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The Role of Youth in Post Accord Transformation in Northern Ireland

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Peace and Conflict Studies

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Abstract

Despite increased international interest in the contribution of education to peacebuilding, there has been a neglect of the role that non-formal youth programming can play in this process. This article examines three such youth programmes in post-accord Northern Ireland through the theoretical lens of their contribution to social, economic and political transformations. Given the sustained context of segregation and limitations of the formal education sector as a mechanism for transformation, the paper argues that the non-formal sector has played an important role in ensuring inclusion of multiple youth perspectives in a divided society. It also raises a number of critical questions regarding the politics of multiple youth representation and the strength of genuine commitment to peacebuilding in terms of conflict transformation.

Introduction

The past decade has seen a growing recognition of the role that education plays in both fuelling conflict and contributing to processes of peacebuilding. This has been driven by the push to fulfil the education-related Millennium Development Goals. The focus on basic education for all (EFA) has arguably led not only to a neglect of the contribution non-formal education makes to peacebuilding, but also to the role of youth. Despite recent disturbances, Northern Ireland is often seen as a peacebuilding success and, fifteen years post-agreement, this paper examines the role of non-formal youth programming in peacebuilding. It begins by outlining developments over the past decade in the field of education and conflict, before highlighting the need to prioritise youth analysis in situations of conflict. It then provides a synthesis of the international research evidence on the linkages between youth, education and conflict. The second half of the article employs this theoretical framework to examine three youth programmes and their contribution to social, economic and political transformations in post-accord Northern Ireland. The paper argues that the non-formal sector has played an important role in ensuring inclusion of multiple youth

perspectives in a divided society where structural education reform is not yet a politically viable option. It also raises a number of critical questions regarding the politics of multiple youth representation and the strength of genuine commitment to peacebuilding in terms of conflict transformation.

Education, Conflict and Peacebuilding

The field of education and conflict emerged as a topic of concern due to its significance for the achievement of the education-related Millennium Development Goals. Over the course of the past two decades academics and donors have explored the 'two faces' of education and its role in both fuelling and mitigating conflict. An important study by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) drew on a number of international examples to highlight different forms of violence in education: "The negative face shows itself in the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance" (2000, p. 7). Subsequent studies have discussed the multiple ways that schools systems might reproduce social and gender inequalities that may be a catalyst for war (Davies, 2004).

On the other hand, academics have examined the ways in which education can contribute positively to peace. Perhaps the most obvious way in which education may do this is through peace education programs. These programs have a wide variety of goals ranging from what Marc Ross (2000) has called 'good enough conflict management', in other words some level of mutual understanding and reduction in violence, through to programs that aim to attain the legitimization of the other side's perspective (Salomon, 2007). In a review of quasi-experimental studies carried out with Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian youth Salomon argues that peace education can produce more views of peace, better ability to see the other side's perspective, and greater willingness for contact. Perhaps most interestingly he also finds that in the context of protracted conflict these programs can play a preventative role in blocking the further deterioration of inter-group relations following adverse events outside the confines of the program.

More recently there has also been a shift towards examining the role education can play in explicitly contributing to processes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The concept of peacebuilding originated in the field of peace studies in the work of Johan Galtung (1976) who argued that peacebuilding "has a structure different from, perhaps over and above, peacekeeping and ad hoc peacemaking" (1976, p. 297). In particular, he introduced the distinction between negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the

absence of structural violence and the conditions for war) and highlighted the importance of local knowledge and participation. Another key scholar in the field, John Paul Lederach (1997), expanded our understanding of the concept. He sees peacebuilding as a dynamic social process and introduced the term *conflict transformation* which he defines as an "ongoing process of change from negative to positive relations, behaviour, attitudes and structures" (1997, p. 20). Key to this process are relationships: "Cultivating an 'infrastructure for peacebuilding' means that "we are not merely interested in 'ending' something that is not desired. We are oriented toward the building of relationships that in their totality form new patterns, processes, and structures" (1997, pp. 84-85).

Education for peacebuilding is therefore oriented towards the transformation of the structural conditions and social relations that generate violent conflict. This may include the role that access to education can play in addressing group inequalities, the importance of education sector reform in encouraging new forms of power relations and the potential for education to support transformation processes related to security sector reform, political institutions, economic regeneration and social development (Smith, 2011).

The recent UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2011) calls for an increased role for education in peacebuilding and, in particular, for the resources available through the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to be increased to between $500 million and $1 billion a year. Whilst the report argues for early engagement and prioritization of education throughout all conflict phases, there is no critical analysis of the way in which non-formal education, particularly for youth, can contribute to these processes.

Why Prioritise Youth?

