

FIELD REPORT

Schools Linking Network Model United Nations (SLN-MUN): a Peace and Conflict Resolution Project in Bradford, UK

Gesche Ernsting*

Angie Kotler**

Abstract

The article describes and analyzes the Schools Linking Network National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN) project. It is facilitated by the Schools Linking Network (SLN) in regard to its relevance for peace education and conflict resolution in Bradford. The intention is to evaluate the project's effect in counteracting segregation and the potential difficulties segregation causes, in the Bradford community. Three methods within the field of peace education will be highlighted as relevant to this specific project: intercultural exchange, cooperative learning and role modeling. Moreover, as continuous opportunities for children and young people to interact are recognized as important and, as the outcome of the NHSMUN for the group of young people participating in the project has been very positive, a proposal for the programme to continue is mentioned. The article will conclude that peace and conflict resolution education should be more strongly incorporated in school curriculums across the United Kingdom in order to achieve sustainable and positive peace within and between communities.

Keywords: Schools Linking Network, Bradford, community cohesion, racial segregation, peace education, intercultural exchange, cooperative learning, role-playing.

* B.A. Cultural Anthropology and Political Science at the University of Hamburg, Germany
Currently enrolled in the masters programme of 'Peace Studies' at Bradford University, UK

** Strategic director of Schools Linking Network in Bradford, UK

1.1. Bradford Community and the Schools Linking Network (SLN)

SLN is a national organization working across the whole of England on developing community cohesion work with schools. However it started its work in Bradford, United Kingdom in 2001 and the project described in this article focusses on SLN's ongoing work in Bradford.

The Bradford population shows great diversity: approximately 22% of the population is made up of non-Caucasian ethnic groups, the largest group being Pakistani (14%) followed by Indians (2%). Despite this diversity many schools are entirely white or entirely Asian¹: in 2006 only 25% of all pupils attended a school where classes were significantly mixed². Residential demographics also reflect ethnic groupings³. The result is that it is possible for some people to live in Bradford without once interacting with the wider community.

The segregation and inequalities in Bradford were a catalyst in violent inter-ethnic tensions, which culminated in intense riots in 2001. Violence broke out between the white and the Asian communities on the 7th July 2001 during a demonstration of the Anti Nazi League in the city centre of Bradford⁴. Due to the ethnic divisions, the resulting racism and the extent of violence during the riots, Bradford Council was pressured to act accordingly.

A school linking project was one of the responses, with the aim of promoting both educational and social cohesion. Later, due to its success in linking schools and communities in Bradford, the organization went on to become a national initiative and was fully established as the Schools Linking Network (SLN) in 2007. The increasing recognition that schools have a duty to contribute to community cohesion and develop awareness of social injustices has led the organization to develop and expand its work beyond Asian/white segregation issues to a broad and inclusive programme developing projects that build young people's sense of identity and create greater awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a

¹ In this article 'Asian' refers to people from rural Kashmir, mainly ethnically Pakistani and of Muslim faith. It is important to note that there is significant diversity within and between Asian communities born in Bradford and across the country.

² Angie Kotler, *Learning from Beyond Local Boundaries* (UK: SLN Website, 2006). Web: <http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/pdf/KO0081~1.PDF>

³ Bradford District Council, *Bradford in Figures* (2001). Available online at <http://www.bradfordinfo.com/District%20StateOfTheDistrict2003/population.cfm>

⁴ BBC News, *Two Stabbed in Bradford Race Riot* (BBC 7th July 2001). Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/7/newsid_2496000/2496003.stm

Martin Wainright, *Riot-torn city voices dismay at 'lawless idiots'* (The Guardian 10th July 2001). Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/jul/10/race.world>

complex interdependent world. In Bradford the overall aim of the organization remains to link children and young people from different schools, from different Bradford districts and different social and cultural backgrounds in order to overcome prejudices.

It should be kept in mind that even though no further major physical violence has occurred since 2001 in Bradford, the potential for such incidences still exist. Due to personal experiences working and living in Bradford, I am of the opinion that tensions between the communities are still high. Following Newsam's argument: if a defined group of people, who also see themselves as one group, feel powerless and sense injustice, if justified or not, it merely needs a small trigger to let violence break out⁵. The lingering divisions between some Asian and some white communities in Bradford, and resulting prejudices and racisms, could be described as a negative peace situation⁶. According to Galtung negative peace is a state in which there is 'an absence of physical and direct violence between groups' as opposed to positive peace, an arena in which there is a high level of collaboration, integration and cooperation⁷.

