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Addressing violence in education: From policy to practice

Conrad Hughes[1]

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Abstract This article explores the relationship between violence and education. It does this by referring to some of the literature in critical pedagogy that investigates how the structure and outcome of education as a social force can be violent in a number of ways. Having discussed how schools are violent in modes that are symbolic, structural, and physical, the article concludes with some of the pathways that twenty-first-century education could be taking to ensure that schools help build the foundation for as peaceful and as inclusive a world as possible.

Keywords Violence · Education · Symbolic violence · Structural violence · Ideology · Ranking · Citizenship · Pedagogy

Although the post-Enlightenment model of education that has become the norm in most countries across the globe today is based on peaceful, humanitarian values, most educational structures historically have been violent. Plutarch tells of how Spartans would teach boys military prowess, how to survive at all costs; corporal punishment is recommended in the Old Testament (Proverbs 13:24) and was and still is widely practiced in some countries: children would be and still are caned, jacked, whipped, and slapped (UNICEF 2018). Worryingly, statistics suggest that most modern corporal punishment takes place at home, inflicted by parents on their own children.

To what extent have we escaped the ghosts of the past? How far away are schools in their current expression from the violence-related barracks that they have been for much of human history? I will argue that while the crudest forms of school-based violence are increasingly obsolete or at least not admitted openly, B. F. Skinner's (1938) theory of

✉ Conrad Hughes
conrad.hughes@ecolint.ch

[1] International School of Geneva, La Grande Boissière, 62, Route de Chêne, 1208 Geneva, Switzerland

operant conditioning (i.e., learning is provoked by crude conditioning stimuli hinging on reward and threat – therefore, a certain form of violence) is still a dominant paradigm in learning systems. I also make the point that there is much in the very design of schooling that is violent in some way.

I argue throughout this article that it is by looking at schools critically rather than assumptively that we can get closer to learning the most effective ways that they can serve the purpose of preventing rather than exacerbating violence.

I should make it clear that this article looks at worst-case scenarios and does not argue that all schools are violent per se. Thankfully, many institutions are explicitly adverse to any form of violence and operate in a manner that is a far cry from the culture of those discussed here. However, at the same time, I would argue that no school is completely free of some of the subtle forms of violence that permeate ideology, structuring, and social implications. We would do well to look at our systems with self-doubt and criticism to get to the core of the matter.

Education as a force for good

The idea that education is a force for good is premised on the idea that education has the capacity to reduce violence. This is more than an assumption; at the conclusion of this article, I will come back to studies that have validated this theory. Education is massively and quite understandably presented in mainstream discourses as something that is overwhelmingly positive and will lead to a more peaceful and productive world. One hardly needs to cite sources to substantiate this: that schooling is good for society, that literacy and numeracy are needed for professional and social integration, that an educated person is empowered and thus disenfranchised groups need to access education, that education for all and quality education for all are desirable, that the humanities and sciences serve the advancement of society, and that formal learning is essential for individual and group well-being — are these all widely endorsed postulates. Politicians, philosophers, celebrities, and public intellectuals constantly remind us of how important education is. Few would take issue with this or try to make a claim that education is a negative enterprise. After all, who would want to fight in that corner, and why?

My argument is that before we launch into all of the positive assumptions about education, we should problematize it so that we are quite clear about the limitations and possibly adverse effects of its structure and sociological implications. It is also helpful to look at education from the perspective of those who feel alienated by its design, for these are the individuals who will quite possibly stray from the model that education is hoping to establish, turning instead to antisocial or potentially violent pathways. By thinking about education from this angle, we might reflect not only on how it can prevent violence but also on how, indeed, it might actually cause violence.

The field of critical pedagogy can help us do this, as can a series of observations about the way schools work and what school might mean for a variety of learners, particularly those who struggle to find intellectual and social integration in schools.

Education as violence

Let us explore this somewhat counter-intuitive notion to show how the structure of education, and of course its various iteration and contexts, all *create* systems that are violent or could lead to some form of violence by the people involved or implied in it. Following the work of Galtung (1969), who, in his research on peace and conflict studies, has designed a typology of conflict, I shall outline the symbolic, structural, and physical violence implied by schools.

