

## **Education: Cultural reproduction, revolution and peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies<sup>a</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews some of the key debates in the growing field of education and conflict studies. In recent years, the interrelationship between education and conflict has been explored widely in the academic as well as practitioner literature<sup>1</sup>. More importantly, the development practitioners are increasingly recognising the need for understanding this complex nexus in order to inform educational programming in conflict-affected environments<sup>2</sup>. In the era of globalisation, education serves as a mechanism for social, political and economic control, which is exercised in the consensual mutuality between political elites and corporate interests. In this context, societies struggle to cultivate humanity against the dominance of neoliberalism as well as to make schooling relevant to disenfranchised populations while recognising social and cultural situationality of education. In this chapter, I will discuss the following key issues relating to education, social change and conflict particularly focusing on: 1) interactions between education and conflict – that education as victim and perpetrator; 2) education as liberation, resistance and revolution; and 3) education as peacebuilder and pedagogies for peacebuilding.

### **Education as victim: Attacks on education**

Since the fall of Soviet Union and the end of cold war, the nature of armed conflicts has changed from inter-state wars to largely, intra-state civil wars. Wars are no longer fought in demarcated zones resulting in increasing civilian casualties that largely include women and children. UNICEF estimated that over 2 million children were killed in conflicts between 1998 and 2008 while another 6 million were disabled and over 300,000 were recruited as child soldiers<sup>3</sup>. In educational terms, children living in conflict-affected countries are the worst affected. Almost 50 million primary and secondary school-age children living in conflict-affected countries are being denied to go to school, which is 50% of the world's total out of school children<sup>4</sup>.

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The *Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack* reports on a global study of threats or deliberate use of force against educational stakeholders as well as schools and universities. For example, over 1000 schools have been turned into detention and torture centres while 2,445 were reported to have been destroyed by 2013 in the Syrian conflict<sup>5</sup>. United Nations reported that over 10,000 children lost their lives in the Syrian conflict between March 2011 and January 2014<sup>6</sup>. Violent conflicts disrupt educational processes. Schooling often becomes paralysed when educational infrastructure is destroyed and teachers, children and educational authorities are caught in violent conflict. Despite being enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enforced by numerous international laws and treaties, education is frequently targeted by non-state armed groups as well as the state security forces. Assaults on education are carried out for ideological, political, ethnic or military reasons but the direct victims of violence are usually innocent children and teachers. For example, Israeli military attacked three UN schools in Gaza in July/ August 2014 killing 45 people including, 17 children<sup>7</sup>. State armed forces in several countries including, Colombia, Ethiopia, India and Mexico continue to occupy schools for military purposes and are involved in attacks on teachers and students<sup>8</sup>.

In some conflicts, schools are destroyed for promoting Western knowledge and cultural values such as, educating girls and teaching alien curricula, language and culture. Abduction is one of the resorts of rebel forces who have no access to “propaganda channels of state media or the coercive power of states”<sup>9</sup>. For example, the *Lords Resistance Army* in northern Uganda abducted 10,000 school children for ‘indoctrination’ along with ‘abuse and brutality’. In a recent incident, more than 200 schoolgirls were abducted from Chibok, Northern Nigeria by Boko Haram militants who disapprove modern education as a cultural invasion on their Islamic beliefs. Teachers and school children are abducted for radicalisation, to be used as combatants or support personnel in military operations and girls in particular, are forced to become sex slaves<sup>10</sup>. More than two-thirds of Rwanda’s teachers were reported to have been either killed or fled during the genocide in 1994, whereas some schools in Angola and Cambodia were deserted due to the presence of land mines in the school areas. In Timor Leste, the secondary school system was paralysed due to the failure to return of the trained and qualified secondary school teachers, who were predominantly Indonesians<sup>11</sup>. In Nepal, approximately 32,000 children were reported to have been abducted from schools to force participate in political campaigns of the rebelling Maoists and an estimated 3000 teachers had been displaced from the schools in the rural areas, directly impacting on an estimated 100,000 students’ education<sup>12</sup>. The Taliban attack on Pakistani young activist Malala Yousafzai and her classmates in October 2012 represented the scale of risks children face in conflict zones. The deliberate assaults on teachers, students and educational infrastructure as well as the

occupation of educational facilities by the armed forces has destabilised the notion of schools as safe places for children during conflict. Where schools are susceptible to attack, the provision of education in such contexts should rather take an unconventional and imaginative approach. The campaign for formal schooling as ‘education in emergencies’ must be reconsidered when the schools are tactical targets of conflicting parties.