*"Peace tends to be very fragile in segregated (and socially unequal) societies. As long as groups are separated, long-term peace is at risk."*⁸

1.2. National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN)

For more than 40 years the non-profit organization National Collegiate Conference Association (NCCA) has organized various educational programmes, the biggest of which is the National Model United Nations. The aim is to educate students worldwide about the work and structure of the United Nations as well as to encourage young people to deal with international political issues, and thereby teaches negotiation and collaboration skills. Young people are thereby given the experience of conflict resolution within a professionally organized role-play of the United Nations⁹.

⁵ P. Newsam, "Prejudice and Stereotyping in Relation to Race and Nationality", in: Hinde, Robert; Parry, Donald (ed.), *Education For Peace* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1989), p. 32.

⁶ Claire Ackroyd; Pauline Grant; Janice Kershaw; Angie Kotler (2003): *Building Bridges*.

Web: <http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/pdf/ACKROY~1.PDF>

⁷ Johan Galtung, *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), p. 31, 32.

⁸ David Johnson, Roger Johnson, "Peace Education for Consensual Peace: the Essential Role of Conflict Resolution", *Journal of Peace Education*, 3:2 (2006), pp. 147-174.

See Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 120.

⁹ National Model United Nations, *Our Mission*. Available online at <http://www.nmun.org/ncca.html>

The MUN was integrated into the SLN programme in 2008. The first major event was a debate with eighty-four students from seventeen Bradford secondary schools addressing "the instability in Iraq". In 2009 these students attended a conference in the Bradford Council Chambers and actively discussed the situation in Gaza from different political standpoints. This event proved so popular with the schools and so successful in the quality of the debate and the level of commitment by the students, that it was decided to develop a continuing programme. Subsequently a session was organized in cooperation with the Bradford University Peace Studies Department in which the students were trained in negotiation skills. In September 2009, a group of thirty students had the chance to visit Belfast to meet ex-combatants and work on conflict resolution skills and reconciliation efforts.¹⁰

Alongside these events the students were prepared in regard to the UN and their given topics in the specific UN committees, where they had to take positions from the perspective of Tanzanian and Gabonese UN delegates. In March 2010 a group of nineteen students then had the opportunity to travel to New York to successfully participate in the NHSMUN with 2000 other students from countries all over the world.

For the Schools Linking Network, the SLN-MUN is a project to link young people from Bradford schools and aims to further overcome social and cultural prejudices within the community. The organization has crystallized five main objectives for the young people:

1. Conflict Negotiation skills
2. Teamwork and cooperative learning skills (specifically here to overcome perceived boundaries of social, ethnic or religious differences)
3. Skills and opportunities to participate actively in the Bradford community
4. Participation in wider societal decision making
5. Dialogue and Deliberation¹¹

The interdisciplinary education programme organized for the Bradford delegation implements many ideas and models developed within the field of peace education. I believe that it further contributes to the conflict resolution field on an individual and community level. How this is done and why it is important that this programme is conducted in Bradford will be shown after a brief insight into the development of peace education as a field of sustainable conflict resolution.

¹⁰ Lee Scholtz, *SLN Model United Nations* (2009). Available online at http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/newsletter/sln_mun.aspx

¹¹ Schools Linking Network, Homepage. Available online at http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.net/newsletter/sln_mun.aspx

2. SLN-MUN: a peace education and conflict resolution programme

Peace education is a sub-domain of the interdisciplinary field of conflict resolution¹². The former can be viewed as 'preventive peace building'; it aims at improving relations between specific groups, creating a society of respect and cultivating a culture of peace on community and regional levels¹³. According to Galtung, Lederach and Curle peace building aims at overcoming the contradictions that are at the root of conflict¹⁴. This is essential in post-conflict societies, as in the post July 7th Bradford riots¹⁵.

Peace education first became relevant in the years between the First and Second World War¹⁶. With Maria Montessori as one of the first revolutionaries of a liberal children's education, the concept of peace education "became part of a general education reform in which schools were seen as means to promote social progress" and create a 'culture of peace'¹⁷. Further, in 1948 the first peace studies programme was introduced and especially later during the Vietnam War many more programmes were established worldwide. Adam Curle, one of the founders of the field of conflict resolution, at the beginning of the 70s further spread the idea that education "would open men's minds" and make people aware of global injustices such as poverty, racial discrimination and class differences. He held the opinion that through peace education people would take action for a more peaceful world¹⁸. He was specifically concerned with the importance of creating greater self-awareness and self-consciousness in children and youth. His major argument was that the more people are self-aware, the more they develop awareness for the world around them and can thus act as peaceful citizens¹⁹.