Symbolic violence

There are, of course, radical positions on formal education that have pointed out its limitations and, worse, its symbolic violence. By "symbolic violence", I am thinking of Bourdieu (1988), who uses this term to mean the type of ideological domination that is thrust on the curriculum (I turn to this later in this article), and Gerbner (2002), who points out that demonstrations of power and social control, emblematic in traditional educational systems, are symbolically violent. In Illich's iconoclastic publication *Deschooling Society* — in which he advocated, somewhat prophetically, for peer-to-peer learning through computer networks as an alternative to schools — he claimed that "obligatory schooling inevitably polarizes a society; it also grades the nations of the world according to an international caste system" (Illich 1970, p. 9). One of the key reasons for this symbolic violence, according to Illich, is that "neither learning nor justice is promoted by schooling because educators insist on packaging instruction with certification" (p. 11).

In other words, schooling tends to be symbolically violent by the very nature of its hierarchical grading system and exclusivist effect on society. It divides the world's population into those who are formally educated and those who are not: those who become "certified" —and therefore legitimized — and those who do not. Although the Enlightenment thrust to world literacy is well on its way, with an estimated 86.3% of the world's population of 15 years and older considered literate (Roser, Nagdy, and Ritchie 2018), high literacy rates tend to be concentrated in wealthy countries and among men. The lowest literacy rates in the world are across parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; whereas, those regions that boast the highest literacy rates, as well as the highest PISA rankings, are wealthy European and East Asian states (FactsMaps 2018). Furthermore, more men are considered literate than women across the globe; something that is symptomatic, again, of hierarchical, symbolic violence whereby some have access to education and others are deprived of it.

Ranking

Indeed, almost every school on the planet ranks human beings. In some learning environments this only happens at the end of secondary school, when students face terminal examinations, but in others – no doubt a large majority of schools – students are graded and ranked from an early stage. This is a violent process in that it objectifies human beings and creates an aggressive competitiveness between them, sending out messages about comparative human value. For the individual student who struggles with academia, school ranking is the heavy judgment, the fear of tests, the humiliation of failure, and the

dark loneliness of not understanding that hang over his or her head at all times, creating a world of doubt and fear.

Ranking is part of a worldview at the origins of modern quantitative, positivist approaches to education. It dates back to the work on normal distribution championed by Galton (1892), who had this to say about human beings:

> I have no patience with the hypothesis occasionally expressed, and often implied, especially in tales written to teach children to be good, that babies are born pretty much alike, arid that the sole agencies in creating differences between boy and boy, and man and man, are steady application and moral effort. It is in the most unqualified manner that I object to pretensions of natural equality. (p. 14)

Defenders of ranking will use "just world" fallacious reasoning: in the "real world" of adult social organization, individuals are differentiated by salary, title, and station. However, one can debunk this by arguing that this so-called real world is, in reality, a violent system of social organization that is the product of human desire and culture and nothing "natural". The way we organize ourselves need not take such a sharp morphology as the exclusivist one Galton embraced. Things could well be otherwise.

That schools, and educational design in general, need to move away from grading to more authentic and socially harmonious ways of celebrating learning is an increasingly appreciated postulate (see the work of Kohn [2011] and Wiliam [2011], for example). Indeed, some systems will claim that by substituting numbers with coded phrases ("descriptors") — using criterion-related rather than bell-curve distribution assessments — or by representing performance through graphs rather than tables, the symbolically violent narrative of competition is lessened. However, these efforts are mainly acts of substitution that do not go any real distance, least of all in the face of the increasing pressure on learners to gain entry to tertiary institutions that boast near-impossible entry requirements.

Illich (1970) is also making the point that entire institutions and even countries are ranked according to educational statistics. This is very much the case with the twenty-first-century phenomenon of OECD ranking by PISA scores, and university rankings that in some countries determine subsidies. What we arrive at is a type of first world/ third world scenario where the education system of such-and-such a system, typically in Africa or Latin America, is seen as ineffective; whereas, another system, invariably somewhere in Northern Europe or East Asia, will be seen as highly effective. To make sweeping judgments about entire systems, districts, and even countries based on these mean scores is aggressively judgmental and even attitudinally colonial to the point of symbolical violence. We forget, perhaps, that schools, universities, districts, and countries with low scores might well be operating in a value system that is entirely different from the positivistic globalized one that dominates so much attention nowadays.

The offshoot of this neo-colonial concentration of power can be felt in the staffing of a number of institutions, especially international schools that tend to be dominated by North American and British teachers, advantaged by not only their language but also the country of their certification. Qualifications from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and South America, therefore, seem somehow inferior in comparison to those from Britain, Western Europe, Australia, Canada, and many US states. This is tremendously insulting, patronizing, and violent in many ways that I need not elaborate upon here. Schools would do well to follow the staffing policies of international organizations such as the United Nations to ensure that there is as much healthy diversity as possible in their teaching and leadership teams.

