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‘The dream of the good’—a peace education project exploring the potential to educate for peace at an individual level

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Numerous educational efforts have been tried in order to address problems of conflicts and violence at various levels of society. These efforts have been effective to various degrees. This article investigates the effectiveness of the Swedish-based peace education project ‘The dream of the good’ (DODG), through its use of mind/body-oriented methods, to develop non-violent attitudes and behaviour (peacefulness) in individual students. This investigation is integrated into a wider discussion of whether didactic programmes may be planned and implemented to effect such changes. The article first discusses assumptions related to the development of students’ peacefulness, and how effective existing peace programmes are towards this end. Following a presentation of DODG, mechanisms of aggression and peaceful development are reviewed theoretically, with particular reference to mind/body-oriented methods, from the perspectives of behavioural science and Buddhist philosophy. Finally, empirical findings from an interview study of DODG and a small controlled follow-up study are presented.

Keywords: peace; education; pedagogy; relaxation; mind/body-techniques

Introduction

In recent years, there have been numerous educational efforts attempting to address problems of violence and conflict at societal, community and interpersonal levels (see Harris 2004; Nevo and Brem 2002). Despite the many forms of these efforts, the common denominator is usually a content orientation towards specific conflicts, violent issues, or skills and abilities in peace work. Examples include: teaching to weaken enemy images in the Israel–Palestine conflict (Salomon 2004), work for politically oppressed groups (Freire 1996), teaching of conflict resolution skills (Carter 2004), and teaching of skills for improving situations of bullying (Rigby 2005, 2006). The Swedish-based peace education project ‘The dream of the good’ (DODG) does not focus on specific contents of this kind. It does, however, focus pointedly on peaceful development of individual students. It seeks to strengthen dispositions for non-violence, empathy and kindness through practical methods based on relaxation and the influencing of mindset to create deepened awareness. If effective, these methods can improve students’ *general* capability to deal with conflicts and adverse circumstances in a non-violent way.

DODG directs its efforts at schoolchildren in primary to upper secondary school, as well as in kindergartens. It has been defined as a pilot project in the strategy of The Appeal of the Nobel Peace Laureate Foundation,¹ which works to introduce peace education and a culture of non-violence in all schools around the world. In this article the potential of DODG will be assessed, through its key principles and methods, in educating the individual in non-violence.

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This will be integrated into a wider discussion of whether individual peacefulness can be developed by social learning processes, and whether it is possible to design successful educational programmes.

Firstly, this article will look at assumptions related to the development of peace at an individual level; the DODG project and this study will be contextualised in relation to previous peace education research. Secondly, a theoretical discussion of the causes of aggression and the possibility for peaceful development, with particular reference to the key principles and methods of DODG, will be addressed. In this endeavour, two perspectives will be used: behavioural sciences of the West and Buddhist philosophy of the East. After this, empirical findings will be presented; results were obtained from interviews with participants in the DODG project in Sweden, as well as from a small controlled study of DODG methods in Norwegian schools. In conclusion there will be outline recommendations based on the findings.

Developing peace at the individual level

Peace, at any level in society, requires that its members have the ability to contain aggression, exhibit a minimum of pro-social and cooperative behaviour, and can deal with, as well as transform, arising conflicts in a non-violent way. These abilities, which are required by individuals of society, constitute what is defined in this article as 'individual peacefulness'. Individual peacefulness overlaps with, but is not identical to, the concept of inner or personal peace.² Rather, it presupposes a minimum of inner peace. It corresponds to Gandhi's concept '*ahimsa*' (see Burns and Weber 1995; Juergensmeyer 2002), whereby a non-violent mind is the basis for non-violent actions. As such, individual peacefulness entails a capacity to act and *react* non-violently in situations of frustrated goals and other adverse circumstances. Furthermore, it entails the ability to react non-violently in a spontaneous manner, without the suppression of negative emotions, as suppression may be violence against oneself or a subtle form of redirected aggression (Barash 2005).

Three assumptions underlie and inform this article:

- (1) All people have the capacity or potential for individual peacefulness.
- (2) This capacity can be developed as a consequence of social learning processes.
- (3) It is possible to plan such learning processes and design didactic programmes to achieve increased individual peacefulness among all or most students.

In relation to these assumptions, it has to be acknowledged that very few people, if any, seem to have a fully developed individual peacefulness and the ability to consistently act non-violently. However, this does not mean that individuals cannot achieve significant peaceful development despite the difficulty of achieving a fully evolved form. On the contrary, the assumption that individual peacefulness cannot be developed would prove theoretically and empirically problematic. It would imply that any educational effort to reduce violent behaviour and strengthen cooperation and kindness, found for instance in anti-bullying programmes or within religious education, have no effect, and that any psychological treatment of aggression (see Isdal 2000) is useless. It would also suggest that individual peacefulness is entirely dependent on *inherent* attitude and behavioural dispositions in combination with the culture, social structures and circumstances that a person faces. This is inconsistent with our findings.

There is no denial that the social structures, institutions and other circumstances can influence, or in many cases disfavour, individual peacefulness. Furthermore, it takes a relatively peaceful culture to establish beneficial institutions and social structures, and to maintain them under difficult circumstances. However, one cannot expect aggressive or violent individuals to establish such structures. This is even more relevant when the aim is positive peace, which

implies an excess of cooperation and pro-social behaviour in society, a capacity for the non-violent transformation of conflicts, and the absence of all forms of violence (Galtung 1996).

