state narratives shift, while critical models must navigate the heightened risks of engaging with ‘dangerous’ historical memories that the state may seek to censor or appropriate (Schultze-Kraft, 2022). Such contestation demands a rethinking of how peace is theorized and taught. National contexts, often assumed to provide stable ground for locally grounded programs, are themselves dynamic; shifting with political tides, public sentiment, and state discourse. What is “local” 1 day may become politically untenable the next. Global literature on critical peace education underscores that universalist approaches, while well-intentioned, often flatten these contextual complexities and risk masking the structural dimensions of conflict (Bajaj, 2015, 2019; Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021).

When “peace” is exported as a singular, apolitical good, it can unintentionally reproduce the hierarchies it seeks to dismantle, privileging Global North epistemologies while marginalizing local ways of knowing, remembering, and healing. However, even within nationally designed or locally adapted frameworks, contexts themselves are not static. Political climates, social tensions, and discursive boundaries can shift rapidly, sometimes within days, altering what can be spoken, taught, or silenced under the name of peace. This instability suggests that contextualization alone is insufficient unless it accounts for the mutability of the context itself. Therefore, peace education must not only be context-sensitive but also context-responsive, continually reinterpreting the terrain in which it operates.

Critical peace education thus insists on contextualization not as a mere ethical gesture but as a theoretical necessity (Bajaj, 2019; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021). It calls on educators and researchers to examine how “peace” is defined, contested, and performed within fluid and often unpredictable political climates, and to recognize that the conditions of possibility for peace education are contingent upon power and subject to continual redefinition. Contextualization, then, is not a one-time alignment with a given setting but an ongoing interpretive practice, one that requires sustained attunement to shifting discourses, policies, and social moods. Situating peace education within local histories and narratives is therefore not merely an ethical stance but a pedagogical and political act. Without such dynamic grounding, peace education risks reproducing silences, reinforcing existing asymmetries, and losing its critical legitimacy.

Why context and local voices matter: rethinking locality as a moving context

If peace itself is politically and semantically unstable, then peace education cannot be designed or enacted as a neutral, universal

framework. Its content, language, and reception are inseparable from the socio-political environments in which it unfolds. Accordingly, peace education must be developed in relation to communities’ histories, values, and lived realities rather than assumed to be universally transferable. Critical and decolonial scholars argue that education which ignores context risks reproducing external hierarchies of knowledge and silencing local voices (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016; Smith, 2008). Yet, even within national contexts, “the local” is not fixed; it is constantly reshaped by political realignments, changing state narratives, and public sentiment. What counts as locally legitimate 1 day may become dangerous or unspeakable the next. Thus, “the local” must be approached as a living, moving terrain rather than a stable moral or geographic category. In many semi-authoritarian contexts, local elites monopolize the discourse of peace precisely to silence alternative imaginaries (Björkdahl and Höglund, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2010). Yet, while Björkdahl and Höglund (2013) conceptualize the “local” as a critical site of friction and negotiation with global interventions, this article extends their argument by emphasizing that ‘the local’ itself is not constant. It, too, shifts with political currents, redefinitions of legitimacy, and the state’s appropriation of what counts as authentic or peaceful.

This raises fundamental questions: *Whose peace is being taught, and whose voices are centered?* For those whose speech is censored, universal principles of peace may indeed serve as moral reference points; yet for educators or communities on the ground, universality alone cannot capture the lived complexity of naming and enacting peace. Programs led by external actors often lack legitimacy, while locally grounded approaches that emphasize relational trust are more likely to resonate and sustain impact. However, even these locally rooted efforts depend on political climates that are themselves unstable. In semi-authoritarian or rapidly shifting national contexts, as the boundaries of what can be spoken change, so too does the meaning of “the local” itself. The local is therefore not a fixed foundation for peace education but a discursive space; continuously reshaped by power, ideology, and the state’s control over what may be named.