Indoctrination

Another form of symbolic violence in schooling can be situated in the choice of curriculum design. We should not be so naïve as to view curriculum as detached from the ideological, social, and economic forces of the time and place in which they operate. We might like to think that good curriculum choices are based on theories of learning alone, but this is wishful thinking; theories of learning themselves are steeped in cultural belief. Philosophies of education are reflections of wider social purposes. As such, Rousseau's (1762) deontological model of an idealized, naturalist individual learner reflected the growing revolutionary sentiments of the eighteenth century; Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism was an echo of Soviet collectivism; and Dewey's (1916) democratized classroom, a microcosm of a wider US liberal political philosophy. No model of cognition stands outside of history, pressure, culture, and economics.

We hope that young people are being brought to reflect on the world around them with criticality, intellectual freedom, and a sense of volition and personal meaning–making. However, the history topics selected by instructors or examination boards, the works of literature deemed "essential study", and even the approach in seemingly objective fields outside the ambit of such social values as science and maths — all determine an *ideology*.

This is well expressed in postcolonial literature, where voices have made it clear that they felt alienated by the cultural message that was being thrust on them, as it described a world in which they could find no place:

> What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook about Milton's *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained* … or Wordsworth's poetry about England, or a Telegu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's *Meghasandesham*, Bommera Potanna's *Bhagvatam*, or Nannaya and Tikkana's *Mahabharatham* except the fact that one textbook is written with 26 letters and the other in 56 letters? We do not share the contents of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. (Ilaiah 1996, p. 15).

We need to look at the postcolonial paradigm not only for the story it is telling about the violence of colonial education on its subjects — a theme picked up by analysts such as Freire, Zinn, Ngugi, and Giroux — but also because of the overarching Marxist idea that a type of *ideology* is being promulgated through curriculum choices. The enterprise of education is normalizing and legitimizing certain belief systems, behaviours, and approaches to knowledge. In most systems, we could argue, as does Bourdieu (1988), that what is being pushed through the curriculum is a middle-class culture of compliance, economic productivity, readiness for the established work place, and certain types of taste.

Apple (2015) points this out clearly:

> The objectives in education are the same as those which guide its economic and social welfare goals. They include the dramatic expansion of that eloquent fiction, the free market; the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside the school; the lowering of people's expectations for economic security; the "disciplining" of culture and the body; and the popularization of what is clearly a form of Social Darwinist thinking. (p. 4)

At first, this might seem like exaggeration; but if one considers carefully the predominance of mathematics and science in school systems, the emphasis on workplace skills such as

collaboration and creativity, the recent obsession with new technology and role models from the GAFA group (Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon), one starts to see the picture more clearly. Equally important is what is being left out of the curriculum: how many schools study the wars in the Congo, contemporary conflicts in the Middle East, literatures from Africa and Australasia, the plight of the Yanomami and Aboriginal peoples? How much time is spent in the history curriculum teaching wars as opposed to teaching opposition to wars? How many students investigate with detail the horrors of colonization and the slave trade or those that rebelled against these power structures, figures such as Nat Turner, Thomas Sankara, Baghat Singh, and Patrice Lumumba?

These strata of ideology — tacitly embedded messages in educational design, discourse, and syllabus choice — are symbolically violent in that they are part of a neoliberal *Weltanschauung* that excludes other possibilities for social renewal and change such as those found in indigenous knowledge systems. Indeed, for Apple (2015), the Western thrust and monochromatic picture of the world that is painted in most educational discourses actually "[destroy] the cultural and linguistic traditions of an increasingly diverse population in many nations" (p. 900). The simple fact that English is the medium of instruction in most state and private schools and in practically all international schools is an act of violence against linguistic diversity.

Structural violence

Docility

The traditional layout of schools is based on the architectural map of the prisons, something Foucault showed in his seminal *Discipline and Punish*. Like prisons and hospitals, schools serve the function of herding and controlling large numbers of people. The principle of Bentham's "panopticon", whereby the gaze of power — always in the hands of a few — has a central position, is played out in the design of most schools: where there are corridors, central quadrangles, playing fields, aisles, and other vistas allowing for effective monitoring (Foucault 1975).

This is exacerbated in the classroom where, typically, the teacher is standing and students are sitting, often in rows facing the teacher. Such controlling protocols as registration, absence management, and, of course, the array of punitive measures schools enact (suspension, detainment, expulsion) all follow the morphology of traditional power structures.