Accepting the need for individual peacefulness leads to the question of attaining peaceful development. In western philosophy, Baruch Spinoza has thoroughly investigated this aspect (Gamlund 2005). He concluded that to overcome the negative effects of past conflicts, harm and injustice, the individual has to be liberated from passive affects such as anger, hatred, resentment and aversion. This can be achieved by focusing on active affects like love, generosity and fortitude, and thereby developing the ability to habitually react with active affects (Gamlund 2005). Thus passive affects will loosen control over the individual who will be able to reduce the dominance of negative emotions and may, through a process of habituation, even reciprocate evil with good. This process opens the potential for forgiveness whereby victim and perpetrator of past injustice can be liberated from the curse of the past.

Spinoza's recommendations are interesting for peacemakers, but they are explained primarily at a principle level rather than a methodological one. By attempting Spinoza's prescriptions, the individual embarks on a sustained self-educational process that demands a high level of cognitive and moral ability. These abilities may be difficult to develop in a person who is persistently facing difficult circumstances where passive affects dominate, or is grappling with previous traumas or aggression problems. Peace researchers and educators have to answer the challenging question of how to devise didactic programmes to change mental habits in favour of active affects and assure a decreasing frequency of negative passive affects.³ The following questions should be embedded in the programme design: how can the majority of participants be reached? Under what conditions will the teaching be most effective? And how can lasting effects of individual peacefulness be obtained? With this in mind a clearer outline of the current peace education efforts needs to be drawn.

Peace education programmes

Ian Harris divides western peace education programmes into five types: international education, development education, environment education, human rights education and conflict resolution education (Harris 2004). Of these categories, conflict resolution education has its main focus on the individual and interpersonal levels and seeks to develop peace-related skills and qualities, which in turn contribute toward peace in affected schools and communities. Programmes in this category have Maria Montessori's theories of education and the Quaker project described in 'The friendly classroom for a small planet' as roots, and they tend to focus on skills and qualities such as anger management, emotional awareness, empathy, assertiveness and self-worth in addition to creative conflict resolution and communication (Harris 2004). In contrast, other programme types concentrate more on a broader social setting, such as international and national levels, and they typically focus on theoretical knowledge of theories, systems, institutions and conflicts.

Harris also includes, in his review, peace educators working in a deeper psychological way aiming to 'heal wounds that create pools of rage in the psyche' in the students (Harris 2004, 17). Examples are given of programmes focused on: resolving stresses created by violence in students' lives; developing affective skills; and building resilience to avoid violence, sex and drugs in interpersonal relations. Such programmes and the conflict resolution projects based on the 'friendly classroom' approach are related. They both aim to attack the roots of violence in the individual psyche through a focus on one's 'inner self' (Harris 2004). By such a focus they are also related to DODG. To the extent that these educational efforts are effective, they help create good mental habits with increased occurrences of active affects in place of the negative passive ones.

Programme effectiveness

Nevo and Brem (2002) undertook the task of summarising the effectiveness of all peace education programmes published during the period 1981–2000. Of approximately 300 programmes of numerous types, 79 had associated evaluation studies that could be reviewed. Nevo and Brem determined effectiveness based on statistical difference in terms of the aims of the individual programme. This could be any combination of the following types of aims: improving peace-related skills, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, and reducing violence-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. One example aimed to improve conflict resolution skills and reduce the incidence of violence. Nevo and Brem found in excess of 80% of the programmes to be effective, which they concluded to be ‘an encouraging picture’, even though they pointed out certain methodological weaknesses in their study. A later analysis by Gervais (2004), based on Nevo and Brem’s review, concluded that the reviewed peace programmes did not contribute to peaceful attitudes and behaviour, but this conclusion seems unwarranted.⁴ In any case, Nevo and Brem have provided a summary of the effectiveness of all peace programmes and do not provide details of programmes focused on the enhancement of individual peacefulness.

Among more individually focused programmes, studies have shown that conflict resolution education may improve school climate through decreased aggressiveness, violence, dropout rates and improved cooperation and attitudes (see Harris 2004). Furthermore, Rigby (2006) found that most bullying intervention programmes have an effect. This applies to programmes trying to stop bullying in a direct way, as well as for those that apply mediation or conflict resolution models (Pikas 2002; Rigby 2005). Interestingly, these programme types are frequently less academic in their approach than the majority of peace education programmes. It suggests that effectiveness may be due to a pragmatic approach focused on emotional literacy and how to relate to others peacefully, rather than teaching peace-related theories and values.

Nonetheless, it is still a challenge to devise effective peace education programmes. Nevo and Brem (2002) compared the characteristics of effective and non-effective peace programmes.⁵ It seems that the more challenging the aim of the peace programme, or the harder the test for effectiveness, the less are chances of success. They found that *more* non-effective programmes than effective ones attempted to reduce actual violence; focused on secondary school (age 13–15); used official statistics as a measurement device; and lasted more than year. The last finding seems somewhat counterintuitive, but can possibly be explained by difficulties in keeping students focused on programme intent if the duration is protracted. In addition to the above differences, Nevo and Brem also found that *fewer* non-effective programmes than effective ones used simulations (of conflicts, mediation, etc.) as a didactic tool. This is much in line with the above suggestion: that hands-on programmes focusing on teaching to relate to others and oneself, and developing emotional literacy, are more effective than a more academic appeal to rationality. On this basis, it seems preferable to design peace education programmes that focus on individual students and reach them emotionally by practical methods.

Need for effective programmes

Most existing peace programmes are academically orientated and thereby appeal to rationality (Harris 2004; Nevo and Brem 2002). New peace projects are needed to reach students on an emotional level to help them develop peaceful attitudes and behaviours. One way forward is to introduce mind- and body-focused methods such as stillness, meditation, yoga and massage in class settings, which may be coupled to deeper reflection aiming to change how students relate to themselves and others. Similar methods have long been practised in many eastern countries in order to transform negative emotions and bring about peaceful attitudes and behaviour in individuals.