The definition of "youth" is highly contested and there is a lot of variation in the age ranges used by international organisations. The United Nations (UN) defines those aged between 15 and 24 as youth; this is the most common age range used, and is advocated by the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Youth Foundation. However, defining youth in terms of chronological age is arguably even less appropriate in conflict situations than elsewhere. Youth are often thrust into adult roles earlier than would otherwise be the case in times of peace. They may, for example, find themselves heading households in the event of parental death and displacement. Conflict also causes difficulties for the socio-cultural definition of youth since the traditional markers of the transition into adulthood are often disrupted. A more appropriate way of understanding youth is as a *transitional stage in life*

between childhood and adulthood. This allows for the exploration of the specific factors that determine the transition into adulthood in different contexts (Hilker & Fraser, 2009, p. 9).

Partly due to the complexity of defining the category, youth are often overlooked. However, there are a number of reasons why it is essential to consider youth as distinct actors in conflict situations. First, youth are disproportionately affected by conflict. The past fifteen years have seen increasing recognition of the negative impacts of conflict on youth. Disruption to schooling means that they miss out on the physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that education provides (UNESCO, 2011). Reports also indicate that youth are increasingly on the front line of armed conflicts, with classrooms, teachers and students seen as legitimate targets (O'Malley, 2010).

Youth are also likely to be represented in the ranks of armed groups and state armies. Here there are two sets of literature. The first relates to the forced recruitment of child soldiers and espouses the need for protective measures. The UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council, covering fifteen countries, identifies fifty-seven groups recruiting child soldiers (United Nations, 2010). The second relates to the "threat" posed by older, mostly male youth who are thought to be easily mobilised by rebel leaders. This is related to an increasing demonization of youth in the media (for critique of this see Hendrixson, 2004; Sommers, 2006). However, it does reflect the reality that youth "provide much of the crucial energy and mass power to get wheels turning for divergent 'vehicles' of social and political change" (Hamilton, 2010, p. 4).

Second, youth are often key actors in peacebuilding. As McEvoy-Levy (2001) writes,
In any conflict context one examines, the dominant presence of the young in youth work, in community development, and in inter-ethnic and dialogue and peace groups is clear. Many have direct experience of violence, conflict and imprisonment themselves. They are not well paid, their projects are under-funded, often stressful and can be life threatening. Like other civil society actors they are less visible in analysis of peace processes than key elites. (pp. 24-25)

As the "primary actors in grassroots community development/relations work" McEvoy-Levy argues youth are "at the frontlines of peacebuilding" (2001, p. 24). However, for many years policymakers and scholars have not adequately explored the positive contribution made by youth. This shortfall is starting to be acknowledged by some. The 2007 *World Development Report* of the World Bank, for example, focused attention on the needs and transformative potential of "the next generation" in development, but much of the

literature remains ad hoc and descriptive, missing out on the potential to learn from the experience of many youth peacebuilders around the world.

Finally, youth is a period –whether defined by chronological age or socially constructed roles- during which individuals undergo a number of important transitions. It is a difficult period under the best circumstances. During times of conflict, however, many youth can be stuck in "waithood" (Singerman, 2007, p. 6), unable to make the transition into adulthood. As just one example, unemployment often affects youth more than any other group. The frustrations that this generates and the effects can last well beyond the end of war. Youth in situations of conflict therefore have specific needs that require analysis and attention. Furthermore, as Hamilton points out, "Youth voices tend to go unheard by political and economic leaders (even by social scientists) unless they are raised as a revolutionary cry or as an articulated threat to the social order" (2010, p. 7).

Youth, Education and Conflict: The Theory

Overall the evidence suggests that youth get involved in violence for multiple and diverse reasons, which need to be understood in each specific context. In practice, there is usually no one singular reason why a particular young person participates in violence. Different individuals may join the same violent group for different reasons (see for example Weinstein & Humphreys, 2008). There are, however, three broad approaches in the literature to examining the linkages between education youth and conflict: social/cultural, economic, and political.

Social and Cultural Theory

One hypothesis is that conflict is generated out of grievances based on "horizontal inequalities", defined as inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups (Stewart, 2008). This is especially the case where the inequalities have perceived "social significance". Gurr (1970) adds that even in contexts where the data shows no evidence of inequalities, there may be an increased risk of conflict where there is perceived "relative deprivation" between groups. Opinion is divided on whether the existence of different identity-based groups (linguistic, cultural, religious) carries an inherent potential for conflict. Although the view that cultural differences are the root cause of violent conflict underpins concepts such as "a clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996), Stewart argues that identity is important as it may be mobilized to generate or escalate conflict.