Ultimately, this structural coercion leads to docility: students are taught to queue, to wait, to enter and exit, to stand up and sit down when told to, to hold their hands up, to be quiet, to copy down notes, to work hard, and so on. (In fact, the word "docile" comes from the Latin *docere*, meaning to teach. In Dutch, the word for a student is still "docent".) If a student stands up and shouts out that this is an abhorrent class or choses to walk out of a class, in most schools, even forward-looking institutions, the consequences will be dire. This is not only to do with discipline in bringing up children and what one might argue are practical and necessary steps. It is also common in universities and colleges: even young adults are conditioned into a passive acceptance of power through the very structure of schooling.

Discourses about students

Then we have the type of discourse that schools encourage by virtue of their function and systems: we hear talk of "good" and "bad" students; complaints about students "not concentrating", "disturbing others", "not being focussed", "being disruptive", "being disrespectful", and so on. Razer and Friedman's (2017) *From Exclusion to Excellence* looks at just how violent this discourse can become; it does this by quoting real-life utterances from teachers that are indicative of patterns of exclusion and abandonment. Consider this extract from grade 5 teachers:

> He was out of school for two weeks, and I felt that the class functioned for the first time. On Monday, when he returned, I said to him, "You were absent for two weeks, and the class functioned for the first time. What do you have to say about that? What do you think about the fact that, when you're not here, everyone is able to learn? (p. 32)

In this real life case, the authors go on to transcribe what fellow teachers say when hearing this story: "Good job!" "Right, you can't let him ruin your lessons like that!" "We can't let one student ruin the lesson for everyone" (p. 33).

We see in the above-mentioned examples how the student in question (about ten or eleven years old) is vilified, ostracized, and labelled, and how teachers support one another in closing in on him. The accusation that a child is stopping other children from learning is a hyperbolic and violent one: what we mean is that the child likes to chat or fool around in class. The accusation of stopping another person's right to learn is heinous, especially when it comes from the grave and legally mature aura of the adult and is driven down on the fragile, unfinished fumbling of youth.

The lexical field used to describe students' academic performance in official transcripts such as reports tends to describe behaviours from a utilitarian, pragmatic, and ultimately productivity-oriented perspective. Students' "effort" is praised; their work might be described as "poor" or "mediocre". When symbols, letters, or numbers are used, the parametrization of human experience is even more aggressively hierarchical and, in this sense, violent. We speak of "straight-A students" and "failing students".

Pertinently, and true to Foucault's (1975) analysis of power that disguises itself in institutionalized language, the subject-object dynamics of the teacher-student relationship are lost in the syntax of utterances about student achievement. A student is described as "good" or, of course, "not good" at mathematics, as if the relationship is between the student and the subject — when, in fact, the relationship is between the teacher and the student around the *construct* of mathematics. A phrase like "she's an excellent student of literature" should be properly translated as: "in the class that I teach, according to my metrics and my numerous biases, I think she is excellent at literature". The empowered teacher is hidden and protected in the phrase "she's an excellent student of literature" — invisible as author of the phrase, the omniscient narrator who dictates the object but without having to identify herself or himself as the subject of the phrase.

Finally, there are the clumsy phrases that poorly trained or emotionally insensitive administrators use to express themselves to students. The list of systematically violent phrases can be quite long — statements along the lines of "you disappointed me", "that was the wrong thing to do", "you don't understand", "you're not listening to me", and so on. This becomes a form of emotional violence, damaging students' self-esteem and confidence. We should not forget that it is not necessarily the content of what is said that is

violent per se but, more especially, the fact that it is being said by an adult to a child and in a context where there is a severe imbalance of power (in addition to that of their age difference). Students typically look to teachers, understandably, as figures of authority and therefore can suffer considerable psychological damage when the gaze cast down on them is disapproving and negatively judgmental: it can be perceived as a judgment of the whole person, a sweeping admonishment of character and integrity.

Further, let us not forget that the student struggling in school has to face not only the violent judgment of the institution ("You are failing"), and oftentimes the violent language of the teacher that compounds this, but a third level of violence: from parents who may be disappointed after reading the latest report and may invariably take their feelings out on the child in some tactic of pressure. This can range from subtle psychological acts of blackmail ("If you do well on your next report, I'll do X and Y"), to threats ("If you don't do well on your next report, I'll do X and Y"), to less sophisticated strategies of punishment — shouting and even physical violence.