Such didactic methods are clearly lacking in peace education literature, as they were not found in Nevo and Brem's summary of peace education projects.⁶ Such methods have most likely, to the extent they have been used in western schools, hardly been regarded as tools of peace education by researchers. Their introduction will typically focus on creating mental and physical well-being (inner peace) as a basis for non-violent, cooperative and helpful attitudes and behaviour (individual peacefulness). That is, to teach schoolchildren to *feel good* in relation to themselves and others, as opposed to *be good*, as is often the case in moral and religious education (Straughan and Keynes 1988). Still, if successful, such teaching may contribute to 'the art of living in peace', which is a primary goal for religious peace education programmes (King 2007), as well as for many conflict resolution programmes of schools and communities. The following project description of DODG shows how such a programme can be designed and implemented.

'The dream of the good' project

'The dream of the good' project is a peace education initiative that pragmatically addresses how to bring about peacefulness in individual students.⁷ It does not focus on specific conflicts, peace communication skills and the like, but aims to bring about changes in a student that are beneficial to all life circumstances. DODG emphasises *how* the individual relates to the content of the mind, whatever that content is, and it does so through methods that focus on stillness and awareness as described below. Theoretically, DODG draws inspiration and justification from behavioural sciences, modern physics, religious and spiritual philosophy, and cultural holistic perspectives, though without being biased towards any specific theoretical, philosophical or religious set of ideas. Rather, it assumes an encompassing and holistic approach.

Key principles and tools of the DODG project

Two key principles are emphasised in the DODG project. The first is to enhance understanding and awareness of a 'connection between self and experience'. This is the realisation of how one's experience of the world is intimately dependent on oneself and thus possible to change. An increased awareness of the *self-other* connection is understood to aid the motivation to seek peace for oneself, in contrast to solely fighting against unpleasant external conditions. 'Connection between self and experience', or 'connection', refers predominantly to how unconscious, or less conscious, parts of the psyche affect our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This encompasses the way that negative emotions can be projected onto the outside world, how creative qualities of the mind are involved in perception, and how current experiences are related to previous thoughts, emotions and behaviour (habitual reactions).

The second key principle is to enhance capacity for, and experiences of, 'calm and concentration'. Calm and concentration can be created through different relaxation methods (mind/body techniques) and are found to counteract negative and stressing thoughts and emotions. Such methods allow for increased awareness of the mind's content and make it possible to consciously deal with negative thoughts and emotions. Increased awareness is also understood to reinforce the first key principle by allowing for a deeper understanding of how our experiences are dependent on ourselves. Calm and concentration is seen to help access one's inner resources, and the stress reduction and well-being achieved may provide inspiration for further use of the methods.

Methodology and tools of DODG

DODG disseminates its tools and methods to schools through seminars for teachers and head teachers. The schools involved are offered a large 'toolbox' with the aim of inspiring and facilitating the peaceful development of teachers and students alike. Teachers may incorporate the

methods into their teaching as presented by DODG, or they may adjust them to their teaching context. Main relaxation methods include stillness/meditation, yoga, qigong and massage. A primary method for fostering awareness of ‘connection’ is group dialogues on existential questions, which are usually coupled with prior relaxation. The dialogues provide a setting for students to examine their own thoughts and beliefs, to dispel rigid views of each other, and to foster feelings of connectedness and empathy, through common exploration of questions related to meaning. The toolbox also includes holistic knowledge of indigenous peoples, dream analysis, inner leadership and conflict handling, ‘plug-ins’ relating regular school subjects to understanding of the mind, and peace films featuring existential dialogues. These all focus on increasing awareness of ‘connection’.

Theoretical perspectives from east and west

The encompassing theoretical base of DODG suggests that its potential to bring about individual peacefulness should be assessed from a range of perspectives. Yet space constraints have informed the selection of two perspectives: modern behavioural science and Buddhist philosophy. Modern research-based behavioural science, especially the field of social psychology, provides a perspective rooted in a western scientific tradition. The most important concerns in this approach are that findings are inter-subjectively verifiable, based on transparent methods, and reproducible by other social scientists. Buddhist philosophy provides a different, eastern perspective that represents an approximately 2500-year-old tradition of introspective research of the mind. As the researcher’s, or practitioner’s, own mind—as opposed to external objects or data—is the focus of the research, it allows for findings of a different nature related to insights obtained by hermeneutic methods in western social science, as explained by Dilthey (1988). However, validation of findings based on introspection requires practitioners to be accomplished in the methods and their underlying philosophy. These findings are thus poorly suited for control on the basis of criteria set by western science.

Causes of aggression and violence—perspectives of behavioural sciences

In this study, aggression and violent behaviour represent the opposite of individual peacefulness and need to be understood and discussed. In western social sciences, a broad range of theories and theoretical perspectives on the causes of aggression may be divided into biological, environmental and psychological levels (see Passer and Smith 2001). In biological psychology, the human body’s emergency response to stressors (Cannon 1914), believed to have evolutionary significance (the ‘fight or flight’ response), triggers neurochemical and hormonal reactions that prepare the body for increased muscle activity: higher blood pressure and heart rate, an elevated physical reaction, and a sharpened focus on external objects perceived as *threats*. Simultaneously, feelings of anger, fear, or possibly a combination of both, are often aroused (Berkowitz 1990). In a modern, rapid society, the ‘fight or flight’ response is found to be frequently triggered in situations where there is no imminent physical danger, thus rendering these somatic reactions dysfunctional (Benson 2000). This can result in a stress-related illness and suppressed but emotionally active aggression, if adequate opportunity for ‘acting out’ is not available.