Given the role that identity plays in mobilisation for violence, there are implications for youth education programming. Over the past decade there has been increased recognition of the fact that education can be provided in a way that either promotes the peaceful management of diversity or be an instrument by which divisions are exacerbated, potentially providing the basis for conflict. Careful thought needs to be given to issues such as the language of instruction; values transferred through the curriculum and, in particular, the way young people are taught about the country's past; and the ideological orientation of the education system. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has recently developed a Conflict Sensitive guideline to help integrate these issues into education policy and programming (INEE, 2013).

Attention should also be paid to equality issues between groups within society, especially in terms of access to education, resource inputs, and actual and perceived benefits to different groups in terms of education outcomes. It is also important to understand the social significance of education for different communities. Stewart (2008) highlights that the social significance can lie either in an element's innate value or in its instrumentality for achieving other goals, such as incomes and wellbeing. This point seems particularly relevant with regards the role of education. It is certainly the case that some minority groups not only have lower access to education, but also lower returns on their education. It is not difficult to imagine this to be a source of grievance in a context where education is valued as a means of social mobility.

Economic Theory

One economic hypothesis argues that youth participation in conflict occurs when it is financially viable and profitable. It is based mainly on research by Collier and Hoeffler (2000, 2004), who used three main proxies to measure the opportunity cost of participating in civil conflict across a number of countries. The first two proxies were mean income *per capita* (a population with high income may have more to lose from conflict) and growth rate of the economy (with high growth there are more employment opportunities). The third proxy indicator was the male secondary school enrolment rate. Collier and Hoeffler argued that young males are the group from which rebels are most recruited, the number of years of secondary education affects earning potential, and therefore having more years of schooling is likely to affect the opportunity cost of participating in conflict. Other studies have found similar results regarding this protective nature of secondary education (Barakat & Urdal, 2009; Thyne, 2006).

However, this theory has also received criticism for being dependent on strong links between the education and labour markets, which is often not the case. For example, Urdal (2006) argues that when countries respond to large youth cohorts by expanding access to higher education, this may result in a much larger group of highly educated young people than the labour market is able to absorb. High levels of unemployment among highly educated youth may cause frustration that could lead to grievances and incidence of violence. In fact, Choucri (1974) argues that high unemployment among educated youth is one of the most destabilising forces a state can face.

In addition, this theory characterizes 'greed' as the main driver of conflict, and has been challenged as overly simplistic and dependent on a rational choice theory of human behaviour (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003). Some authors argue there are other explanations for the mitigating effect of education on conflict that remain to be explored. These range from the values that quality education transmits, the evidence it gives of a government's ability to provide for its citizens, through to the role it plays in simply keeping young people occupied. Although opinions are divided on the mechanisms by which education and political violence interact, the literature highlights the need for education programming to focus on secondary education for youth in and out of school, the role of technical and vocational education, and the relevance of education to employment opportunities and economic development.

Political Theory

While the greed and grievance perspectives examine the reasons why youth take up arms, the third approach critically examines the nature of the politics that "prepared the field" (Bates, 2008, p. 131) for conflict. Bates argues that ruling elites in many countries post-independence have been driven by the need to maintain a political power base by concentrating resources on a narrow section of the population, rather than developing policies to provide social goods such as education as a wider benefit for all. Drawing on examples from sub-Saharan Africa, Bates argues that post-independence elections were costly and incumbents preserved their position through the distribution of public goods. As it became too expensive to continue in this manner, ruling elites moved towards an authoritarian regime. Under this system, providing the constituency with public goods, including education, was no longer important. The goal of both incumbents and political opponents alike was to garner the favour of ruling elites, on which their chance of success and being included in the narrowing "private distribution" of material benefits depended. This

centralised, closed and regulated economy was costly and in the long run meant a decrease in public revenue and less rewards from public services. This further entrenched the status of rulers as "predators". Eventually, citizens react to this behaviour of their rulers by taking up arms.

Bates (2008) documents the ways in which rational (self-interested), political decision-making by elites can lead to the demise of the social contract. The past decade's emphasis on liberal peacebuilding, with a focus on early electoral and market reform, has received criticism on the grounds that it serves the interests of elites and does little to address the underlying causes of conflict. This is certainly one of the criticisms of the peace process in Northern Ireland where, despite a halt in overt conflict, tensions between communities are still apparent (Knox, 2010; Leonard & McKnight, 2012). In particular, a number of authors have noted a sense of alienation among young people and frustration that peace has not delivered on its promises of a better life.

The implication is that there is a need for programmes that promote wider political engagement of youth in understanding and participating in the political systems that operate within their communities. There is a well-established body of evidence that shows that greater levels of schooling increase political participation (Bénabou, 2000; Dee, 2004; Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Civic education has been shown to increase young people's understanding of their political systems and environment, although effort must be made to ensure that this translates into action and political participation. Research also indicates that it is important to engage young people early as they are unlikely to become more interested in politics with age (Institute for Conflict Research, 2005). In the case of Northern Ireland it is especially important to engage this section of society as they will be tasked with managing the decision on the sovereignty of their country.