The insider–outsider dynamic is crucial at this point. Outsiders may bring resources, global discourses, and frameworks, but they often misinterpret or oversimplify the volatility of national contexts that redefine local legitimacy from day to day. Insiders, by contrast, navigate language, trust, and silences differently, although they too face risks of marginalization or politicization. In contexts such as Türkiye, “insiderness” itself is fragile: one’s legitimacy as a teacher, researcher, or even citizen can shift overnight as state narratives and public sentiment evolve. Decolonial approaches to peace education (Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021) emphasize that legitimacy is not given by institutional authority, but is earned relationally through trust, reflexivity, and attentiveness to the politics of voice. Yet these relationships are never static; they must be renegotiated within political terrains in which both peace and those who attempt to teach it are continually redefined. To practice peace education under such conditions is thus not only a pedagogical task but an interpretive one: it demands the ability to read, listen to, and adapt within changing contexts rather than assuming that “the local” can remain stable.

The Turkish context illustrates this vividly. Teachers and community members in Türkiye have long been documented as expressing hesitation to use the term *barış* (“peace”), since it has been politically charged through its association with the Kurdish peace

process (Yeğen, 2015; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008). In practice, this meant that peace education could not simply be introduced as a formal curriculum unit. Rather, teachers cautiously engaged students through themes like empathy, coexistence, and communication, indirectly building toward peace without naming it. These adaptive strategies reveal how educators continually recalibrate their language to survive within a shifting political discourse; one that alternately silences and appropriates the very idea of peace. Over time, relational trust between teachers, families, and students enabled small openings where more explicit dialogue could occur, but these were fragile and contingent. This experience underscores the central argument of this article: peace education cannot rely on either universal frameworks or static readings of context. It must instead be cultivated as a fluid, dialogic practice that evolves with, and resists, the political transformations that shape what peace can mean and who may speak it.

Bariş in transition: changing state narratives of peace in Türkiye

The Turkish case illustrates how the dynamics discussed above unfold when peace becomes a politically regulated form of speech rather than a stable moral horizon. The preceding discussion demonstrated that peace is neither static nor universal but a fluid, context-bound concept whose meaning shifts with changing political and linguistic terrains. This instability is especially visible in Türkiye, a country governed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002, where I conducted my fieldwork, where *barış* (peace) has travelled a complex path from aspiration to accusation, from silence to official slogan. The Turkish case illuminates how peace can be simultaneously desired and feared, rendered unspeakable and then suddenly demanded, revealing how state power reshapes not only political outcomes but also the moral vocabulary available to educators and researchers.

In Türkiye, the meaning of *barış* has long been entwined with the state's relationship to its Kurdish population. The government's official "Solution Process" (*Çözüm Süreci*), initiated in late 2012 and formalized in 2013, marked the first sustained attempt to negotiate with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after decades of armed conflict (Yeğen, 2015). For a brief period, *barış* carried a sense of public hope; the word appeared on banners, in newspaper headlines, and in classrooms as part of civic initiatives promoting coexistence and democratic reform (Ensaroğlu, 2013). Yet by mid-2015, the process collapsed following renewed violence and political polarization. The abrupt end of negotiations not only reignited conflict but also transformed *barış* itself into a risky utterance, an index of political identity rather than a shared ethical aspiration (Çelik, 2020; Dinc and Ozduzen, 2023). Peace became less a horizon of possibility than a marker through which loyalty and dissent were read.

Between 2016 and 2023, the semantics of peace narrowed dramatically. Following the failed coup attempt in July 2016, Türkiye entered an extended state of emergency that reconfigured the boundaries of permissible speech under an increasingly centralized and securitized governance regime. The "Academics for Peace" petition signed by over 2,000 scholars in January 2016 calling for renewed dialogue in the Kurdish regions was prosecuted under anti-terrorism legislation. Signatories were dismissed from universities, stripped of passports, and, in some cases, imprisoned (Esen and

Gumuscu, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2016). During this period, Türkiye became one of the world's leading jailers of journalists, and academic freedom was systematically curtailed, reinforcing a climate of fear and self-censorship. In public discourse, *barış* became coded as subversive, its invocation equated with sympathy for separatism. The very language of peace was thus criminalized, and the field of peace education fell silent and was forced into indirect, cautious, and often unspeakable forms.