In environmental terms, according to the ‘frustration-aggression-hypothesis’ (Dollard et al. 1944), frustrated progress towards a goal increases the risk of aggression (Passer and Smith 2001). There are indications that the instigation of aggression depends on whether negative emotions arise (Berkowitz 1989). Accordingly, many events that are often adversely experienced, like physical pain, exposure to heat, cold water, foul odours, provocation and crowding, have been found to increase the occurrence of aggression (Passer and Smith 2001). The environment can

further serve to reinforce or model for aggressive behaviour and violence. Children with violent role models (Passer and Smith 2001; Stormshak et al. 2000), or who are rewarded or recognised for aggressive behaviour (Patterson, Littmann, and Bricker 1967), have frequently been found to become aggressive.

In terms of psychology, it is well established that feelings of fear can be associated with violent behaviour (Berkowitz 2004). In the case of fear of authorities, as shown by the Milgram experiments (Milgram 1975), ordinary people, not experienced with violence or torture, accepted orders to deliver lethal levels of electric shocks to trial participants. Furthermore, sadness and depression have been linked to an increased incidence of aggression, though typically as violent outbursts rather than premeditated attacks (Berkowitz 1990).

In addition, behavioural research has found significant differences between instigation to aggression in small and large social environments. Groups appear to be more competitive and aggressive than individuals in interpersonal settings (Hewstone and Cairns 2001). According to Tajfel's social identity theory, individuals seek a positive identity with an in-group, and a threat to that group may easily instigate conflict and aggression towards out-groups, especially if group membership is highly valued or desired (Hewstone and Cairns 2001). Also, strong group identification entails de-individuation, and potentially dilutes responsibility for own actions, thus reducing barriers for aggressive behaviour (Passer and Smith 2001). Furthermore, intra-group aggression may be activated in response to inner tensions such as competition for scarce resources and power struggles, or in response to rank-disequilibrium (Galtung 1977).

The above research shows how various biological, environmental and psychological stressors and conditions may increase the likelihood of aggression and violence. Isdal (2000) suggests, in accordance with the above, that violence may be considered as a response to conflicting emotions. According to Isdal, the aggressive dispositions of violent individuals may be understood as a response to feelings of powerlessness or difficulty in coping with various stressors and aversive conditions. In this view violence—physical, verbal, psychological or other—becomes a way of regaining feelings of control. Violent acts feel good for the perpetrator (during the act), and this feeling of reward contributes to repetitions and the development of a pattern of violent behaviour (Isdal 2000). Isdal, who works with violent men, seeks to gradually increase their awareness of the memories, of events and associated emotions, which have led to violent reactions, to be able to change their reaction patterns.

Causes of aggression and violence—the Buddhist perspective

From a Buddhist point of view, aggression stems from aversive experiences that in Buddhist terms constitute suffering. Suffering is dealt with in *The Four Noble Truths*, a core teaching in all Buddhist schools of thought. The text describes the existence, origin, termination and release from suffering (Dalai Lama 1999). The Buddhist concept of suffering is broad and encompasses all negative experiences at both conscious and subconscious levels. The first noble truth describes the pervasiveness of suffering at three increasingly deeper levels (Wetlesen 2000). At the first level, one suffers from negative feelings. This suffering accompanies various physical and mental states, and is related to frustrated desires, for instance in the form of goal interference or a damaged self-image. At the second level, one suffers because all physical and mental states are subject to change. One thus suffers from changes in relation to people and things with which one identifies, in particular from sickness, old age, death and loss. Even when things are good and stable, one is likely to fear the end of this positive state. At the third level, one suffers from existential fear; that objects and processes with which one identifies do not have any real or inherent existence. All bodily and mental phenomena one may identify with have a conditioned or constituted way of existing, and cannot be said to exist independently of other factors.

The second noble truth, about the origin of suffering, deals with ignorance or confusion about the causes of suffering. This has two aspects (Dalai Lama 1999). Firstly, the laws of causality of actions, karma,⁸ tell that we reap what we sow, mentally as well as physically, and that motives decide the character of actions. Actions partaken in a spirit of generosity, kindness or wisdom will eventually bear good fruit, while actions motivated by greed, anger or ignorance will reinforce negative attitudes and dispositions, and therefore bring suffering (Wetlesen 2000). *How* future situations are experienced will depend on the reinforcing of attitudes and dispositions through one's current actions.

Secondly, the perceived root cause of suffering deals with not recognising the nature of existence. According to Buddhist philosophy nothing exists in itself independent of other factors. By not being able to recognise the true nature of existence, one identifies with perceptions, roles and attitudes that one assumes to constitute the 'I' (Wetlesen 2000). An incorrect and rigid view of the self is found to give rise to egocentric actions and dualistic thinking. This in turn allows for motives such as fight/conquer, flee/defend and associated negative attitudes and feelings, such as greed, fear and anger; the causes of aggression.

Peaceful transformation

DODG focuses on the need to direct one's attention inwards in order to reduce tendencies of aggression and violence, and to strengthen tendencies for empathy and pro-social behaviour. Since negative actions are often related to aversive emotions, peaceful transformation may occur through a strengthened ability to react calmly and non-violently in the face of aversive emotions, and by reducing tendencies for antipathies and conflicting emotions in various situations. By applying DODG key principles—through relaxation techniques aiming at increased calm and concentration, and by progressively realising a connection between 'self and experience' (thus affecting one's view)—one's ability to react non-violently, as well as one's dispositions for non-violent and peaceful actions, may be strengthened. That is to say, application of DODG principles can be seen as an aid in developing individual peacefulness.