Education and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

On 10th April 1998, the negotiations that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement were finally concluded. Thirty years of violence had resulted in 3,600 people being killed, more than half of whom were civilians, and 30,000 injured. Fifty-three percent of those killed were under 30 years old (Fay, Morrissey, & Smyth, 1999). The agreement involved the establishment of cross-border bodies with executive powers set up by the Irish and British governments, a Northern Irish Assembly based on power-sharing, support for victims of the 'Troubles' and the early release of paramilitary prisoners. The British and Irish governments

recognised "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British or both" and the agreement accepted that the future constitutional status of the territory will be determined by "the wish of the majority of the people who live there" (Northern Ireland Office, 1998).

Fifteen years after *The Agreement* peace is increasingly well established and the former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has claimed that "the lessons of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland can be learned in other conflicts across the world" (Blair, 2008). The European Union, a longstanding and major actor in the peace process, has held up its role in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland as an opportunity for lesson-learning and modelling as it seeks to expand its capacity for conflict prevention, management and resolution (Tonra, 2011). However, a number of issues remain capable of stalling progress in Northern Ireland (see Fitzduff & O'Hagan, 2009); most recently the flags dispute that began in December 2012 is evidence of a deep alienation within a section of the unionist community from the peace settlement that has emerged (Nolan, 2013). Perhaps most crucially, as Smith (2010) argues, *The Agreement* deferred a decision on the ultimate sovereignty of the territory: "the agreement managed to 'transform' the conflict, but the dispute has not been 'resolved'" (2010, p. 58).

Of particular interest to this study is the role that education and employment linkages played in the lead up to the period of conflict known as the Troubles. When Ireland was partitioned in 1921 the six counties in the North-East became known as Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom, whilst the other 26 counties gained independence as the Republic of Ireland. At the time Protestant Unionists made up two thirds of the population of Northern Ireland and the state was described by its first prime minister as having "a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people" (Fitzduff & O'Hagan, 2009, p. 3). The evidence available shows that systematic inequalities in many dimensions persisted for the first fifty years of the newly created Northern Ireland state. The Catholic unemployment rate was 2.6 times the Protestant rate in 1917 and the same in 1971 (McGarry & O'Leary, 1995). There has been much research into the causes of the employment differential and a comprehensive review is provided by Gallagher (1991). Since 1812 and the formation of Catholic schools, Northern Ireland's education system has been effectively segregated along religious lines. One explanation for the employment differential therefore relates to lower academic achievement: data shows Catholic disadvantage in admission to grammar schools and O and A-level achievements up to the mid-1970s (Stewart & Langar, 2007, p. 21). In

addition, Catholic school leavers were less likely to have qualifications in scientific and technological subjects. These issues were visible in the civil rights riots in the 1960s.

Significant progress has been made in reducing these inequalities through the introduction of a common curriculum and the 1976 and 1989 Fair Employment Acts (Stewart & Langar, 2007). The recent Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report finds that "those who have entered the labour market operate on a level playing field and amongst the older age cohorts the numbers of Catholics and Protestants who are unemployed are proportionate to their population size" (Nolan, 2013, p. 8). However, it also notes that "the growth of youth unemployment has opened up a new communal differential: 20% of Catholics aged 18-24 are unemployed as opposed to 15% of Protestants" (p. 8). Further, whilst progress has been made with regards to equality of educational outcomes, the system remains highly segregated. Education is mentioned twice in the Good Friday Agreement, once in relation to support for the development of integrated schools and once in relation to support for Irish language education. However, recent figures indicate that almost half of Northern Ireland's school children are still being taught in schools where 95% or more of the pupils are of the same religion (Hansson, O'Connor-Bones, & McCord, 2013, p. 47).

Peacebuilding in Practice: Non-formal Youth Education in Northern Ireland

The previous section has highlighted the contribution of education to peacebuilding in terms of social, economic and political transformation. This provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of three youth programmes that have been implemented in post-agreement Northern Ireland.

Recent data from the 2011 census indicates that there are 227,634 youth in Northern Ireland between the ages of 16 and 24, making up 12.6% of the population. As in many cases elsewhere, youth in Northern Ireland have suffered in the context of the current economic crisis. Between November 2007-August 2010 the number of unemployed young people (24 years and younger) increased by 171%, compared to 145% in the general population. There was an even more dramatic rise in the percentage of young people experiencing long term unemployment of more than a year, with the figure increasing by 688% from July 2008 to July 2010. More recent evidence from the Labour Force Survey (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 2013) also identified 42,000 young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs).