¹² Kathryn Girard, Susan J. Koch, *Conflict Resolution in the Schools: A Manual for Educators* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), p. xxii.

¹³ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, pp. 122, 217.

¹⁴ Galtung, *Peace By Peaceful Means*, p. 103.

¹⁵ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, pp. 223, 224.

Lynn Davies, *Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos* (USA: Routledge, 2004), pp. 124, 145.

¹⁶ Marcia Johnson, *Trends in Peace Education* (The Educational Resources Information Center, 1998). Available online at

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/15/45/fb.pdf

¹⁷ E.M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (California: The New American Library of World Literature, 1962), p. 21.

Ian Harris, "Conceptual Underpinning of Peace Education", in Gavriel Salomon, Baruch Nevo (ed.), *Peace Education: The Concept, Principles, and Practices Around the World* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 8.

Davies, *Education and Conflic*, p. 128.

¹⁸ Adam Curle, *Education for Liberation* (Norfolk: Tavistock Publications, 1973), p. 1.

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 219.

¹⁹ Curle, *Education for Liberation*, pp. 6, 9, 59.

At the end of the last and at the beginning of the current millennium, the practice of conflict resolution education as a part of peace education became of major relevance in order to address the physical and structural violence that surrounds children at schools or at home²⁰. It should be stressed that the education of conflict resolution does not aim to avoid conflict but to handle conflict appropriately and non-violently²¹. This implies that apart from teaching children and young people communication, negotiation, anger-management, impulse control and problem-solving strategies, it aims to equip children to be more cooperative in both inter-personal and intrapersonal relations through affective skills, awareness of sensitivity and compassion for others²².

Peace education is a broad field that can incorporate different sets of values and is practiced differently in different parts of the world²³. The main difference between diverse programmes worldwide is that some "try to produce a general understanding of peace" and others aim to "overcome specific animosities between ethnic/religious or racial groups"²⁴, the former mostly being practised in peaceful societies and the latter being applied in post-conflict situations²⁵.

Consequently, it is logical that peace education has to be specifically adjusted to the circumstances of the children and youth targeted, as well as to the specific conflict situations they are exposed to²⁶. This can differ from country to country, from city to city and in some cases even from school to school. I have chosen three peace and conflict resolution aspects of the SLN-MUN programme that I find specifically important for the Bradford community. They are: intercultural exchange, cooperative learning and role modelling.

²⁰ Girard, Koch, *Conflict Resolution in the Schools*, p. xvii.

Harris, "Conceptual Underpinning of Peace Education", pp. 21, 23.

Blythe Hinitz, Aline Stomfay-Stitz (ed.), *Integration of Peace Education into Multicultural Education/Global Education* (New York: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, 1996).

²¹ Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes* (London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 9.

²² Johnson, *Trends in Peace Education*. Available online.

Pamela Lane-Garon, Monica Ybarra-Merlo, Joe Dee Zajac, Tekla Vierra, "Mediators and Mentors: Partners in Conflict Resolution and Peace Education" *Journal for Peace Education*, 2:2 (2005), p. 186.

²³ Gavriel Salomon, "The Nature of Peace Education: Not All Programs Are Created Equal", in Gavriel Salomon, Baruch Nevo (ed.), *Peace Education. The Concept, Principles, and Practices Around the World* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 4.

²⁴ Salomon, "The Nature of Peace Education", p. 5.

²⁵ Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 145.

²⁶ Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*, p. 5.

2.1. Intercultural Exchange

Intercultural exchange is probably the most important factor of conflict resolution education, especially in districts such as Bradford²⁷ where racial segregation is a major issue within the wider community. Therefore it is crucial to provide opportunities for people from different communities to meet in positive circumstances and thereby overcome negative stereotypes, misconceptions, prejudices, ignorance and the potential of discrimination of 'the other' at an early stage²⁸. According to Curle's theory described above, this can happen by facilitating children and young people to develop a strong but healthy individual and collective identity, which in turn leads to greater inner security and can avoid misconceptions of, and even aggressions towards, others²⁹. Furthermore, good knowledge about other people in the society can help build bridges by demystifying the perceived 'other' and finding communalities³⁰. The cross-cultural/multicultural NHSMUN project is one example of how this can be achieved.