In recent years, education has also become an integral part of counter-insurgency strategy, resulting in militarisation of education aid in conflict-affected countries<sup>13</sup>. The most prominent donor countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Netherlands and Canada have adopted a ‘3D’ approach in which ‘development’ agenda has an implicit goal for strengthening national ‘defence’ and effective ‘diplomacy’. Consequently, development aid has been redirected to countries that pose security threats to the Western world while support for many of the world’s poorest countries is predicted to be either stagnant or in decline. A recent Development Assistance Committee (DAC) report reveals that aid is expected to rise in Asian countries such as India, Jordan and Pakistan but ‘a worrying trend’ of decline is projected for the aid dependent countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and yet, it is expected to increase for Cameroon, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia<sup>14</sup>. Educational interventions also feature within the military tactics to win ‘hearts and minds’ of the local communities to fight insurgencies. The military involvement in dispersing education aid, as observed in Afghanistan and Iraq, is a worrying trend, which has increased risks to school children and aid workers, undermined the goals for poverty reduction and skewed aid towards ‘frontline’ states<sup>15</sup>. The changing dynamics, intentions and geographical foci of global conflicts seem to determine DAC countries’ priorities for development aid. In other words, aid follows violent conflicts, especially the ones that pose direct threats to political ideologies, values and beliefs of the donor countries. The volatility of aid in low-income countries is not only counter-productive to development goals but also ethically questionable, as educational programmes that shape children’s future require long-term commitments.

### **Education as perpetrator: The contentious nexus and cultural reproduction**

In the last decade, there is a growing body of literature that analyses education as having two or multiple faces that education systems can be both ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’<sup>16</sup>. Formal education plays contesting roles that range from its contribution to conflict mitigation, statebuilding and building more resilient societies<sup>17</sup> to a socially destructive role by maintaining unequal access and quality to education, offering a segregated and unjust educational provision, manipulating history and textbooks, denying education to certain social and ethnic groups, and repressing minority languages and culture<sup>18</sup>. The imposition of dominant language on diverse ethnic and indigenous groups through formal education serves

as a repressive force and is a way of destroying their resource base and eroding the very essence of their life that constitutes culture, traditions and identity. Most importantly, in many societies, privileged social or ethnic groups manipulate historical knowledge, which is validated and formalised through teaching, learning and assessment in schools. This process legitimises certain historical narratives while systematically negating the others.

Educational resources including textbooks often glorify military victories and engage in collective demonization of the opponents, which serves as a political instrument to manufacture ideological consent in favour of the state. As Lall shows, the curricular revisions in India under the Hindu fundamentalist government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (1998 - 2004) and in Pakistan during the military junta under General Zia-ul-Haq (1977 – 1988) were driven by ideological interests of the regimes that created antagonistic identities between Pakistani and Indian youth<sup>19</sup>. The revised school curricula served as ideological machinery for both political leaderships in ‘fundamentalization’ of national identities through which the regimes manufactured consent of their citizens. The biased curricular contents, enforced by authoritarian states fabricate chauvinistic national identity that is repressive of and deceptive to diverse representations of civic lives. The dominance of hill high castes and their native language on ethnic minorities in Nepal, depiction of Tamils as the historical ‘other’ in Singhalese textbooks, anti-Jewish and anti-Roma doctrines in Nazi textbooks, misrepresentation of the WWII atrocities caused by Japanese troops in China and Korea and negative ethnic stereotypes in Rwandan text books before the genocide in 1994 do all exemplify misrepresentation and production of historical prejudices through education. Education in these contexts legitimates partial knowledge that also shapes and normalises distorted perceptions against marginalised groups. In this process, education exacerbates ethnic distinctions and social hierarchies that generate necessary conditions for violent conflict.