Peaceful transformation—perspectives of behavioural sciences

In western psychology, an inward path traditionally belongs to the psychodynamic disciplines. Although many of Freud's original theories have been severely criticised, including his view of aggression as a form of catharsis of bottled-up instinctive aggressive energy, modern disciplines of psychology such as cognitive psychology and neuropsychology have provided much evidence for the central premises in Freud's theories. The unconscious mind is found both to exist and operate in specific ways (Westen 1998). Both conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions and motifs have been found to operate in parallel in largely independent neural networks (Westen 1998). This in turn allows conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions to motivate different behaviours. Experiments have shown that conscious attitudes inform behaviour when they are focused on, while primarily unconscious attitudes inform behaviour when conscious attitudes are not focused upon (Devine 1989; Fazio 1990). There is, thus, a certain automatism in unconsciously motivated behaviour. If unconscious attitudes and motives are positive and produce positive effects, this is good and efficient. However, if they produce automatic negative reactions that serve us negatively, as often seems to be the case, there is a need to focus on active affects like empathy, generosity and love as a way to liberate ourselves from the grip of the passive affects.

The above findings correlate with other research that suggests emotionally charged thoughts, when suppressed from consciousness, continue to remain active through an emotional pressure, whereas habituation is found to occur when they are kept in consciousness (Wegner et al. 1990).

Thus suppressed or unconscious negative emotions may inform behaviour. Modern experiments have also found evidence for the hypothesis of ‘defensive projection’, here defined as a tendency to make inferences about other people based on threatening aspects of oneself (Newman and Duff 1997); whereby the subject’s own hostile and threatening qualities are projected onto others and serve to justify the subject’s aggressive behaviour towards them. These findings support the DODG key principle of ‘connection’. An increased awareness of own negative emotions at deeper levels of consciousness may contribute to an understanding of how one’s own emotions influence perceptions of others, and negative emotions may be defused when brought to light.

The DODG key principle of ‘calm and concentration’, applied through the practice of stillness, meditation, massage, yoga and qigong gives rise to a ‘relaxation response’ (Benson 2000), or a ‘calm and connection reaction’ as defined by Uvnäs Moberg (2003). Negative physical reactions associated with prolonged and repeated triggering of the body’s ‘fight and flight’ response are reversed (e.g. high blood pressure and weakened immune system), and increased well-being, positive feelings and attitudes such as caring and sociability are observed in place of frustration, anger and fear. Correspondingly, experimental studies have shown reduced aggression among children in a nursery school by practising reciprocal massage amongst the group (Uvnäs Moberg 2003). Similarly, in a controlled study in a large American middle school, application of meditation-related techniques yielded increased positive and cooperative behaviour (Benson et al. 2000).⁹ Furthermore, aggression was reduced in adolescents when using massage techniques (Diego et al. 2002), whilst it improved mood and behaviour in children and youths with ADHD (Khilnani et al. 2003).

In relation to the positive states of mind that relaxation techniques can induce, mood research has shown positive moods to consistently enhance pro-social behaviour in terms of helping (Eisenberg 2000; Salovey, Mayer, and Rosenhan 1991). This evidence is associated with a more positive evaluation of oneself and others, as well as an increased awareness of the act of helping affecting the subject’s mood positively. One may also expect the relaxation techniques to contribute, at least temporarily, to increased empathy, since a strong link has been found between empathy and the willingness to help (Batson et al. 1981; Batson and Oleson 1991; Eisenberg 2000). Empathy is further found to be negatively related to acts of aggression (Miller and Eisenberg 1998).

A person’s empathy may be increased experimentally by having the subject focus on similarities with other people. DODG aims to increase empathy through fostering more universal feelings of connection and similarity with all mankind. This is done through challenging the ‘normal’ dualistic perception of the world, where everybody and everything appears to exist independently of one’s own perception, thereby aiming to reduce alienation from others. In this respect, research on perception provides some theoretical pointers, as does the previous discussion on unconscious influences on experience and present behaviour. The various forms of perception can be shown to involve creative abilities of one’s mind. The way in which visual images are constructed provides an example. Electromagnetic rays hitting the retina of the eyes, on a two-dimensional surface, are not simply transmitted and reflected by neural networks and centres in the visual cortex of the brain; they are interpreted, that is *transformed* by the cortex, into a three-dimensional image (Passer and Smith 2001). Furthermore, the interpretation of received sensory information has been found to be sensitive to psychological influences, and is dependent on previous learning (Passer and Smith 2001), as well as being affected by cultural background (Deregowski 1973).

Peaceful transformation—the Buddhist perspective

The Buddhist way to obtain individual peacefulness is described in the fourth noble truth, the path to cessation of suffering. It is also called the ‘eightfold path’ and may be seen as a practical

guide to the termination of suffering. This path consists of right understanding and right thought (wisdom); right speech, right action and right livelihood (morals); and right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (meditative efforts) (Ringu Tulku 2005; Wetlesen 2000). These eight parts do not represent a linear path but are rather mutually dependent. For instance, improved mindfulness may facilitate moral actions, which helps to generate more positive states of mind, which will make meditation easier and so forth.