As the participants of the SLN-MUN project are specifically chosen to link members of different Bradford ethnic and social communities, it incorporates intercultural exchange on a community level. Moreover, the NHSMUN event in New York brings a global aspect of cultural exchange to the young people. The participants had the chance to meet other young people from all over the world and were able to exchange political as well as personal ideas within a framework of political debate. Hence they are taught to respect and come to terms with fellow world citizens as well as fellow local citizens.

Furthermore, they needed to act as members of a very different culture to their own by representing Tanzania and Gabon in the NHSMUN. This not only trained them to adopt a mindset different from their own and thereby made them more conscious of their own identity; it also enabled them to overcome their intergroup differences by role-modelling the same culture/society as one delegation.

²⁷ Hinitz, Stomfay-Stotz, *Integration of Peace Education into Multicultural Education/Global Education*. Available online.

²⁸ Newsam, *Prejudice and Stereotyping in relation to Race and Nationality*, p. 32.

Ian Harris, "Peace Education Theory", *Journal of Peace Education*, 1:1 (2004), p. 22.

²⁹ Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 212.

Curle, *Education for Liberation*, p. 59.

³⁰ Lorraine Brown, "International Education: a Force for Peace and Cross-Cultural Understanding?", *Journal of Peace Education*, 6:2 (2009), p. 209.

Curle, *Education for Liberation*, p. 100.

2.2. Cooperative Learning

Many academics have discussed cooperative learning as an essential pedagogy for the education of peace. It is specifically eligible to apply cooperative learning methods in heterogeneous groups. It can therefore also be seen as an integral pedagogy of intercultural education³¹.

In an environment of cooperative learning, positive interdependencies are created so that the members of the group rely on the others in order to succeed³². This interdependence can be created through mutual goals, tasks, resources or rewards³³.

The outcome of the cooperative learning pedagogy is that 'students develop a considerably greater commitment, helpfulness, and caring for each other regardless of differences'³⁴. Hence, the group interdependence incorporates those previously perceived as outsiders and generates a greater sense of every individual feeling valued by the group³⁵. In a long-term perspective it becomes apparent to the children and young people that common social, as well as economic, interdependencies between all people exist on any level of social life³⁶.

Applying cooperative learning in the SLNMUN group from Bradford is an essential part of SLN's objective. With the overall goal to link different Bradford communities and to overcome prejudices and misconceptions towards fellow students, the interdependencies within the group have been extremely helpful and have ultimately led to its success. The students had the same goal - to fly to the NHSMUN in New York to represent the same country as one delegation; their mutual task was to develop group strategies as country and organization representatives in the Model United Nations. They were also financially/resource interdependent as they had to fundraise for the trip to New York together (every individual contribution was put in a collective fundraising pot). The interdependent reward was to be

³¹ Morton Deutsch, *Educating for a Peaceful World* (1993). Available online at http://www.forums.alliance21.org/d_read/pax/articles/Deutsch.html

Johnson, Johnson, "Peace Education for Consensual Peace: the Essential Role of Conflict Resolution". Hinitz, Stomfay-Stitz, *Integration of Peace Education into Multicultural Education/Global Education*. Available online.

³² Merry Merryfield, Richard Remy, *Teaching About International Conflict and Peace* (USA: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 26.

³³ Deutsch, *Educating for a Peaceful World*. Available online.

Johnson, Johnson, "Peace education for consensual peace", pp. 149, 153.

³⁴ Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 127.

³⁵ Deutsch, *Educating for a Peaceful World*. Available online.

Johnson, Johnson, "Peace Education for Consensual Peace", p. 156.

³⁶ Girard, Koch, *Conflict Resolution in the Schools.*, p. xvii.

David A. Hamburg, *Preventing Contemporary Intergroup Violence and Education for Conflict Resolution* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1999).

able to eventually fly to New York and participate successfully in the NHSMUN conference as a group.

2.3. Role-Playing

Role-playing has often been found to be a very suitable method in peace and conflict resolution education even though only few programmes have made use of it. It allows "the experience of a problem under an unfamiliar set of constraints in order that one's own idea may emerge and one's understanding increase"³⁷. The main achievement of role-playing is to allow children and young people to take on positions and views other than their own and in some cases also assume the opponent's role in the conflict³⁸. This can create possibilities to see other points of view and lead to acceptance of others' opinions³⁹. Obviously it is not required to agree with the other's view; the most important thing is to see it as legitimate and therefore valid. To gain an insight into the thoughts and actions of fellow adolescents can also develop a greater self-awareness and understanding of oneself⁴⁰.