This climate of surveillance reshaped pedagogy in subtle but enduring ways. In interviews that I conducted with teachers working in refugee-receiving schools between 2018 and 2021, many expressed fear of being misunderstood or reported if they addressed themes that might be construed as political. Even activities focusing on intercultural friendship or anti-bullying could be questioned for hidden ideological intent. As Zembylas and Loukaidis (2021) argue, affective dilemmas often accompany teachers working in divided societies: emotions of fear, loyalty, and caution become pedagogical conditions. In Türkiye, such affective dynamics were intensified by the possibility of disciplinary investigation or public denunciation. Teachers thus developed a "pedagogy of avoidance"; a careful balancing act that sought to nurture peace without naming it. This phenomenon aligns with broader findings in divided societies, where educators often navigate 'contested narratives' by opting for neutral or technical language to circumvent the perceived risks of political sensitivity (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2011).

Crucially, this shows that the "local" realm of teachers, students, and community is itself altered by politics: what was once a safe or even generative "local" moment became politically suspect. The silence surrounding *barış* also reflected broader contradictions in Turkish democracy. As Galtung (1969) reminds us, negative peace; the absence of direct violence; does not guarantee positive peace, which requires social justice and structural equality. Türkiye's emphasis on "security" and "unity" in the post-2016 period prioritized the former while neglecting the latter. The result can be described as "authoritarian peace": a discourse that demands social harmony while suppressing dissent. Within such a framework, peace education becomes constrained by what can be safely spoken, its transformative potential reduced to behavioural management or moral obedience.

By 2024 and 2025, however, a new political moment appears: the Turkish government has again adopted the language of peace as part of its official rhetoric, signalling a willingness to reopen dialogue with Kurdish representatives (Baker Institute, 2025; Marcou, 2025). Media outlets aligned with the ruling party now present *barış* as a component of national stability and religious fraternity rather than a threat to territorial integrity. The government's "Peace and Solidarity Vision 2025," announced by the Ministry of Interior in early 2025, frames peace as a patriotic duty, associating it with development, regional leadership, and humanitarian diplomacy. As a result, public expressions of peace are once again permissible, even encouraged, though under a tightly controlled narrative of unity and loyalty (Daily Sabah, 2025; Kurdish Peace Institute, 2025).

This transformation does not signal true democratization but rather the state's cyclical re-appropriation of moral language. What was once dangerous to say has been domesticated into policy vocabulary. *Bariş* thus oscillates between taboo and propaganda, demonstrating the profound fluidity of political semantics. For educators, the shift introduces a new dilemma: although it is now "safe" to speak of peace, the meaning of the term is predetermined.

Official documents promote peace under empathy and understanding themes as part of civic values curricula, yet these initiatives emphasize national belonging and obedience rather than critical reflection or plural coexistence (MoNE, 2022). The reappearance of *barış* in policy discourse therefore represents not a recovery of freedom to speak but a re-definition of what counts as peace. While it may appear easier to speak of peace in Türkiye in 2025, this openness is conditional and tightly governed. When peace becomes policy, it risks losing its transformative power; when the state defines peace, dissenting voices that once sought it may again be silenced, this time under the banner of harmony.

The Turkish terrain thus demonstrates the necessity of understanding peace as a fluid, historically contingent construct. Each political turn; 2013 hope, 2016 silence, 2025 appropriation, reshapes the pedagogical meaning of peace education. Imported frameworks that treat peace as a universal moral good cannot capture these fluctuations. Instead, educators must recognize that the very capacity to utter or teach peace depends on shifting configurations of legitimacy and fear. As decolonial pedagogy suggests, peace begins by acknowledging that context is not a stable backdrop but a constitutive, evolving force (Bajaj, 2019; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021).

