

UNESCO RIELA: The sounds of integration

Episode 95: The Learned Ability to Coexist Peacefully (22/07/2026)

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

هـ آل وس هأل-أ، benvenuti, fàilte, titambire, welcome to the podcast series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow. We bring you sounds about integration, languages, culture, society and identity.

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

We are lucky to have Blessing with us who is going to talk about the learned ability to coexist peacefully, sharing insights from her current work with students and teachers in Nigeria, focusing on strategies for integrating global citizenship education into classroom learning with the aim to promote peace so she will share some of the ways in which she has used writing and film and other creative ways of working to take action for people to become more peaceful within. So please join me in welcoming Blessing Oluchukwu Awamba, who is going to share her work and knowledge with us.

Blessing Oluchukwu Awamba

Thank you so much, Dr. Esa, for the introductions and thank you so much, everyone. Before I dive in, I'd love to hear from everyone. When you think of the word peace, what's the first word that comes to mind? I'd like to for us to begin with that.

Dr Esa Aldegheri

So, yep, so the chat is coming up there's water, war.

Blessing Oluchukwu Awamba

Really good. Wow. Wow. Really good. Really good. Thank you so much, everyone, for participating in this exercise with me. You see that even in these few minutes with these few words, we have successfully broken down peace into ways that it concerns us. And what my presentation is going to do is build on your existing knowledge about peace but this time I'm going to be showing you simple strategies that I employ in my work of preventative peace building across Nigeria and classrooms. It is my hope that you find something that you can adapt to your own unique context as well from this. So thank you so much, everyone, for participating very actively. I can already tell that this is not just a Zoom room, but a bus full of peace builders. Haha. I think I should have landed the joke a bit better. Well, yeah, thank you.

Now, it is common knowledge that violence is not inherent human behavior however, it is learned behavior. Most people know that. But we assume that as soon as a person is termed learned or educated, that person is supposed to automatically value peaceful education. And that's where we've been getting it wrong. We understand that violence is learned, but we leave peace to chance. We leave it that, OK, as soon as someone, as soon as learners go to school and they come out as graduates and learn it, then they become automatically peaceful.

That has not been the case in recent times. And we have seen it. Even the IEP reports that global conflicts are the highest since World War II. Now, what this proves is that people will not just pick up peaceful actions or peaceful habits. People will not just pick it up from the classroom because the truth is, in many classrooms, there is no peaceful coexistence already existing. And there are no measures to ensure that peace is available and active in the classrooms. So, we have to understand and begin to see peace as a skill that we learn that we build upon and that we continuously practice. This is one of my favourite quotes because of how expressive it is. And I'll be sharing with you how my work is using schools as vehicles to bridge the gap of peace education across Nigerian classrooms and make it a part of everyday living. Because in the world filled with so much violence and so much conflict, these are the skills that we truly need for today's world and even for the future.

Now, the school as a bus. I like to think of your school as a bus and of course, every bus has the potential to take its passengers of the bus, the occupants, to a particular destination. Now, what my work does is help teachers and school leaders to not just see the classroom and the school as somewhere where learners just come to learn ABC and 123 and learn to comprehend grammar. However, I am helping teachers and school leaders to see themselves as the drivers of this vehicle, as the drivers of this bus. Now, rather than the classic classroom setting of the teacher stands in front of the classroom like I'm standing right now and talking to the learners, what my work has been doing is to help teachers to incorporate essay writing, games, films, reflections, show and tell activities, as well as collaboration in this bus. Now you may be wondering, okay, yes, now all of these things are now here in this bus. Where are we headed? I'm going to share that with you.

Now, we are helping teachers to see themselves as drivers toward these important skills that incorporate peace building, creativity, empathy, environmental awareness, resilience and critical thinking. Because we understand that the people who are going to solve the challenges of now and future generations are people who have these skills and who continue to learn and master them. Now, these are supposed to be the true definitions of education. These are supposed to be the skills that should be used to evaluate learners that, oh, how do we know how learned you are? How do we know if you are truly learned? These are the skills that I believe are very, very critical for our world and for the world to come if we are going to move out of our current recurring cycle of violence and conflicts. That by the time that learners are considered, learned or educated, they are also peace builders alongside whatsoever career path they have chosen, whether they are doctors or literary icons or artists, whatever it may be they have that alongside being actively proactive toward peaceful coexistence around them.

Now, my vision is to build a generation that values empathy and resilience as essential as literacy and numeracy. And I'm going to share with you how I have been achieving this. I have been using these two strategies, pedagogy, as well as youth engagement, to work this out across classrooms. Now, pedagogy by engaging with teachers, helping them in their classrooms, as well as youth engagement, by constantly speaking with younger people, I'm a youth myself, but when I say youth here, I mean like primary school learners, secondary school

learners, helping them to see the essence of peaceful coexistence. And I'm going to share that with you. Explain this in a bit.