The SLN-MUN involves role play, a creative process which was established in early days of SLN and was proven to play a crucial role in opening minds and facilitating dialogue between young people. The NHSMUN conference asks the students to role-play for example UN diplomats, which makes the students view political matters from different angles. It has furthermore not only trained them in adapting a mindset different from their own but also helped them to further build their own identity by reflecting on other positions and standpoints and recognizing the multilayered nature of these.

3. Conclusion

*"Since wars begin in the minds of (wo)men, it is in the minds of (wo)men that the defenses of peace must be constructed"*⁴¹

Given the 'complex and shifting nature of education' and the hardly measurable impact of 'preventive peace-building', it is difficult to assess its contribution to conflict

³⁷ Morry Van Ments, *The Effective Use of Role-Play: A Handbook for Teachers and Trainers* (London: Kogan Page, 1983), p.19.

³⁸ Brigitte Malm, Horst Loefgren, "Empowering students to handle conflicts through the use of drama", *Journal of Peace Education*, 4: 1 (2007), p. 3.

Girard, Koch, *Conflict Resolution in the Schools*, p. 140.

Van Ments, *The Effective Use of Role-Play*, p. 20.

³⁹ Merryfield, Remy, *Teaching About International Conflict and Peace*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Malm, Loefgren, "Empowering Students to Handle Conflicts through the use of Drama", p. 19.

⁴¹ Hamburg, *Preventing Contemporary Intergroup Violence and Education for Conflict Resolution*, p. 26.

resolution, especially on a community level⁴². On an individual measure it is easier to see progress and development and we wish to believe that small individual steps will radiate to a larger level⁴³.

Racial segregation, as well as prejudicial ethnocentrism, is not only a major issue in places such as Bradford but may also be viewed as one of the most common sources and results of global, regional and individual conflict⁴⁴. It is therefore of crucial importance for education programmes to effectively tackle this problem at an early stage. The work of the SLN and, as more specifically discussed in this article, the SLN-MUN project is one way of countering such tendencies. A student from the SLN-MUN group wrote in her intermediate evaluation:

"Since being part of the SLN I have gained many people skills, for instance, many members of the SLN-MUN group are white, and since I generally 'hang out' with Asian people, this has been a big change for me, as it has allowed me to learn how to get on with different age groups and races. Unfortunately everyone within my sixth form is not as friendly to Asians as the members of the MUN, therefore it has shown me how everyone can learn to get along."

Although this is one voice, it is just one quote of many from the Bradford MUN group (see www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk for a film of students' reflections) that show intercultural and cooperative learning can have a positive effect for some individuals and therefore shows how valuable this work can be. It is hoped that such statements made by the young people and through them passing these experiences on to their peers, more students will be willing to positively link to students from other schools and build networks across cultural/social boundaries.

We hope that the young people from the SLN-MUN project will incorporate their experiences into their daily lives and will thereby act as ambassadors of peace in a community that is in need of similar exchanges on many levels. Due to the success of the group and the wish of the young people to further continue to work together, different ideas for a continuation of the project have been assessed. One idea is for the group to continue meeting on a regular basis to exchange opinions on current political topics. They will also disseminate their learning in a range of forums across the district and further afield. The success achieved with the SLN-MUN group leads to the conclusion that young people should be made a major focus group to avoid future conflict on all interpersonal and community

⁴² Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 122)

Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 162.

⁴³ John Synott, "Peace Education as an Educational Paradigm: Review of a Changing Field using an Old Measure", *Journal of Peace Education*, 2:1 (2005), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Hamburg, *Preventing Contemporary Intergroup Violence and Education for Conflict Resolution*, p. 16. Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 131.

levels in order to create sustainable peace and achieve a stage of 'positive peace' ⁴⁵. Therefore we strongly support the motion brought forward by many academics to make peace and conflict resolution education a part of the regular school curriculum⁴⁶.

"Education on its own will not create world peace. Nor will a school be able to heal and control children living in violent communities. I am not over-romanticizing the possibilities for schools. But I do think schools can interrupt the processes towards more violence." ⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Deutsch, *Educating for a Peaceful World*. Available online.

Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 198.

Galtung, *Peace By Peaceful Means*, pp. 31, 32.

⁴⁶ Clive Harber, Noriko Sakade, "Schooling for violence and peace: how does peace education differ from 'normal schooling'", *Journal of Peace Education*, 6:2 (2009), p. 180.

See H.B. Danesh, "The Education for Peace Integrative Curriculum: Concepts, Contents and Efficacy", *Journal of Peace Education*, 5:2 (2008), pp. 157-173.

⁴⁷ Davies, *Education and Conflict*, p. 223.

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