It is important to stand back to view the extreme structural violence implicated in the teacher-student relationship, which follows a Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Here, the teacher holds a particularly potent lease of power. In his or her hand is a double whip: of academic gatekeeping, as the ultimate decider of whether a student can progress to the next year level; and of behaviour regulation, as the judge of whether a student's comportment is socially acceptable.

The power of the teacher is further compounded by the long-term might of the pen: the teacher not only passes or fails a student but also shapes the student's final transcript, thus potentially impacting tertiary education opportunities and, by extension, professional opportunities later in life. If a teacher decides she or he does not like a student and chooses to express that through punitive marking, especially in subjects (such as the arts and humanities) where a substantial margin exists for interpretation, the student has few rights and little recourse to any kind of justice. In these situations, the student is helpless in the hands of the instructor. It's important to note that university guidance counsellors or those writing recommendations for students have significant power, as well.

This is why protocols to make assessment fair, such as externally assessed components (this should be done blind) and moderation of teacher marking, are important. They protect the student from abuses of power.

Physical violence

Bullying and social exclusion

Let us not forget just how violent schools can be due to bullying. A meta-analysis by Modecki et al. (2014) claimed that, at the time of the study, there was a 35% prevalence for traditional bullying and 15% for cyberbullying among 12- to 18-year-olds in the US. For many students, school is a place where a tormentor or group of tormentors lurk, happy to harass and persecute the victim from day to day.

Students can be damaged emotionally and psychologically not just by bullying but also by subtle social acts of exclusion by other students. (As a note: teachers are also frequently the victims of student-led violence. A 2009 Institute of Education Sciences School Principal Survey on Crime and Safety showed that approximately 17% of principals had witnessed or experienced verbal abuse by students [Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum 2009];

the Department for Education in the UK reported 17,520 exclusions for physical assault against an adult in the year 2011–2012 [HSE 2018].) For most adolescents, the important pull factor in schools is peer relationships, so when students are excluded by a group, they can experience pain and isolation. Students can be humiliated by others in front of their peers for a range of reasons, from their physical appearance to the clothes they wear. Indeed, group ostracism is one of the most serious areas of violence and can lead to the worst imaginable scenarios, including suicide.

Sexual harassment

One would like to think that educational institutions are places where behaviour is refined by the spiritual and intellectual culture that a place of learning has developed, but, unfortunately, it would appear that, frequently, this is hardly the case. The UK teacher's union revealed that over 1,200 female teachers

> had been sexually harassed at school by a colleague, manager, parent or pupil …. Nearly a third (30%) of those who have been sexually harassed have been subjected to unwanted touching, while two-thirds (67%) have experienced inappropriate comments about their appearance or body. (Bates 2018)

A study by the Women and Equalities Committee of the UK Parliament reported in 2016 that "29% of 16–18-year-old girls had experienced unwanted sexual touching at school" (WEC 2016).

Sexually transmitted grades

A particularly violent set of behaviours that expresses not only sexual harassment but also the power imbalance built into schools is the phenomenon of "sexually transmitted grades". This phenomenon, which essentially consist of teachers' demanding sexual favours in exchange for grades, is particularly acute in Africa, as studies by the Integrated Regional Information Networks show:

> Research in Uganda found that eight per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds had had sex with their teachers. In South Africa, at least one-third of all child rapes are by school staff. In a survey of ten villages in Benin, 34 per cent of children confirmed sexual violence in their schools. (IRIN News 2008)

This type of extreme physical violence, although in a different, less pronounced form, is rife in universities. The power relationship between professor/lecturer and student is clearly played out in a sexual manner. A study on UK universities reports:

> Sexual harassment of students by staff members has reached epidemic levels in British universities. Most universities have no effective mechanism to stop staff from pressuring students into sexual relationships, and when it happens, any sort of disciplinary action is pretty much nonexistent. (Batty, Weale, & Bannock 2017)

This discussion on power and violence in universities could be taken much further, for the power imbalance there, particularly at the level of higher degrees, is highly problematic, to say the least. Professors are gatekeepers and, to students, represent significant levels

of power. There exists little to protect students from abuses of power, especially when it comes to doctoral supervision, which is essentially a 1:1 scenario. In cases of disagreement, the word of a powerless student is set against that of a professor — and that is set against the psychological and professional powers that a professor necessarily has over a student trying to gain a higher degree. Unfortunately, universities are places where real abuse can take place, and often does, either directed at assistant staff (Shaw 2014) or at students (Amienne 2017).