Now for youth engagement, I created a school club, What Have I Done for the School Club? And this club currently runs across schools in Lagos State, Nigeria and what we do in this school club, it's like a hub for young people who are interested in learning more about your community, because we understand that you cannot be talking about peaceful coexistence or peace in an abstract form. We bring young people together, and we talk about the challenges that their communities are facing, and how they can be part of the solutions, helping them to see themselves as part of the solutions and not just victims in whatever situations are going on in their communities. We also have like a peace themed essay contest, we held one last year, and we made sure to provide incentives to the students, we provided scholarships to encourage them to see themselves as these solution bringers to their communities; and for last year's essay contest, the theme of the essay contest was, we went to a community where gang violence was prevalent and then we asked the young people that people in primary and secondary schools to write us an essay and reflect on how their education and their schooling has helped them to differentiate themselves to not join those gang members. And it was really impressive to see all of their reactions and all their entries, very, very interesting entries and of course, there were incentives, like I mentioned earlier, scholarships for the three best essay entries that we received. So that was a really great opportunity to encourage these learners to think, reflect about peaceful coexistence. Now for the documentary viewing tour. This is something that we started this year in collaboration with Sima Academy. And what we've been doing is to go around schools in Nigeria and we've done this now in three states across Nigeria, and instead of me going to stand in front of the children's talk about peaceful coexistence of global citizenship education. We have decided to play films, documentary films that educate them on different concepts of peace building or different concepts in global citizenship education, including the refugee crisis, even in Nigeria and across Africa, educating them about inclusion and diversity, especially as it pertains to people living with disabilities, because that is something that is very prevalent in our community. I'm going to read out to you some of the responses from the learners who were present during this documentary film tour, so that you can see how these films that he watched helped them to reflect about peace and helped them to make a decision. That is always a great thing about this, helping young learners

to not just reflect on what their actions are, but also make a decision, make a change, a U-turn, whatever it may be, and make a decision to be better people, make a decision to be better members of their communities, make a decision to be more peaceful in their actions and their reactions. I'm just going to read out some of it. This one says, "I feel solemn and sad." And when we asked what are the two most important lessons you're going home with, said "to live in peace, to encourage other disabled people", because we saw a documentary, The Happiness Shop, about some people in the Philippines who came together and created employment opportunity for people living with disabilities and it was such a surreal experience to witness these learners watch these documentaries, see that people living with disabilities were just like them, who they just, all they wanted is a chance to be able to contribute to their community as well and their reaction says it all "my experience was that we should not discriminate or discourage people who live with disabilities. The thing that touched me most was that the parts went even when they were disabled, they are still very useful". So, these are some of the reactions that I have been getting whenever I go for this documentary viewing tour and it has been such a surreal moment for the workshop we held last year as well, as part of our youth engagement activities, bringing young people together, we brought over 50 young people together across secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria, explained to them, introduced them to global citizenship education.

Now for pedagogy, how I've been doing that is to help teachers, like I had mentioned earlier, helping teachers to see themselves beyond the classroom as community shapers, because it is the teachers who help these communities to incorporate peace building. It is most learners, most young people in Nigeria will go to school at some point in their life, like this primary school or secondary school or tertiary education so, they will have access to teachers. That is why we are encouraging as well as equipping teachers to see themselves and enter into that role of community shapers and when they see themselves in that role, then they are more keen to transform their classrooms into peace building incubators with those essay writing we have had mentioned earlier, with bringing those films documentaries into their classrooms, with bringing in reflections and single collaboration into their classrooms. That's now gone beyond the regular classroom. We are now using it as a way of promoting peace within their classroom, as well as helping their learners to take out that piece that you've learned in your classroom to the different facets of their lives. And what we are trying to achieve with this is

to build schools to become wells of curiosity, as well as collaboration, because we understand this quote very well that establishing peace is surely, surely the work of education.

Now, so far, this bus has carried over 3000 learners and 70 teachers across three states in Nigeria. Now the change I see is powerful, students asking deeper questions, they ask deeper questions, what would the world be like without war, without violence, without hunger. Those are the questions we want young learners to be asking, because in asking those questions we understand that then they'll be working towards solutions and we are always there to hold their hands towards solution finding. Now, asking deeper questions, such as creating more peaceful classrooms, to the peace building incubator idea, and schools becoming incubators themselves for empathy. And what excites me the most are the stories of changes like one I have read to you from the survey of the students.

Now, what are we looking to what I'm looking to what this work is imagining that every classroom, every school across Nigeria, we such a bus. Using films with your learners with your teachers as well as your school leaders coming into that role as community shapers and being the ones to drive the community peace building their communal peace building and that's using these films using reflections using essay writing using community involvement to move students to value peace, because it is something that is away from the norm that we find in the world today. What we understand that if school teachers, as well as school leaders take that as their primary purpose beyond teaching your learners to understand grammar and understand mathematics and English, but then when teachers see themselves as community shapers and take this on as your primary goal, then we will begin to see a change in the way the world works. Now, what if children everywhere I'm putting this forward to everyone, can you imagine what the world would be like if children everywhere grew up seeing peace as natural as reading and as mathematics how much more different our world would be. Now, I've been able to share most of what I have, and I thank you so much for listening, and I can't wait to- my invitation to you is simple and reiterating that you can take a strategy from the or strategies that I'm working with teachers and with learners, helping them to incorporate this beauty in their classrooms. Thank you so much.

Dr Esa Aldegheri

Thank you blessing for your sharing and your words and your work. I really love the image of the well that you brought that the school is a well of many things, as well as learning, and the work is never done, and the work is always done and we must keep on doing the work is really inspiring for me. So thank you.

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

شكراً, grazie, tapadh leibh, totenda, thank you for listening to this episode. For the full show notes and for شكراً, more information about our work, please visit bit.ly/UNESCO_RILA.

[JINGLE]