At the same time there is evidence that youth are switching off from politics. In a survey of 1434 sixteen year olds 62% of sixteen year olds responded that they had "not very

much" or no interest at all in politics (Young Life and Times Survey, 2011). They also represent the age group that is the least likely to vote. A recent opinion poll found that 52% of the 18-24 year olds said that they would not bother voting compared with 40% of the 45-64 age-group, and 38% of the 65+ age-group (Belfast Telegraph, 2013).

On a more positive note, there are signs from a small sample survey of 15-21 year olds that young people are supportive of greater sharing and integration across many different aspects of education, relationships, culture and social/physical regeneration (Ellis, McNeill, Erskine, & O'Sullivan, 2013). For example, over 90% of respondents supported greater levels of contact between the communities and 64% of respondents indicated that they would prefer to be educated in a mixed environment rather than a segregated one. One issue on which the respondents were divided relates to the aspiration either to stay in Northern Ireland (53%) or seek a better future elsewhere (47%).

Social Transformation

Research has highlighted the role that identity and social values play in mobilisation for violence. As a result there are many examples of youth peacebuilding programmes based on the idea that intercultural exchanges lead to reduced prejudice and improved relations between groups (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Maoz, 2002; Trew, 1986). One example of such programmes is the Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland (CFPNI) which was established with the aim of promoting understanding through interaction. It ran from 1987 until 2007 when the organisation directed its activities into the creation of an Alumni Group of past participants. The project has its origin in the many "holiday schemes" of the 1980s which allowed children from both the Catholic and Protestant communities to travel to the United States for a few weeks during the summer months. Over 2,500 young people participated in the CFPNI programme that included a four-week stay in the United States with a host family along with organised pre and post "holiday" programmes. Activities varied, but included participation in community service and volunteer schemes and cultural and teambuilding activities, concentrating on leadership and conflict resolution (Irish Times, 2007). However, the main focus was on the building of a friendship and a key requirement was that both the youth participants from the two major traditions in Northern Ireland had to share a room for the duration of their stay with the American host family.

The impact of these programmes has been the subject of much research across a number of contexts (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996; Horenczyk & Bekerman, 1997). According to the contact hypothesis on which these types of programmes are based, four key

conditions are necessary for inter-group contact to be beneficial (Pettigrew, 1998). The groups should have equal group status, work towards common goals, be able to cooperate with each other without intergroup competition and the contact should have the support of the relevant authorities or customs. The literature also highlights that important consideration should be given to the management of anxiety which accompanies inter-group contact (Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998). An evaluation of CFPNI by Stringer and Murphy-Cowan (2008) finds that:

> the programme follows the key steps suggested by leading contact researchers. During the first stage cross community friendships are encouraged in a safe and anxiety free Northern Irish environment and friendships are given time to develop in the more religiously neutral USA context. During this initial stage relationships are also supported by important authority figures (parents, group co-ordinators and host families) providing essential support for cross group contacts. (p. 5)

A common criticism of holiday schemes relates to a lack of follow up events in order to maintain friendships across the groups (Stringer & Cairns, 1992). It is argued that the impact can only be limited given the challenges of maintaining friendships once participants have returned to their everyday lives in a strongly divided society. Interestingly, this is something which CFPNI aimed to tackle. First, a key requirement in pairing up participants was that they must live within a few miles of each other. Parents were also actively involved in the process and had to agree to meet up at least once for a pre-departure program as well as agreeing to attend the follow-up program (Harroun, 2009). In particular, the project put a strong emphasis on its structured post-holiday programmes which included a reunion event where participants, parents, a selection of host families and CFPNI volunteer coordinators could come together to share what they had learned and experienced.

More generally, questions have been raised about the need to go beyond the level of superficial contact towards engaging youth in understanding the root causes of conflict and analysing power relations within society. Despite theory highlighting the importance of intergroup inequalities, many programmes have been accused of operating at the level of interpersonal exchange that is unlikely to have an impact on broader social, institutional and structural change within conflict affected societies. A variety of studies have highlighted a failure of cross-community schemes to address divisive issues (McKeown & Cairns, 2012; Robinson & Brown, 1991). This may reflect the "avoidance culture" where there is evidence of a reluctance to discuss religion and politics (Niens & Cairns, 2008).

