

EDUCATING FOR PEACE: HOW THE SYDNEY PEACE FOUNDATION BUILDS A CULTURE OF PEACE WITH JUSTICE

MELANIE MORRISON

Melanie Morrison outlines the importance of education in the pursuit of peace, advocating for a ‘peace with justice’ model for our turbulent times...

In a world plagued with conflict, rising inequality, and eroding human rights, the work of civil society groups and movements dedicated to peace, justice and human rights has never been more important.

Since its founding in 1998, the [Sydney Peace Foundation](#) (the Foundation) has been advocating for ‘peace with justice’ recognising that to achieve true and lasting peace, society must go beyond ending war and violent conflict and must also address deep injustices and structural inequality.

The ‘peace with justice’ philosophy distinguishes the Foundation from more conventional peace organisations. Peace is not a passive condition but an active project— one that requires dismantling the systems of poverty, racism, and exclusion that generate violence and inequality in the first instance.

As Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees who co-founded both the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney in 1988 and later the Sydney Peace Foundation, has said, considerations such as access to health care, education and housing are central to building a better world. It is these fundamental human rights and values that are essential foundations for a more peaceful and just society.

Through education, public engagement, and advocacy, the Foundation has worked with a broad coalition of individuals and organisations committed to peace and social progress to reimagine what a truly peaceful and just society might look like.

This excerpt from the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) underscores the centrality of peace education in building these foundations.

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among

all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” – Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Central to the Foundation’s work has been its commitment to education as a transformative tool. The Foundation has encouraged people in Australia and abroad to think about the meaning of peace, justice, and alternatives to violence. It is about building a culture of peace with justice where these concepts should not only be taught as a theory but as an active practice.

TEACHING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The partnership with the NSW Teachers Federation combines both these elements. How do we embed theories of peace and justice in professional teaching practice? The University of Sydney’s Dr Jake Lynch, also a former director of the Sydney Peace Foundation, has run several sessions with Federation peace delegates on the academic approach that connects the theory and practice of nonviolence, human rights, and conflict transformation. By outlining the distinction between ‘positive peace’ and ‘negative peace’, these sessions encourage a deeper understanding of the necessary conditions for true and sustained peace.

These concepts were developed by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung where ‘positive peace’ goes beyond the absence of armed or weaponised conflict, which he refers to as ‘negative peace’, and incorporates the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. Dr Jake Lynch elaborates on his article entitled [Peace and Conflict Studies - Teaching Peace](#) (Journal of Professional Learning 23)

This partnership builds on the NSW Teachers Federation’s long-standing commitment to peace and peace education as fundamental to the ethos of public education. At its very core, public education promotes just and equitable societies in its advocacy and support for

access to high quality education for all. No matter where you come from, how much money you have or who you are, you are welcome in public schools. It goes without saying that in the public school sector themes of social justice, human rights, reconciliation, and nonviolence are intrinsically embedded into teaching practice across a range of curriculum areas.

Over recent years, the Teachers Federation has strengthened engagement with the Sydney Peace Foundation and other organisations committed to building a safe, more equitable and more peaceful society. During Peace Week, for example, teachers and students become active contributors to building a culture of peace primarily through the schools program at Cabramatta High School and the Sydney Peace Prize Lecture and Award Ceremony.



Cabramatta High School Peace Day

The Cabramatta High Peace Day is a highlight of Peace Week. For over 20 years, Cabramatta High, located in Sydney's multicultural heartland, brings together thousands of students for a celebration of diversity and inclusion. Many students wear traditional cultural dress—from Ukraine to Iraq, from Afghanistan to Ghana—with colourful performances from across the globe. Sydney Peace Prize laureates find it one of the most meaningful parts of Peace Week with the regional head of International Federation of the Red Cross, Alexander Matheou, saying in 2024, "I've worked in peace for 25 years and it seems I should have come to Cabramatta High to see what peace really looks like."

The purpose of education, [as defined by UNESCO](#), is to empower individuals, strengthen communities and fosters inclusive societies. "It is one of the most powerful tools to lift marginalised children and adults out of poverty, and it also helps to uphold other basic human rights. It is the cornerstone of peace, justice and resil-

ience in the face of the world's most pressing challenges. This is the basis of any democratic society, and the right to education is protected by international law."

Inherent in these concepts is the process through which students become informed citizens with the knowledge and skills, coupled with the practical experience to participate in the civil society and our democratic processes.

Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees stated in a [Honi Soit](#) article last year, in reference to student participation in civil society action when the Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies still existed, "Students spent time on the picket line to learn about labour, to learn about the rights of workers, to learn about the consequences of privatisation, to learn about the apparent power of trade unions. More was learned in a couple of nights huddled around fires with workers than from just theory alone."

THE SYDNEY PEACE PRIZE AS PEDAGOGY

The Foundation is perhaps best known for the annual [Sydney Peace Prize](#), Australia's only international prize for peace. The Prize is not merely an award—it is a pedagogical tool, designed to shift public conversation and inspire debate.