Fragile pedagogies and fluid positionalities: teaching and researching peace when speech itself trembles

If the meaning of *barış* has shifted with Türkiye's political tides, so too have the ways it can be spoken, taught, and researched. When discourse itself becomes unstable, even nationally designed peace education programs must be re-evaluated, since they are rooted in political and linguistic assumptions that no longer hold. Peace education, then, cannot remain static even in national contexts; it must move with the social currents that continually redefine what peace can mean, what can be said about it, and who may say it with legitimacy.

In such climates, teachers and researchers inhabit an uneasy space between participation and resistance. Their role is not merely to transmit peace as a set of values, but to navigate its ever-changing boundaries, to interpret, reframe, and sometimes protect it from misuse. What was once a pedagogical virtue may, under new conditions, become politically fraught. When the language of peace becomes an instrument of power, the educator's task is not simply to comply or withdraw, but to recover its ethical depth without falling into compliance.

Education for liberation begins with naming the world (Freire, 1970). Yet when the world's naming becomes dangerous or co-opted, educators must find other ways to speak truthfully. This act of creative negotiation, speaking through silence, metaphor, and relational care constitutes a pedagogy shaped by uncertainty rather than clarity. In such moments, peace is not a topic to be taught but a stance to be inhabited: a fragile, ongoing process of listening, sensing, and responding to the world's contradictions.

In the classrooms, silence was not absence, it was a method. Silence could shelter both the teacher and the child, providing space for meaning to exist without declaration. Affective practices in divided societies often oscillate between fear and care, with silence functioning

as both a barrier and a bridge. Avoiding political vocabulary protected educators and students from reprisal, yet it also reinforced the state's monopoly over what could be spoken. This dual nature of silence, its capacity to protect and to constrain, reveals the complexity of pedagogy under surveillance.

Freire (1970) warned that when education loses its power to name the world, it risks becoming domestication rather than liberation. In Türkiye, the prohibition of *barış* illustrates this paradox vividly: the more peace was managed and redefined by the state, the less it could be lived as a democratic practice. Thus, peace education became a pedagogy of negotiation: educators and researchers working around, through, and beneath words, striving to hold open a space for humanity in systems designed to close it.

This precarious space gives rise to what might be called *fluid pedagogy*, a practice shaped not by fixed content or stable principles, but by continual adaptation to shifting meanings and risks. Fluid pedagogy recognizes that language, legitimacy, and safety are in motion. What can be spoken 1 month may become dangerous the next; what once carried dissenting potential may later be absorbed into national rhetoric. In such conditions, teachers do not simply apply curricula or researchers do not simply conduct research in one *research topic*, rather, they engage in ongoing acts of ethical translation deciding daily how to speak responsibly without erasure.

The positionality of the peace researcher is not merely reflexive but situationally redefined. Classical frameworks distinguishing insider and outsider (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Ergun and Erdemir, 2010; Merton, 1972; Mullings, 1999) presuppose stable social categories; yet, in volatile contexts, positionality itself is fluid, an identity negotiated in real time. The "local" is not fixed geography but a moving field of perception shaped by power, and state discourse.

Ergun and Erdemir (2010) describe this dynamic as "*the constant construction and deconstruction of boundaries*." In contexts of heightened surveillance, this process becomes intensified: the researcher must continuously manage visibility and vulnerability, balancing transparency with self-protection. Fieldwork becomes less about data collection and more about endurance, an ongoing calibration of tone, presence, and pace. To research peace in this way is to practice what could be called *methodological trembling*: the constant, embodied awareness of instability that accompanies ethical inquiry in volatile environments.