Ways forward

My purpose in this article is not to simply paint a morose picture of schools. I hope to make it clear that good school leaders and teachers can make a difference to students. Such teachers are open-minded and self-critical enough to imagine what school is like for students who struggle in the academic or social contexts, to empathize with them, and not to be part of the violence — that is, not to abandon or exclude students. We have to assume good intentions from administrators and instructors but should not close our eyes to potential abuse in educational institutions, for abuse there is (see, for example, Waite and Allen 2003).

Violent extremism is an increasingly serious problem in our world. According to *Our World in Data* (Roser, Nagdy, and Ritchie 2018), from 1980 to 2014, the number of deaths worldwide caused by terrorist attacks increased tenfold — from 4,400 to 44,490. UNESCO (2017) shows how, "from 2001 to 2017, the United States government alone…spent approximately US$1.78 trillion to fight terrorism. The European Union's spending is estimated to have increased from €5.7 million in 2002 to €93.5 million in 2009" (p. 10).

In recent years, there has been a focus on how education can prevent violent extremism (Davies 2018; Hughes 2018; UNESCO 2017; UNESCO 2018). The United Nations and its agencies, such as UNESCO, have presented a number of pathways that can lead to less violent extremism in society through educational strategies.

Researchers have not done a great deal of study on this specific aspect of educational violence, but they have conducted research to establish what sort of educational practices might lead to less violent extremism by learners. For example, UNESCO commissioned 32 case studies (UNESCO 2018) to suggest good practices. The study reported that "relevant education of quality can help to create conditions that make it difficult for violent extremist ideas to proliferate by addressing the causes of violent extremism and fostering resilient learners able to find constructive and non-violent solutions to life challenges" (p. 8). The central practices that the study identify are experiential learning, role play, and peer-to-peer learning (p. 4). Indeed, these constructivist methodologies ensure that learning becomes a discussion between learners; such practice is highly conducive to finding workable, peaceful solutions to problems. Studies by Hughes (2017, 2018) and UNESCO (2017) suggest other considerations, discussed below.

Postcolonial thought

Scholars posit the idea of considering schools from the perspective of postcolonial thought, for "the work of the postcolonial imagination subverts extant power relations, questions authority, and destabilizes received traditions of identity" (Dimitriadis and McCarthy 2001, p. 10). A central step in this direction is to embrace the study of history, geography,

and nation-building with that view that diversity is a strength, and that alternative points of view are necessary to construct a balanced account of these subjects.

In the chapter "Educating Beyond the Other" of my study on *Understanding Prejudice and Education* (Hughes 2017), I discuss how the study of literature and history can lessen both prejudice and the violent imperialist narratives of the past, which have been traditionally celebrated in the classroom. By studying the histories of the oppressed and marginalized as well as those of the oppressors, the study of the past becomes a more dynamic, inclusive enterprise. As an example of this, the courses at Muhammadiyah Islamic schools in Indonesia are "pluralistic [and] include subjects such as world religions, where all religions are studied [leading to] more candid and open discussions" (Ranstorp 2009, p. 6). Part of this educational design is to consider questions of gender and to ensure that "in the school context, women, notably young women, are given the opportunity to make their voices heard on the school climate" (UNESCO 2017, p. 43). This is because women are the primary victims of violence in the world, particularly extremist violence.

The postcolonial approach is to consider education as a narrative that can always be looked at otherwise, can always be subverted and told from the perspective of someone else. This frees educational design from the monolith that makes it aggressive to those who cannot see themselves reflected in its initial premise. John Berger's quotation, which Arundhati Roy uses as an epigraph to her seminal work *The God of Small Things,* puts it well: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one".

Pedagogies of inclusive dialogue

Pedagogies of inclusion place an emphasis on respect, the importance of the language we use in schools, and how to create inclusive classroom cultures and relationships. Strategies include those elaborated in the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero approach (Harvard Graduate School of Education 2018) and Matthew Lippman's Philosophy for Children (Lippman 1991). These discussion-based models allow for some of the tensions and anxieties — which fester in a teacher-driven, nondialogic environment — to be laid out in the open and discussed. Rokeach (1971) showed that open discussion about sensitive issues could lead learners to a less extremist view of society, even many years later. An example of the type of inclusive-language approach that instructors should consider comes from Ritchhart (2016):

> Establishing a culture of thinking is about building a community of learners. Using the collective pronouns we, our, and us sends a message about community and clearly situates us as teachers as a part of the group. In contrast, using primarily the pronouns of I and you, can create more distance and emphasize power and control.