The Sydney Peace Prize laureates represent a remarkable collection of moral and intellectual courage. Their philosophies and values embedded in their lives and their work hold invaluable pedagogical lessons.

The jury assesses nominees' efforts to promote peace with justice and awards the Prize to individuals or organisations that have made significant contributions to global peace, through challenging systems of structural violence, inequality, gender discrimination and racism in all its forms.

Recipients have ranged from [Muhammad Yunus](#), the Foundation's inaugural laureate, who reimagined finance as a tool for the poorest, to feminist and environmentalist [Vandana Shiva's](#) championing of Indigenous agricultural knowledge in India as scientifically valid and continues to be a strong proponent of non-violent community action.

Also, laureates including the late [Archbishop Desmond Tutu](#), [Patrick Dodson](#) and [the Uluru Statement from the Heart](#), all proposing that reconciliation is not the erasure of painful history but its honest reckoning. When Tutu

was in Australia, he urged the then Prime Minister John Howard to apologise to Aboriginal Australians for the discrimination they suffer.

Both Patrick Dodson and the Uluru Statement from the Heart highlighted strong themes of respect, recognition and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. For educators, the message of these powerful Indigenous individuals and movements is that you cannot move forward without an acknowledgement of the past. Genuine peace cannot be built on silence. It must be firmly grounded firmly in the rights of Indigenous people.

And the many women who have received the Sydney Peace Prize who have refused to be silent as they challenge power structures, the patriarchy, climate justice and inequality.

[Naomi Klein](#), [Arundhati Roy](#), and [Irene Khan](#) all connect the dots between capitalism and climate disaster, between the patriarchy, freedom of speech and human suffering, between corporate power and the erosion of democracy. They fearlessly identify who holds power, who benefits from existing power structures, and who pays the price.

I will make special mention here of our 2026 Sydney Peace Prize Laureate, Australian international human rights lawyer [Jennifer Robinson](#). Her work also traverses climate and gender justice, human rights, press freedom and the rights of marginalised communities. Importantly, she is also a strong advocate for public education recognising the fundamental role it plays as a foundation for a more equal and fair society. Also, [Dr Hanan Ashrawi](#), a Palestinian Christian lawmaker, who continues to act as a role model for courage. She has maintained her principled, evidence-based advocacy in the face of Israel's occupation of Palestine and brutal personal attacks.

Professor [Joseph Stiglitz](#), who received the Sydney Peace Prize in 2018 and the Nobel Prize in economics in 2001, teaches us that genuine peace cannot be built while economic inequality and economic injustice exist. The political system that creates this inequality— by serving the interests of the powerful while failing to protect the poorest nations and communities— must be challenged.

Former Human Rights Commissioners [Mary Robinson](#) and the 2025 Sydney Peace Prize Laureate [Navi Pillay](#) both teach us that human rights are not abstract legal

instruments but lived realities, that international law is not a privilege extended by the powerful but a universal right in which every human life carries equal worth and equal protection under the law.

The stories of each and every Sydney Peace Prize laureate— whether it be the lawyers, the political leaders, the artists, the community workers, the academics, the weapons inspectors, the activists— remind us that even in the darkest moments, there is power working together for peace, justice and universal human rights. Stories of courage and compassion deliver powerful lessons in 'educating for peace', inspiring a new generation to be active participants in building a better, more just world.

We know that change requires solidarity and collective action. Through our partnership with the NSW Teachers Federation and other organisations, communities and individuals committed to peace with justice, we can be that change.

Here I will end with a quote from Judge Navi Pillay, "we live in a world where voices for justice are louder, more connected, and more courageous than ever before. The path ahead is neither easy nor short, but it is a path we must walk together – with integrity, with compassion, and with determination."

REFERENCES

- Lynch, J. (2026) [Peace and Conflict Studies - Teaching Peace](#) *Journal of Professional Learning* 23
- Morrison, M. (n.d.) *Sydney Peace Foundation Annual Report 2024* https://sydneypeacefoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2024-SPF-Annual-Report-FINAL_website.pdf
- Sydney Peace Foundation (n.d.) [Peace Prize Recipients](https://sydneypeacefoundation.org.au/peace-prize-recipients/)
- Sydney Peace Foundation (n.d.) [2025 Navi Pillay](https://sydneypeacefoundation.org.au/peace-prize-recipients/navi-pillay/)
- UN General Assembly, Resolution 217A (III), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, A/RES/217(III) (December 10, 1948), <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.
- UNESCO (n.d.) [What you need to know about education](#)

and why it matters <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-education-and-why-it-matters>

Zhang, V. (n.d.) A Collective Voice for Peace With Justice Honi Soit <https://honisoit.com/2025/10/peace-foundation-collective-voice-for-peace-with-justice/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melanie Morrison is the executive director of the Sydney Peace Foundation. She is a human rights, peace and climate justice advocate with extensive leadership experience in partnerships, strategy, communications and program development. With a Master's Degree from the University of Sydney, she has led communications and research programs across the corporate, non-profit, government and university sectors. She is an award-winning journalist, researcher and producer for her work in Australia and overseas.