This trembling is not failure; it is sensitivity. It reflects the awareness that both knowledge and safety are provisional. Just as peace itself shifts between taboo and slogan, the identity of those who teach or study it moves between suspicion and approval. When the government reclaims the vocabulary of peace as policy, educators and researchers find their once-radical language suddenly mainstreamed, yet emptied of its transformative power. The same phrase that once invited investigation may now attract praise, but for opposite reasons.

Such reversals demand ongoing vigilance. If the political discourse around peace changes, the pedagogies and methodologies that engage it must also be rethought. Otherwise, peace education risks becoming complicit in the very systems it once sought to critique. Critical scholarship must constantly question the "abyssal line" between dominant and suppressed knowledge, acknowledging how power redefines legitimacy (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

The same holds for research ethics. When legitimacy becomes a moving target, reflexivity must evolve into what might be called *discursive awareness*; an attunement to how one's work circulates, is

received, and is reinterpreted through shifting political narratives. This awareness prevents peace education from becoming an echo of power while allowing it to remain engaged in the struggle for meaning.

The emotional dimensions of this work cannot be overstated. Scholars navigating such terrains often describe fear, exhaustion, and moral fatigue (Ahmed, 2014; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2018). Yet within this fragility lies an ethic of care. To proceed cautiously is not to retreat; it is to acknowledge that pedagogy and research are relational acts grounded in responsibility. Silence, hesitation, or gentle redirection can become strategies of integrity rather than avoidance. In these small acts of discernment, educators embody a form of critical tenderness, the courage to remain kind, reflexive, and precise even when speech itself feels perilous.

In Türkiye's current moment, where peace has re-entered official discourse, such critical tenderness becomes even more vital. The return of *barış* to public vocabulary may appear liberating, but it also risks taming the concept by aligning it with state narratives of unity and loyalty. Teachers may now speak of peace freely, yet only within the sanctioned vocabulary of harmony and national belonging. Researchers may publish on peace, but only by affirming state-led definitions of stability. The freedom to speak, once regained, can easily mask a new form of control.

Fluid pedagogy, then, is not a concession to instability but a model of resilience. It teaches us that peace cannot be secured through fixed curricula or eternal truths, but through the courage to keep reinterpreting what peace might mean today, here, and with these people. Ultimately, the Turkish experience reflects a broader insight for peace education globally: peace is not a universal endpoint but a moving relation between power, voice, and vulnerability. As long as the meanings of peace remain fluid, so too must the pedagogies and methodologies that seek to engage it. To stay still in such a motion would be to lose the very essence of peace itself, its capacity to evolve, to unsettle, and to call us back, again and again, to the unfinished task of learning how to live together.

Discussion: reimagining peace education

This article has argued that peace education cannot be approached as a universal template or a fixed moral framework. Rather than simply restating the need for contextualization, a critique long established in the field, this work advances an additional claim: that contexts are fluid, constantly reshaped by the discourses that authorize or restrict their expression. Across politically volatile settings, the meaning of peace is rarely stable; it drifts with shifting political tides, moving between promise and peril, aspiration and appropriation. When the state alters what can be spoken, it also alters who may speak, revealing that peace and positionality are co-constituted through the language of power.

What emerges, then, is not a call to fix peace education within a national frame but to recognize its perpetual reconfiguration. Programs designed for one moment may become obsolete or complicit the next, as the moral grammar of peace itself transforms. To teach or research peace in such conditions demands not mere contextual awareness but epistemic agility, understood

here as the capacity to revise one's interpretive stance as political vocabularies, risks, and permissions change: the ability to move, translate, and re-evaluate one's position as the world redefines its language.