The Philosophy for Children approach is particularly powerful, as it gives full agency to learners, putting them in the position not only of discussants but also of mediators and observers, teaching them to build up a vocabulary of critical inquiry as well as techniques to ensure that discussions are productive and made up of respectful, active listening. Other examples of inclusive dialogue for less violence include Essentials of Dialogue by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, and the Unity Jam initiative by ConnectJustice, UK. When discussing extremist violence, in particular, studies suggest that dialogue should include a broad palette of community participants, including ex-extremists, members of religious communities, and youth. By extending educational dialogue beyond the classroom into the community at large, one makes connections and discussions become more concrete and relevant.

Digital citizenship education

So much communicative activity takes place on the web and so much violence-inducing narrative is articulated on the web that it is essential to equip learners and instructors with the ability to navigate the web critically and carefully. UNESCO has established three essential pathways for the type of digital citizenship that can reduce the lure of extremist violence:

- Digital literacy: Cognitive, creative and critical abilities to create and engage with content;
- Digital resilience: Ability to manage online risks;
- Digital rights and responsibilities: Ability to recognize one's right to equitable access to ICT and right to privacy, while upholding responsibility to respect the rights of others. (UNESCO 2016)

Education for a more peaceful world

These methods can help to prevent violence in individuals and groups but they are only part of a larger picture:

> Education cannot prevent an individual from committing a violent act in the name of a violent extremist ideology but the provision of relevant education of good quality can help create the conditions that make it difficult for violent extremist ideologies and acts to proliferate. More specifically, education policies can ensure that places of learning do not become a breeding ground for violent extremism. (UNESCO 2017, p. 22)

We should resist the temptation to look at violence as something that develops in individuals without some external aggravating factor, trigger, or force. To assume that schools can somehow remedy individuals without asking, first, whether schools themselves, as they operate currently, are not partly responsible for creating violent mindsets in individuals is to miss an opportunity for in-depth critical introspection. And if we are to turn to the larger question of education, which goes beyond schooling, we quickly see how important the community, peers, elders, and parents are in shaping young people's values, especially since a lot of violence against young people and women takes place in households. Violence does not appear out of thin air, and its sources must be tackled within a social context.

If we assume that education is wholly and generally positive without problematizing this discourse or reflecting critically on the many ways that education can be an unpleasant experience, we will fail to gain a richer self-awareness of the scope and limitation of educational action. Importantly, deconstructing and questioning the idea of education's being a de facto universally beneficial enterprise allows us to empathize with those who do not feel at home within the walls of a school — the rebels and subversives, the "naughty children", the "high school dropouts".

It is important to understand what school represents to these individuals so that we, as educators, can nuance our language, behaviours, and norms and make them more inclusive, more welcoming, and more imaginative. This will help free us from the potential tyranny embedded in most schools, unconsciously driving the violence that turns some learners away from school, and from learning in general — possibly for life. If we want these individuals to stay in school and to get out of school everything on offer, then we must see and understand what is violent about schools, thus holding a mirror up to ourselves, even if what it shows is not what we would like to see.

Let our schools, our universities, and the educational fabric that we weave around learners in so many different ways be made up of inclusion, diversity, careful listening, discussion, appreciation, positivity, self-awareness, and criticality.

May the assessment systems that we build in this century move away from normative distribution and ranking to more evolved, celebratory, and communal systems that show what each person and group can do, rather than how well they perform against each other. May teachers, professors, and administrators, with the tremendous power they have, use their positions of responsibility with due diligence and solid moral conscience, never abusing that power or turning the noble mission of education into an act of exploitation.

And may the messages that we send out in the way we interact with learners and each other, the manner in which we disseminate knowledge and build competences, and the way we fashion approaches to the past and to culture celebrate human dignity and the beauty of peace rather than the doctrine of war, conquest, and imperialism. Let us tell the right story.

Overview of the special edition

This special edition of *Prospects* is dedicated to the relationship between violence and education. This is a theme of fundamental importance for two core reasons:

First: The overarching goal of education is to impact individual, collective, and public good (Marope, Griffin, and Gallagher 2018). Understanding how education can contribute to reducing violence is therefore an important pathway to this goal.

Second: Our world, in many regards, is becoming increasingly violent. This might not always be physical violence —ideological violence, too, rears its ugly head in the form of increased xenophobia and hate speech. The rise of extremist views across Europe and the United States, for example, testifies to this.