There is great emphasis on reflection, awareness and meditation as tools for peaceful transformation in the eightfold path. Meditation has a central role and exists in thousands of different forms in Buddhism. However, they may be divided into two groups (Wetlesen 2000). The first group, tranquillity meditation, is concerned with concentration and a clear mind (Ringu Tulku 1999) and corresponds to the DODG key principle of 'calm and concentration'. This meditation form is achieved with a real or imaginary object as a focal point, or without such an object, and is an exercise in letting arising thoughts and emotions pass through consciousness without interference. The second group, insight meditation, makes use of the clear and concentrated mind that is attained through tranquillity meditation, to actively examine and work on thoughts and emotions (Bornstein 1989). In particular, insight meditation is applied to gradually attain an integrated understanding of constituted processes or phenomena as being impermanent, associated with suffering, and devoid of independent existence (Wetlesen 2000).

A central purpose of meditation is to help increase patience and tolerance, in order to be able to react peacefully to situations that normally might give rise to anger. Patience here refers to a stable and peaceful state of mind (Dalai Lama 1997), whereby one may spontaneously react in a non-aggressive manner when confronted with different situations. This state of mind is achieved through familiarising oneself with one's own aversions during meditation and daily life, and thus decreasing strength of the aversions rather than employing defensive tactics. The development of attitudes like affection and compassion, for instance by meditation and pro-social behaviour, is found to have positive effects on developing patience and tolerance. In these ways, mental experiences may be transformed into something more positive, and suffering, the fuel of aggression, may be reduced.

Empirical study of DODG

DODG was investigated empirically through qualitative in-depth interviews with participating students and teachers at several schools and kindergartens in Stockholm, Sweden. The goal was to explore the *potential* of teaching based on DODG key principles to educate individual peacefulness in an educational context. Interviews were used to detect whether the teaching programme led to participants experiencing change in terms of individual peacefulness.

Contexts and methods of interview study

The study was conducted *in situ*. In their entirety, the interviews encompassed a number of contexts such as different school levels, various methods of teaching the two key principles, and numerous ways of implementing, or integrating, these methods into the teaching programme.¹⁰ Generally children and adolescents were exposed to lessons that included exercises with contents such as stillness, yoga, qigong, massage and existential dialogue. The period and frequency of exposure to DODG ranged upwards from a minimum of weekly sessions for a period of eight weeks. Table 1 summarises the contexts in which the DODG project was studied.

The interviewees included teachers and students from primary school, secondary school and upper secondary school, as well as kindergarten teachers. They were selected through consultation with DODG organisers, and primarily chosen to cover a range of different contexts and

Table 1. Implementation of teaching based on DODG key principles.

School level / Other	Key principles as main focus*	Manner of implementation
Primary and secondary	Relaxation	Elective course
Secondary	Connection and relaxation	Obligatory course
Secondary	Relaxation	Integrated in language course
Upper secondary	Relaxation	Elective course
Kindergarten	Connection and relaxation	Basis in teaching
Kindergarten	Connection and relaxation	Basis in change programme
Resource persons	Connection and relaxation	Longer-term exposure

* Relaxation refers to 'calm and concentration'. Connection refers to 'connection between self and experience'.

ways of implementing DODG key principles. The interviewees did not represent a statistically significant sample. It is worth noting, however, that there were probably differences in the motivation of the student participants in DODG-based teaching programmes, as the key principles could either be implemented through elective or obligatory courses. Generally the interviews were conducted in the local setting, and several were completed after a period of classroom observation.

Five high-level indicators, or operational questions, were implemented in data collection during interviews, as well as for its subsequent analysis and reporting. The indicators were the *perceived* effects of teaching based on five variables of DODG key principles:

- (1) awareness of *connection* between *self* and *experience*;
- (2) feelings of *calm*, *concentration* and *well-being*;
- (3) capacity for *non-violent response* to conflict and stress;
- (4) *empathy*, *kindness* and *harmony*; and
- (5) *inspiration* for individual peaceful development.

Indicators 1 and 2 reflect the two key principles of DODG, on which the indicators 3–5 are established. Therefore, if 1 and 2 are absent, 3–5 cannot be expected to be present either. Indicators 3, 4 and 5 constitute perceived effects on individual peacefulness by teaching based on the key principles. For the purpose of interview analysis and reporting, these indicators were broken down in an interview coding scheme.¹¹

The interviews were conducted by use of an interview guide that aimed for good exposure of the indicators, albeit through an open and naturally flowing, but controlled, conversation. The interview guide was tested in a pilot interview, and was subject to feedback by reviewers.

Results of the interviews with students and teachers

The results of the interviews are summarised in Table 2. In three cases two interviews were conducted, amounting to a total of 10 interviews. The table shows the results as positive, negative or mixed findings in relation to the indicators in the various contexts of implementation. The actual nature and strength of the responses were shown in the reported interviews. Generally, interviewees experienced positive effects from the application of DODG methods and mindset. The participants reported in particular experiencing calm and well-being,¹² feeling closer and more connected to others, and improving ability to react calmly and non-violently in stressful and provoking situations. The methods also appeared to have positive effects on the co-operation and harmony in the classes in which the methodology was implemented (Sommerfelt 2004).

Table 2. Interview results by indicators.

DODG implementation	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5
Primary and secondary school—relaxation-based elective course	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Secondary school—connection and relaxation-based obligatory course	Y	M	Y	Y	Y
Secondary school—language course with integrated relaxation	Y	M	Y	Y	Y
Upper secondary school—relaxation-based elective course	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kindergarten—connection and relaxation-based teaching	Y	M	Y	Y	Y
Kindergarten—connection and relaxation-based change programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resource persons—connection and relaxation-based experiences	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: 'Y' = Positive findings in relation to indicator, 'N' = Negative findings in relation to indicator, 'M' = Mixed findings in relation to indicator.