Despite some of the criticisms, recent evidence suggests that intergroup contact can have a positive impact on attitudes between the two communities. McKeown and Cairns (2012) highlight research from the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey that indicates that young people aged 16 living in Northern Ireland who had attended cross-community groups demonstrated more favourable attitudes towards the outgroup in comparison with those who had not (Schubotz & Robinson, 2006). Data from the 2007 to 2008 YLT further indicates that 82% of young people who had participated in a cross-community programme agreed or strongly agreed that relations between Protestants and Catholics would be better if there were more community relations projects (Schubotz & McCarten, 2008). They argue that despite some of the weaknesses of some of these programmes related to the length of engagement and depth of discourse,

> the fact that participants in such programmes have volunteered to make contact
> with other communities and to learn about prejudice is surely in itself a step
> forward from a society who only 30 years ago was involved in violent conflict.
> (McKeown & Cairns, 2012, p. 73)

Economic Transformation

In terms of the contribution of economic change to peacebuilding, the literature highlights the importance of increasing potential livelihoods and therefore the opportunity cost to an individual of taking part in war. One organisation with a long-standing interest in this area is the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). The Fund was established in 1986 by the British and Irish Governments "to promote economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland" (International Fund for Ireland, 2011, p. 8). Financed by contributions from the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as of September 2011 the total resources committed totalled £695 million.

One of the Fund's longest established programmes *Wider Horizons* was established in 1986 to bring together young adults aged 16 to 28 years to enhance their employability. Each project typically lasts 20 weeks and is divided into three stages. The first stage includes training in vocational skills, conflict resolution, mutual understanding, team building and personal development. Stage two involves work experience in destinations such as Canada, America, Europe and South Africa and the third stage involves completing a vocational qualification and developing job search skills on their return. Over 17,000 young people have taken part in the programme. Whilst it has always targeted young people, the

programme has evolved to actively target disadvantaged groups. In 1994 it was decided to channel all resources to only one target group, "young people aged 18 to 28 years, who are disadvantaged either socially, economically or physically, especially through poor qualifications and poor employment prospects" (Fitzpatrick and Associates, 2008, p. 15). It specifically aims to attract those in long-term unemployment or those who have been carers (this links with the social disadvantage criterion). It also targets young people with a poor employment record, and with consent, those who are in jobs that are at-risk, or are under-employed.

The peacebuilding literature highlights that what is crucial is whether training results in increased employability. Short term programming that is not well aligned to an analysis of labour market needs is unfortunately an all too common occurrence in the post-conflict international literature (Ginifer, 2003; Paulson, 2009). The resulting frustration with training that fails to deliver what it seems to promise is very problematic in terms of long term peacebuilding. In 2010, 71% of Wider Horizons participants progressed into employment or training. This is a positive result given that the programme specifically targets the long-term unemployed and compares very favourably with an average of 50-55% for other employment programmes.

The international literature on technical and vocational training indicates that the degree of choice and flexibility that participants have with regards their training has critical implications for their level of satisfaction and therefore the likelihood of successfully completing the programme (Paulson, 2009). The training provision delivered through IFI programmes has evolved to provide more choice and flexibility for participants. A realisation that there is a need and desire for accreditation has led to a greater variety of qualifications being offered. There is now a choice of 68 qualifications offered to Wider Horizons participants. For example, those undertaking training in multimedia can choose between completing a BTEC qualification III or the shorter BCS Digital Creator Certificate depending on the time and resources they have available and their academic background and abilities. There has also been a shift in the types of training offered in line with the changing needs of the labour market. Much of the early training provided through Wider Horizons was in carpentry, plumbing and hospitality and tourism. However, in recognition of a shift towards a knowledge-based economy there has been an increase in multimedia and IT related training.

This shift towards greater choice and flexibility in vocational training is something which is also reflected in changes in the formal sector. The Northern Ireland Council for the

Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) pushed for a revision of the curriculum and these changes were formalised in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. The revised curriculum aims to provide a more joined-up and holistic approach, place greater emphasis on work skills and provide greater flexibility for pupils (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2009). In particular, in an attempt to greater prepare students for work, the revised curriculum requires students from 11-16 years to study "Learning for life and work". This includes education for employability, local and global citizenship, personal development and home economics. There is also a greater emphasis on cross-curricular skills such as communication, using mathematics, and using ICT. As part of this revised curriculum the Department of Education has also started to introduce an "Entitlement Framework", which aims to provide students aged between 14 and 19 with a guaranteed minimum number and range of applied (vocational) and general (academic) courses. From 2013, schools will be required to provide students aged 14-16 years with access to a minimum of 24 courses, and post-16 students with access to a minimum of 27 courses. At least one third of the courses must be general and one third must be applied (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2014).