Duffield argues that contemporary neo-liberal global economy and exclusionary ‘polity’ have resulted in increased violence globally<sup>20</sup>. These are expressed in the ravaging of indigenous populations in India, Brazil or Ethiopia in order to protect corporate interests or in political terms, authenticated by selective interventionist policies that choose to interfere in conflict in Libya but not in Sri Lanka. Education plays an implicit but central role in reproducing these deeply rooted hierarchical and manipulative structures both at national and global spheres<sup>21</sup>. In doing so, education maintains socioeconomic divisions as well as fuels political tensions that often lead to violent conflicts. This understanding has important implications for education policies and programming in general but more specifically, in conflict-affected environments where educational reforms need to be understood beyond the framework of service delivery. Uncritical, technocratic and apolitical education inculcates submission to

economic and political interests of the corporate sector and disconnects learners from the basic principles of humanity such as love, compassion, mutuality and social justice.

The reproduction theorists tend to suggest that children and young people are passive recipients of the educational processes in which they learn to conform to the social structures<sup>22</sup>. Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction is concerned with the relationship between educational attainment and class inequalities. Bourdieu argues that the education systems of industrialised societies mediate the reproduction of the original class membership by recognising the cultural capital and higher-class social and cultural attributes. Cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society where, the level of affiliation with and competence across stratified social groups vary. The education systems discount the preconditions of learners and assume the homogeneous possession of cultural capital irrespective of children's class affiliation. Bourdieu argues that education "is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a *social* gift treated as a *natural* one."<sup>23</sup> Higher-class children who inherit cultural capital in their homes are better positioned to gain higher educational credentials that enable them to hold dominant positions in society, which contributes to reproduce their social class.

In low and middle income countries, social hierarchies are manifested in the forms of ethnic, caste-based or regional divisions in which opportunities of modern education and development are more likely to be seized by historically privileged sociocultural groups. In the former colonies of the European empire, these groups would draw upon their cultural capital, gained through historical socialisation with the colonial powers, in brokering or resisting the imperial hegemonic control. In the post-colonial times, the colonial systems remained only to be replaced by neo-colonial national actors who would monopolise key realms of society. Ordinary people were never liberated. The advent of educational development supported by aid in the post-colonial era largely benefitted these privileged groups to exploit new opportunities created by economic globalization while perpetuating deeply rooted structural inequalities in these societies.

When the prospects of social mobility are blocked, people lose patience for progress and development and look for 'escape' or 'individual spatial mobility', in other words, what Ferguson notes, "Not progress, then but egress"<sup>24</sup>. As the spatial mobility for the oppressed is controlled by powerful economic and political structures, "other avenues may involve violently clashing the gates of the "first class," smashing the bricked-up walls and breaking through if temporarily, to the "other side" of privilege and plenty"<sup>25</sup>.

## **Education as liberation: From resistance to revolution**

The cultural landscapes of the classroom serve as a microcosm of the broader community within which the educational processes take place. Classroom encounters characterise hierarchically structured values, norms and skills that define and produce stratified workforce demanded by the market economy. This is evident in the practice of stratified educational expectations across children from stratified social groups. Bowles and Gintis explain this phenomenon as the correspondence theory that schools not only allocate different categories of learning that correspond to different hierarchies across gender, race, ethnicity and caste but also symbolise the broader class-based structures of the society<sup>26</sup>. However, the failure to acknowledge confrontational interactions between structural and ideological control of schooling and its stakeholders such as teachers and students makes the theories of reproduction “‘pessimistic and fatalistic’”<sup>27</sup>. The idea that pupils and educators are passive recipients of hegemonic curricula imposed by the state and can therefore do nothing about the role of education in reproducing social inequalities is essentially flawed<sup>28</sup>. It is important to recognise that “‘resistance to the structural determinants of the education system can also emerge within the autonomy of a school, where the space of the classroom and of its surrounding communities can be exploited and expanded by educators in order to exercise counter-hegemonic pedagogies’”<sup>29</sup>.