Discussion of the interview findings

As mentioned above, the key principles were incorporated into the teaching programme as either a separate module, obligatory/elective course, or integrated into the regular teaching programme. Furthermore, implementation was through a wide range of relaxation and awareness creation techniques. This suggests the possibility of the DODG project to educate in individual peacefulness in these contexts with these methods, at least within the Swedish educational structure. However, as the interview results are in terms of effects perceived by the interviewees, and obtained in situ without a control group, there are limitations, from the western scientific perspective, to using the results as evidence of *actual* improvement in individual peacefulness. The interview responses allow for attitudinal, memory and selection biases (Passer and Smith 2001). Furthermore, results might have been affected by the voluntary status of the interview subjects and participants in DODG-based teaching activities, and the data from the kindergarten children was filtered through teachers reporting their impressions of the children's reactions. Finally, a general criticism can be raised due to the nature of the interviews being based on somewhat loosely defined criteria subject to interpretation. Nevo and Brem's (2002) review of peace education projects suggests that more rigid criteria, such as official statistics, make it harder to obtain a positive outcome of such research.

An issue arising from these findings is that effects (in terms of individual peacefulness) appear to be the strongest in individuals who: (a) have been working with meditation and related methods for an extended period of time; and (b) have a positive attitude to the project. This suggests that a habituation component, as well as an ideological or value component, may be involved in the outcome, and that these components may account for some of the effects. If so, this is a classical dilemma in educational and research philosophy that has not been addressed in the interview study: is it possible for an educational measure to have a positive effect if the students are not goal-orientated, and have advanced minimum belief in and habituation to the educational methods, its inherent values, and associated cultural activities? In other words, do the components of habituation and value affect whether teaching programmes can be designed and implemented to develop peacefulness in *all or most* students?

Spinoza recommends an act of free will at a high level of rationality as a solution to dealing with passive affects and thus developing individual peacefulness; thereby replacing dominance of negative passions, such as anger, hatred, resentment and aversion, with active affects, such as love, generosity and fortitude. He encourages the development of good habits to enable conscious focus on the active affects in an attempt to leave problematic passions powerless. It is more or less self-evident that habits can be learnt. Famous historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela also support the fact that peacefulness can be learnt. They acquired

an ability to act compassionately and be an agent for peace in the worst of circumstances. However, it remains unclear as to how well these habits can be *taught* in an active didactic effort, the optimal conditions for learning, and the scope of such teaching programmes in an average population. This interview study has cast some light on these questions by indicating the potential for the development of individual peacefulness in the interview group. However, this study should be extended to more effectively investigate these issues through controlled studies.

Follow-up study through a controlled pilot study—methods and results

A small pilot study designed to lay the ground for a larger controlled study has already been conducted (Sommerfelt 2006). In this study, DODG methods of yoga and dialogue of existential topics were tested on 7th-grade and 9th-grade students in Norwegian schools.¹³ The 10-week test period had a total of 15 yoga sessions and five dialogue sessions. The test groups consisted of 13 and 15 students respectively; there were corresponding control groups at the same class levels. The test groups and the control groups were exposed to a pre-test/post-test questionnaire and were asked 64 questions using six variables: (1) School satisfaction, (2) Distress, (3) Self-esteem, (4) Depression, (5) Aggression (verbal and physical), and (6) Empathy (concern and perspective taking).¹⁴ Mean average scores from the questionnaire were measured before and after the DODG experiment and then registered and compared by *paired t-test* in SPSS. The results for the participants in 7th grade are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

The results show changes in the expected direction in all the six variables for the 7th-grade test group. In this group the *reduction of psychological distress* and *increase in self-esteem* were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (one-tailed test). No significant changes were observed in the 7th-grade control group. There were no statistically significant effects in any of the variables in the 9th-grade test group (not shown). The significant increases for two specific variables combined with positive tendencies for the others in the 7th-grade test group must be interpreted as encouraging, especially as the groups were small and the implementation period was restricted to 10 weeks. From data collected from add-on questions to the post-test questionnaire, it is also interesting to note that these students generally perceived an improvement in class atmosphere, behaviour and calmness. In terms of the acceptance of DODG methods, the majority of students in this group were motivated to continue with yoga (85%) whereas half wanted to continue with existential dialogue (50%). However, this discrepancy may have been due to yoga being more frequently practised, inducing an increased habituation effect.

The lack of observable effects in the 9th-grade test group may be due to several factors. Initially, there was a comparatively high level of conflict in this group that made implementation of DODG methods more difficult. The class teacher did not participate actively in the teaching and the practice of the methods and thereby did not aim to fulfil role-model status and share the students' experiences.¹⁵ It is also a difficult age group: Nevo and Brem (2002) showed that peace programmes addressing students of 13–15 years of age tended to be unsuccessful.

Table 3. Effects on individual peacefulness—7th-grade test group.

	School satisfaction	Psychological distress	Self-esteem	Depression	Aggression	Empathy
Pre-test	13.5	6.1	19.1	4.4	12.3	35.8
Post-test	13.7	4.8	21.9	2.5	11.8	36.4
Sigma	0.24	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.35	0.35

N = 13. One-tailed test of significance.

Table 4. Effects on individual peacefulness—7th-grade control group.

	School satisfaction	Psychological distress	Self-esteem	Depression	Aggression	Empathy
Pre-test	13.1	5.5	24.2	4.2	8.6	34.3
Post-test	12.6	5.3	24.2	4.0	9.5	33.5
Sigma	<i>0.40</i>	<i>0.73</i>	<i>0.94</i>	<i>0.85</i>	<i>0.57</i>	<i>0.66</i>

N = 13. Two-tailed test of significance.