Northern Ireland is also participating in a UK-wide programme to reform the vocational qualification system. The aims of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) are to simplify the current complicated National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

> by presenting qualifications in a way which is easier to understand, to recognise more learning through the award of qualifications and to instil more flexibility into the system through the use of units and credit awarded for achieving those units. (Byrne. 2010, p. 31)

Every unit and qualification in the QCF has a level between Entry level and level 8 which indicates the degree of difficulty. Every unit and qualification also has a credit value (with one credit representing 10 hours of study). There are three types of qualifications in the QCF: Awards (1-12 credit); Certificates (13 to 36 credits); Diplomas (37 credits or more) (Byrne, 2010, p. 31).

What makes the Wider Horizons programme distinctive from the type of training provided in the formal system, however, is the composition of each project group and the holistic approach. A Wider Horizons project group typically involves 21 participants drawn equally from the nationalist and unionist traditions in the North of Ireland and young people from the Republic of Ireland. The Wider Horizons programme has as one of its main aims *to*

encourage and support peace and reconciliation between young people from both nationalist and unionist communities in the North and young people from the South of Ireland. The programme employs a number of approaches to delivering Mutual Understanding, and all offer accredited training, as well as informal and one-to-one support (see Fitzpartick and Associates, 2008 for further details). A 2008 evaluation found clear evidence of Mutual Understanding having been advanced. The level of cross-community and cross-border contact among past participants up to two years after the end of the programme is 80%. Indeed 93% of the Northern participants have maintained cross border and cross-community contact. This was one of the highest indicators of lasting mutual understanding (Fitzpartick and Associates, 2008, p. 6).

Political Transformation

The research literature has highlighted the importance of promoting political engagement among youth. The WIMPS (Where is My Public Servant?) project was founded in Belfast in 2004 by the non-profit organisation Public Achievement. Public Achievement staff work with the young people through their 'Civic Youth Work' model (VeLure Roholt, 2005; VeLure Roholt, Hildreth, & Baizerman, 2009), encouraging them to take action on issues they identify as important. Participants are also trained in journalism and media skills to enable them to research and create interviews and articles, and produce video and audio programming. Young people interview politicians and others for video "Hot-Seat" interviews, make films about issues in their communities, and can identify (through a postcode search) and email their elected representatives at local government (District Council), Northern Ireland Assembly, Westminster and European Parliament levels about issues that are important to them. The website also has an active discussion forum, where young people discuss issues that are important and relevant to them.

A common criticism of civic education programmes is that too much emphasis is placed on transferring civic "knowledge" and insufficient attention is paid to engaging young people in the practice of democracy (Quaynor, 2012). However, Public Achievement takes the position that young people are citizens now, rather than citizens in preparation (Smyth, 2012, p. 8). This, the director of Public Achievement argues, is in line with Miller's (2000) active model of citizenship. Distinct from the liberal model (under which citizenship is seen as a set of rights and obligations) and the consumer model (whereby citizens are consumers of services and rights are 'handed down'); under the active model citizens are actively

involved in the way their community functions. Under this model Miller (2000) envisages a society,

> In which ordinary people are heavily involved in deciding issues and achieving goals, not just voting for governments and then letting them make decisions for them. ..If we are going to rely on active citizenship to decide issues, then citizens have to be prepared to see beyond their own interests and commitments and take a wider, more impartial view. ..This identification...gives you a sense of responsibility for the whole, and not merely the particular subgroup you belong to, whether this is an ethnic group, or a group of like-minded activists. (p. 29)

Public Achievement's evaluation indicates early evidence of impact both in terms of increased civic knowledge of participants and also an increased readiness to approach politicians and take action on what they consider to be important issues. Research, by Smyth (2013), documents the way in which attitudes of young people towards politicians have changed throughout the course of the project. In fact the young people expressed surprise at the ease with which they could approach key figures, "The access that we could have with politicians as young people, and how easy it was to go up to Stormont (the home of the parliament in Northern Ireland)...in fact they wanted you to come up!" (p. 344). In particular, Smyth's research demonstrates that the media training and the quality of the equipment plays a key role in giving participants the confidence needed to approach and, at times, challenge politicians. This highlights the importance of the skills training element of the project. Moreover, Smyth's (2013) research indicates a level of impact beyond the scope of the project, with some evidence of participants going on to become involved in school and student politics (pp. 344-345).

The active citizenship model is not only important in encouraging greater forms of youth participation, but also has particular benefits given the problematic nature of national identity in post-accord Northern Ireland. The baseline data indicates that WIMPS participants have diverse backgrounds. Ages of participants range from 12 to 30 years old, with the mean age of participants being 17.3 years. Both female and males participate in WIMPS, although there is a larger proportion of females (70%) than males (30%). Most notably, however, there is an almost equal distribution of participants from the Protestant (52%) and Catholic (48%) communities. Smyth (2012) argues that it is the active citizenship model that allows the creation of a neutral space (both virtual and face-to-face) where members of the different traditions can come to work together on common goals.