Reimagining peace education thus requires a reflexive pedagogy of presence, one that listens before it teaches and responds before it codifies. Following Freire (1970), this pedagogy begins with naming the world, even when that naming trembles under censorship or co-optation. In these moments, dialogue ceases to be a pedagogical method alone; it becomes an act of democratic defiance, a refusal to let speech be monopolized by authority. Arendt (1958) reminds us that to speak and appear before others is the foundation of the public world; in repressive contexts, sustaining dialogue itself becomes a form of political participation.

Peace education, then, must be understood not as a stable curriculum but as a living praxis; one that evolves through fragility, uncertainty, and continual redefinition. To teach peace amid shifting discourses is to inhabit the tension between fear and expression, to read the political climate as part of the lesson itself. Teachers and researchers alike become interpreters of atmosphere, tracing how each change in rhetoric or regulation reconfigures what peace can mean at a given moment. Their practice becomes an art of discernment; knowing when to speak, when to pause, and when to remake the language entirely.

Critical and decolonial peace education frameworks (Bajaj, 2019; Smith, 2012; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2018) have long argued that authentic dialogue requires confronting the hierarchies that determine whose voices are heard. This article extends that insight by showing that these hierarchies themselves are not fixed; they mutate with political transitions, moral panics, and state narratives. Reflexivity, therefore, cannot be treated as a singular moment of awareness but as a continuous recalibration of one's ethical, epistemological, and positional commitments. In the Turkish case, for example, when *barış* shifts from forbidden word to government slogan, the reflexive educator must reconsider not only ethics but epistemology: what counts as peace, whose meanings prevail, and what risks are concealed in compliance.

Such recognition invites a broader literacy; a dialogic and reflexive literacy capable of perceiving movement, contradiction, and change. Dialogue, in this sense, is not a polite exchange but an ethical posture: an openness to uncertainty and a willingness to let others unsettle one's understanding. Reflexivity, likewise, is not self-examination alone but an act of world-orientation; a continuous tracing of how power and language mold our capacity to know, feel, and act.

These insights carry implications for peace education research and practice. For researchers, they call for methodologies attentive to shifting discursive conditions and to the instability of positionality over time. For educators, they suggest an approach to curriculum not as a fixed sequence of content but as an adaptive, relational practice responsive to changing political climates. For both, they foreground ethics not as procedural compliance but as situated judgment exercised under conditions of uncertainty.

Ultimately, to teach or research peace in turbulent times is to dwell within motion. It is to accept that both peace and the self who names it are never settled, but always becoming. The educator's

task is not to stabilize meaning but to accompany its unfolding, to work in the cracks where words tremble, where speech returns after silence, and where the old vocabularies of peace no longer suffice. In this movement lies the most enduring lesson: peace is not a noun to be defined, but a relation to be lived; one that emerges within fluid contexts, through shifting positionalities, and in continual translation.

Conclusion

This article has argued that peace is not a stable moral endpoint but a contested and often state-regulated discursive terrain, whose meaning shifts across political moments and that the positionalities of those who teach or research peace shift alongside it. Drawing on critical and decolonial peace education scholarship and the Turkish case, the analysis demonstrates how peace can move from hope, to accusation, to official slogan, revealing how it is continually re-authorized, censored, or appropriated by power. The article's central conceptual contribution, fluid context, offers a theoretical lens for understanding settings in which what can be spoken "in the name of peace," and who may speak it with legitimacy, changes rapidly, rendering "the local" a moving and politically redefined terrain rather than a stable foundation for peace education.

The implications are straightforward but demanding. Contextualization cannot be treated as a one-time adjustment but must be understood as an ongoing interpretive practice. Peace education therefore needs to move away from transferable templates toward a context-responsive praxis. For researchers and educators, this requires methodologies capable of tracing discursive shifts over time and an evolution of reflexivity into "discursive awareness," an attunement to how one's work is reinterpreted through shifting state narratives. In fluid contexts, the integrity of peace education depends less on defining "peace" correctly than on resisting its domestication: keeping open plural meanings, sustaining spaces for dissent, and protecting local voices from both external universalism and internal appropriation.

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