Schooling for Peaceful Development in Post-Conflict Societies

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Education for Transformation?

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Preface

The central concern of this book is summarised in the following quotation:

> Children and youth, in whom visions of national development are invested, are central to post-conflict state-building efforts. Statements such as 'children are the future' bring together the fortunes of national development with individual human development. (Pells et al. 2014: 294)

As this book demonstrates in more detail below, the education of young people is increasingly seen as important in peacebuilding in post-conflict societies, that is in helping to create conditions where a violent conflict will not occur again. So much so that in 2011 UNESCO's annual Global Monitoring Report called for an increase in funding to this area of between $500 million and $1 billion a year (UNESCO 2011). Yet a few years ago I was asked to do a review essay of five books on the role of education in conflict and post-conflict states where education is supposed to play a part in peacebuilding by 'building back better', that is to say where schools are re-structured to play an active role in educating for peace and democracy. These were primarily 'developing'

states, as is further discussed below. However, no contributors to the books offered any evidence or working examples of successful systemic restructuring, or transformation, of a wide range schools in a more peaceful and democratic direction. There were a lot of prescriptive 'shoulds', 'cans', 'musts' and 'oughts' but there was overwhelmingly more evidence in the five books of successful attempts to return the 'normality' of providing access to conventional schooling. There was little sign or evidence of them successfully educating for a more peaceful future via their organisation, pedagogy and curricula emphases (Harber 2013).

So I became intrigued and decided to do a detailed content analysis of a wide range of books, articles and other documents on schooling and peacebuilding in post-conflict developing societies. There is now a large and burgeoning literature in the field of education in post-conflict societies and I wanted to see if there was any evidential support for the idea that schools could actually contribute to peace in a meaningful way following violent conflict.

The review of literature in this book is, however, limited to publications in English because of my lack of sufficient proficiency in other languages. I also chose to limit my review of the literature to 'developing' countries (further discussed below) because the majority of violent conflicts in recent decades have been in such countries and it would limit the range and variety of post-conflict contexts. In particular, I wanted to avoid comparing conflict-affected European contexts such as Northern Ireland or Bosnia Herzegovina (or more developed nations such as Israel) with contexts where human and material resources were much thinner on the ground. However, even in more 'developed' contexts like Northern Ireland there seem to be problems in actually implementing critical forms of citizenship education for peace (Reilly and Niens 2014) and the key programme initiative—Education for Mutual Understanding—has not been researched in terms of long-term impact on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Tinker 2016: 36).

Although education and learning can take place in many ways and in many contexts, this book is primarily concerned with formal, mass education—primary and secondary schooling. Although everybody learns in and from places other than the school, and many do not go to school, the school is nevertheless globally the main institution for

transmitting the values, skills, knowledge and behaviours that societies deem desirable or acceptable. Thus, if a society is to change in any significant way then schooling must play a role in such a transformation. This role for education has been understood and debated since at least the time of Plato (Harber and Mncube 2012: Chapter 2).

One the reasons that schooling may not, in fact, be playing a part in peacebuilding in post-conflict developing societies (despite the large literature saying it can and ought to) is simply because not all eligible children actually go to school in developing societies (Harber 2014: Chapter 2; 2017: Chapter 3). Another reason is that the necessary physical, human and organisational resources simply aren't there. Providing good quality education in many developing societies can be difficult enough anyway, without the added problems posed by recovering from violent conflict (Harber 2014: Chapter 2; 2017: Chapters 4 and 11). Moreover, after violent conflict it is difficult enough to re-start an education system, let alone re-fashion or transform it so that it takes on very different structures, practices and relationships from before. Buckland (2006: 7), for example, writing in his capacity as a Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank, sets out some of the problems facing education in many post-conflict states as

- An inability of recovering states to fund either capital or recurrent expenditure as few states have access to domestic revenue sufficient to keep systems running
- Chronic shortages of qualified teachers—many have been killed or fled, and many of those who remain or return are snapped up by international agencies and NGOs
- Oversupply of under-qualified or unqualified teachers
- The sheer number of war-affected youth, demobilised soldiers and young people who have not completed basic education
- Poor record keeping, corruption and lack of transparency in education governance: salaries are often paid to 'ghost' teachers
- The 'relief bubble' in international financial support often subsides before a more predictable flow of reconstruction resources can be mobilised: relief agencies often scale back operations before development-focused agencies can be mobilised.

To which Smith (2010: 18–19) adds in relation to the desired role of teachers in 'building back better' via the promotion of peace and reconciliation,

> Ensuring that teachers have the capacity to undertake reconciliation education is an enormous challenge. The conflict reduced the pool of teachers, making it even harder to find those with the skills to teach a sensitive new topic. Teachers themselves are part of the culture and have their own values. The emotional issues surrounding the past conflict make enormous demands on the traditionally technical background of teachers. Addressing conflict and reconciliation, of course, requires knowledge of child rights, expertise in pedagogy and skills in facilitating discussion of controversial issues. Teachers are probably the single most important factor in mediating the curriculum and the values it conveys, and any education strategy needs to take account of their central role.

However, practical problems may not be the only reasons that schools find it difficult to educate for peace in post-conflict, developing societies. This book makes the argument that the existing and dominant model of schooling globally has a built-in dimension of political control, authoritarianism and violence. Moreover, this model is so deep-rooted in historical experience, cultural expectations and popular consciousness that in reality it is relatively impervious to change or transformation. Importantly, such schooling has also often played a part in both reproducing the violence of the surrounding society and in actively promoting it (Bush and Salterelli 2000; Harber 2004; Pinheiro 2006). This will be further discussed below in the next chapter.

Even when it is well known that schooling has played a part in fostering violent conflict in the past, and could easily do so again, it is very difficult to get key actors in schooling (politicians, ministries, heads, teachers, pupils, parents, inspectors, etc.) to change their expectations of what a school ought to look like. Acceptance of the traditional assumptions and practices of the conventional model of schooling is shared by too many people to make it possible for genuine change to occur. Indeed, politicians in a post-conflict society may well want to harness this authoritarian model to transmit the political messages that are convenient to them and their view of what the post-conflict state and

society should look like. Teachers (and students), on the other hand, may well prefer to continue with the old model as a way of avoiding the difficult, highly sensitive and controversial issues of facing up to the conflict and examining its nature and causes.

This book, then, examines the ideas and arguments surrounding schooling for peace in post-conflict developing societies before reviewing the organisational, curricular and pedagogical *evidence* as to whether it actually does make a contribution. It is important to note up front that, despite many optimistic statements to the contrary, evidence of transformed schooling contributing to peace seems extremely thin on the ground. The book also therefore asks both why schools do not really perform this role and why international bodies, NGOs and academic writers continue to perpetuate the myth of building back better.

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