These results provide the basis for the design of a larger-scale controlled study. They seem to suggest that bigger groups and an extended period of influence by DODG methods will result in more statistically reliable findings. This pilot study will also help to reconsider the practical methodology, the selection of test instruments, and the control of contextual factors and influences. The latter includes considering the initial level of conflict within the group, authority relationships within the student group, teacher attitude and involvement, and culturally determined attitudes towards DODG methods.

Concluding remarks

The DODG project is a recent initiative in the overall context of the field of peace education. In a field dominated by academic programmes appealing to rationality, it provides a pragmatic approach to teaching peace by employing practical methods and addressing student ability to deal with negative thoughts and emotions (passive affects). In its address to personal well-being, it is related to certain conflict resolution programmes like the 'friendly classroom' project, anti-bullying programmes and the psychologically based teaching reviewed by Harris (2004). Yet its connection- and relaxation-based programme, incorporating the methods and a mindset prevalent in spiritual philosophy, makes it quite unique. Even so, these methods were readily applied in schools in Norway and Sweden without problems of stigmatisation.

Harris (2004) points to critical thinking, kindness and cooperation as key aspects of peaceful behaviour. DODG addresses kindness and cooperation comprehensively, whereas critical thinking remains within the domain of more theoretically based peace programmes that focus on societal issues at community, national or international levels. However, if teaching based on the DODG method works as prescribed, students may develop a calmer and clearer mind, become more aware and less easily swayed by subconscious passive affects, and reduce tendencies of seeing others in terms of projected negative emotions. In this way, DODG methods can provide a basis for clear and critical thinking, and an ability to maintain a rational state of mind in the face of conflict.

This article has illuminated the possibility of actively educating in individual peacefulness; the theoretical discussion should allow some basic understanding of the causes of aggression and principles of individual peaceful development. Furthermore, the empirical investigation into the DODG project tentatively suggests that the practice of relaxation and connection may be integrated into didactic programmes in order to develop the peacefulness of individual students.

However, several questions need further examination. Firstly, there is a need for more conclusive results on the effectiveness of these teaching methods. Significant results are needed in terms of effects on empathy and aggression, and may be obtained through controlled studies with sufficiently large groups and extended test periods. Furthermore, consideration has to be given to the importance of habituation and value components in achieving peaceful development in the participants, sustainability of effects after participation, and other factors such as initial

conflict level and teacher endorsement. These factors need to be embedded into future research design and controls. Ultimately, this article suggests that these questions deserve follow-up studies in peace education research and practical educational experimentation. We encourage other researchers in the field to join our endeavours.

Notes

1. The Appeal of Nobel Peace Laureate Foundation is based on an appeal by all living Nobel Peace Laureates (UN Resolution 54/243B) that calls for a global movement for a culture of peace and teaching of non-violence in all schools around the world. The 'Appeal Foundation' works to act as catalyser towards this end.
2. In this article inner or personal peace refers to the feeling of inner calm and harmony, while 'individual peacefulness' refers to the individual's capacity to *act* peacefully even in adverse circumstances. Inner/personal peace and individual peacefulness should be considered interdependent. It is hard to imagine that a person in deep and enduring disharmony with himself or his environment will act in a sustained, peaceful way and be able to bring about peace in his social environment. We believe individual peacefulness is impossible without a minimum of personal peace and harmony.
3. The precondition for Spinoza's recommendations seems to be that people can govern their own habits as an act of will or rational choice. If this were easy, we believe the world would be a far more peaceful place: it is hard to imagine how people would choose to live with a hatred or resentment which eats up their 'souls' if they could easily *choose* not to do so. From one perspective it can be argued that DODG is an attempt to create an educational programme that facilitates and helps rational choices, and a mental transformation of the kind that Spinoza recommends.
4. We found Gervais' account of Nevo and Brem's report to give an incorrect illustration. Gervais seems to attribute absoluteness to differences between effective and non-effective programmes and exaggerate methodological weaknesses, and thereby reach a faulty conclusion.
5. Nevo and Brem warn against inconsistency, as there were only 10 peace programmes in the non-effective group. Effective programmes numbered 51 and partially effective ones numbered 18.
6. Nevo and Brem provided no category for didactic approach into which mind/body techniques fit.
7. The DODG project foundations, central ideas and project tools can be found on www.dreamofthegood.org
8. The Dalai Lama (1999) describes karma as a theory concerning causality of actions governed by intent.
9. Benson's study also resulted in improved student grades.
10. For detailed documentation, see Sommerfelt (2004).
11. Details of this process are accounted for by Sommerfelt (2004).
12. Table 2 displays mixed findings in relation to I2 (calm and well-being) in tree cases. The mixed findings concern individual students who do not like to receive massage. While massage seems like an efficient technique, not everybody likes to be touched. No problems of reception were noted for the other relaxation methods of stillness/meditation, yoga and qigong. The general picture was that the relaxation methods were generally effective in creating calm and well-being.
13. In Norway 7th-grade students are 12–13 years old and 9th-grade students are 14–15 years old.
14. The questions were drawn from tests in psychological literature. In terms of the interview indicators, school satisfaction, psychological distress, self-esteem and depression relate to I2 (calm and well-being), aggression relate to I3 (capacity for non-violent response), empathy related to I4 (empathy and kindness) and I1 ('connection'). I5 (inspiration) was measured by an additional question on the post-test questionnaire on the wish to continue practising the methods.
15. DODG teaching was led by a yoga instructor.

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