The authors of this special edition explore elements and precursors of violence, as well as the relationship between education and violence — in theoretical, ideological, methodological, and personal ways. Through the various articles, we understand the depth and complexity of this relationship and how responses need to be nuanced, bold, and informed by research.

Viewpoints

A. C. Grayling reminds us that educating against violence must be based on two premises: that violence most often stems from emotions rather than careful, logical reflection; and that personal relationships can undo much of the closed-mindedness that can lead to violence. He goes on to advocate for the humanities, that age-old tenet of a good education, to explain how this subject matter can be used to teach learners to think for themselves and to reflect on others and the world around them in a subtle, compassionate, and understanding manner. If the great works that make up the humanities are learned with depth and reflexivity, we will be taking the right steps toward reducing violence.

Ali Abu Awwad tells a powerful personal story to take us to the core of nonviolence. The tale he tells, which comes from Palestine and Israel, recounts his transformative experience that follows a pathway from escaping victimhood, to understanding nonviolence, to eventually practicing nonviolence. For Awwad, nonviolence involves respect for human dignity and the courage to engage extremes in transformative dialogue. He urges us not to shirk from difficult discussions. Nonviolence, he says, is not just a strategy; it is

an identity, a way of life. His personal testimony brings out this message with clarity and immediacy and demonstrates what it means to live out nonviolence in an environment of conflict.

Open File Articles

The special edition contains four timely and salient contributions to educational research and theory.

Doyle Stevick argues, compellingly and with much conviction, that racism should not be seen merely as a psychosocial construct but as a political tactic that can be used and exacerbated for ideological gain by political leaders. Stevick reminds us of some of the lessons that humanity learnt from the Holocaust and draws some alarming parallels with the contemporary sociopolitical situation in the US. Racism needs to be problematized carefully for us to derive meaningful understandings of how it can be used to drive certain thoughts and beliefs.

Laura Ligouri outlines what the research in neuropsychology tells us about extremist thinking. In a brilliant exposé, she points out that "there has been an overemphasis on human rights concepts by human rights defenders and a lack of consideration of the important process and biases that drive anti-social behaviour". Her point is that a more scientific analysis is needed if we are to grapple with violent attitudes thoroughly. Ligouri, by exploring the neuropsychological architecture of such constructs as in-group favouring, out grouping, cruelty, and schadenfreude, promulgates a unified theory of Western extremism (UTWE) as a conceptual model toward understanding extremism in the Western world, with particular reference to the United States. UTWE is something that can be used powerfully in educational models for a better understanding of the roots of violent thoughts and behaviour.

Natalie Fletcher provides us with a vision for educational practice that tackles stereotypes through Philosophy for Children (P4C). P4C is an educational philosophy and pedagogic method that involves learners discussing important issues in a structured, chaired manner. P4C can undo the epistemic rigidity of stereotypical beliefs, particularly if chaired adroitly so that thinking is "curated" and there is bold, skilful intervention into high-stakes moments (where discussants demonstrate stereotypical thinking). In order to tackle stereotypes, which are often at the core of much violent attitudes and behaviour, Fletcher evokes careful educational strategies that place collaborative philosophical inquiry at the centre.

Finally, **Felisa Tibbitts** gives us a strong theoretical underpinning of universal values. She points out that, historically, there have been two approaches to universal values: the universalist school, which sees them as transcendent across cultures and contexts (in a Kantian sense); and the particularistic school, which views values as contingent on culture and local parameters. She advocates for a hybrid approach that marries the supra-cultural ethical model that still responds to the pressures of specific, local context. Such a hybrid approach can be well expressed in the comprehensive model of human rights education, which Tibbitts suggests as a response to violence.

Hence, this special edition of *Prospects*, centered on violence and education, and, more specifically, on preventing violent extremism through education, provides us with valuable insights and lessons for a better world.

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Conrad Hughes (South Africa) is campus and secondary principal and teaches philosophy at the International School of Geneva, La Grande Boissiere, Switzerland. He holds a PhD (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa) and an EdD (University of Durham, UK). He is a member of the Educational Advisory Board for the University of the People (Pasadena, US) and a UNESCO IBE Senior Fellow. His research interests include twenty-first-century education, critical thinking, international education, and assessment. He is the author of numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and, as director of education at the International School of Geneva, he led the publication of UNESCO IBE's *Guiding Principles for Learning in the 21st Century*. Dr. Hughes' previous publications include *Understanding Prejudice and Education: The Challenge for Future Generations*; *English A: Literature for the International Baccalaureate*; and *Educating for the Twenty-First Century: Seven Global Challenges*.