The young people are aware of the citizens paradox- that it is difficult to agree on notions of citizenship when we can't agree what we are citizens of- but their practical sense of active citizenship means that notions of national identity take a back seat. (p. 348)

More research is needed into the implications of this approach for long term social cohesion and democratic values. However, it is clear that one important impact of the programme is that it has allowed young people to meet and work with individuals from other communities and gain greater awareness of the multiples sides to understanding truth.

Conclusion

This analysis has highlighted important linkages between education and conflict with implications for peacebuilding programming. The literature, however, has largely neglected the role of non-formal youth programming, despite its importance in contexts of conflict. This paper has provided an analysis of three youth programmes that have contributed to social, economic and political transformations in post-accord Northern Ireland. One important distinction to emerge relates to the inclusion of multiple youth perspectives and backgrounds in each of these programmes. Fifteen years after the peace agreement people in Northern Ireland "still live, work and learn in a largely segregated society" (International Fund for Ireland, 2010, p. 3). There are currently 59 peace walls dividing communities across Northern Ireland, nine of which have been erected since the signing of the peace agreement in 1998, and data from the 2011 census shows that 37% of electoral wards are single identity (as defined by having 80% or more from one communal background). In particular, the education sector is an important mechanism in the reproduction of this structural segregation. The establishment of 62 integrated "common" schools serving 7% of the school population is a considerable achievement in the midst of conflict and within a divided society (Smith, 2013). However, recent figures show that almost half of Northern Ireland's school children are still being taught in schools where 95% or more of the pupils are of the same religion (Hansson et al., 2013, p. 47).

Given the context of segregation and the current limitations of the formal education sector as a mechanism for transformation, the inclusion of multiples youth perspectives in non-formal youth programmes is an important contribution. A common criticism of intercultural programmes is that they tend to attract young people who already hold positive attitudes towards intergroup mixing and who have parents who also support intergroup mixing. From a peacebuilding perspective this raises a critical question regarding the politics

of which youth voices are represented. Youth are not a homogeneous group that exist in isolation from conflict itself. Youth may be perpetrators as well as victims of violence, mobilized to fuel the conflict as well as motivated to end it. This presents significant challenges for genuine youth engagement in terms of identifying the multiplicity of youth perspectives on the conflict, the politics of who represents youth opinion, and which youth organizations receive funding and resources. Perhaps the greatest challenge is that peacebuilding inevitably involves bringing politically opposed or marginalized groups into dialogue. While peace agreements might represent new working arrangements between political elites, relapses into conflict are common, especially where younger generations do not see or experience the benefits of peace. Sustainable peace is therefore unlikely without youth commitment, since it is the youth who have the capacity to carry a conflict into the next generation. This means that difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions have to be made about how to achieve youth engagement that is inclusive of the full range of youth. From a peacebuilding perspective, consideration of inclusion needs to go beyond measures of equality in terms of representation from the two communities, to examine the politics of which youth voices are being represented.

Furthermore, whilst the three case study youth programmes have clearly identified theories of change, it is questionable to what extent these have been designed and articulated from a peacebuilding perspective. The Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland (CFPNI) has a strong basis in contact hypothesis theory and follows the key steps outlined by researchers. However, the reluctance to discuss divisive issues leads us to question its transformative potential. In terms of economic contribution to transformation, technical and vocational training schemes often receive criticism in the international literature for failing to increase employment opportunities. It is argued that this may even lead to the creation of grievances in the mismatch between aspirations and reality. Wider Horizons has demonstrated a level of success in this regard, with a relatively high level of graduates progressing into employment. However, it will be important to give consideration to the implications of the current economic downturn for the programme from a conflict and peacebuilding perspective. Finally, Public Achievement's WIMPS project has perhaps the most explicitly defined peacebuilding goal. New media allow participants to communicate on an equal basis and raise issues that are of relevance to their lives. By putting youth in direct contact with politicians, they can also act as an important mechanism of accountability in support of political transformation.

In conclusion, this article has highlighted three examples of programming that contribute to social, economic and political transformations. Over the course of the past fifteen years there has been an important shift in the priorities and objectives of actors and agencies involved in youth programming in Northern Ireland. From an early emphasis on economic regeneration, realisation of the persistent nature of segregation has led to an emerging consensus around the need for peacebuilding. This is a significant shift, with important implications for programming. Crucially, it involves a shift towards a more political realm. WIMPS is an explicitly political project, which perhaps explains why it is the project that seems most at ease with the peacebuilding goal. However, all actors and agencies need to give further thought as to what this shift means in practice for their priorities and programming. From a peacebuilding perspective, key issues include the politics of multiple youth representation as well as the design of youth programmes that are most likely to bring about social, economic and political transformation.

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