Socio-political movements provide a meaningful space for youth from marginalised communities who are used to subconscious resistance to the cultural hegemony of schooling. Ironically, within their dominant patterns of cultural reproduction, schools unintentionally produce oppositional groups that challenge hegemonic and cultural domination of privileged groups in society. Political uprisings often capitalise on youth frustration that stems from unemployment, socioeconomic exclusion and bleak aspirations for future, which are exacerbated by exclusionary social policies and educational practices.

Educational institutions are not only the centres for production of economic workforce but also important political junctions where teachers and learners actively engage in the critical debates surrounding the issues and state policies that impact upon their lives. The failure of ‘development promises’, particularly the lack of economic opportunities, only serves for political violence. Urdal shows that ‘youth bulges’<sup>30</sup> increase the risk of political violence and particularly, the expansion of higher education without the ability to absorb graduates into appropriate employment significantly increases the risk of destabilisation.

## **Education as peacebuilder: Concepts and pedagogies**

Educational policies that promote equitable access to education can benefit socioeconomically disadvantaged populations through which potential ethnic tensions can be minimised. Schools can promote instruction in the mother tongue especially in early years, rather than imposing a dominant national language on minority groups. Bush and Saltarelli argue that the provision of schooling in the child's first language "helps to develop inclusive ethos" and hence, "it is difficult to marginalize children with different languages, cultures and histories if these are integral parts of the education process"<sup>31</sup>. The authors further mention "bilingual education will help ethnic groups participate as citizens of the countries in which they live presenting them with the knowledge and means to defend their interests as well as revitalising and strengthening their own cultures"<sup>32</sup>.

Nevertheless, peacebuilding education initiatives in conflict-affected environments lack explicit links to peacebuilding theories and tend to focus on the immediate humanitarian needs with "a greater emphasis on protection and reconstruction" rather than "transformation" that "requires a more explicit commitment to political, economic and social change"<sup>33</sup>. Such interventions are underpinned by the liberal views of schooling that assume that public education creates opportunities for individual development, social mobility and; empowers those who have been traditionally denied access to economic and political power. In this process, educational reforms are concerned with potential contribution of education in mitigating conflict not only by enhancing human capital and hence enabling economic growth through educational investment but also by increasing capabilities of individuals to achieve their functionings (e.g. being safe, staying healthy, being educated, being able to have a job and contribute to society etc.)<sup>34</sup>.

The popular model of educational development in conflict-affected environments draws on the hybrid logic of development that predominantly favours free market, liberal democracy, individualism and competition but also with some recognition of human rights, civil liberties and gender equality<sup>35</sup>. Educational reforms in such contexts coincide with the processes of liberal peacebuilding that promotes Western models of economy and governing systems which are often rationalised against the objective of "a self-sustaining peace within domestic, regional and international settings, in which both overt and structural violence are removed and social, economic and political models conform to international expectations in a globalized, transnational settings"<sup>36</sup>. It is evident from the peacebuilding missions and their programming in post-conflict countries including Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, El Salvador, East Timor and Cambodia that most influential international development agencies "have supported the transformation of war-shattered states into liberal

market democracies”<sup>37</sup> where public funding to education has declined, private provision is favoured and market-oriented education policies and disciplines are prioritised. It is ironical that the conflicts that were caused by economic and political inequalities in these societies are being prescribed neoliberal policy solutions that have categorically failed to reduce inequalities.

Education for peacebuilding is characterised by action-oriented multidisciplinary learning process that goes beyond the knowledge-based classroom activity about peace, in order to build capacities of learners who are able to interrupt the continuum of violence (symbolic, structural and physical). The curriculum for peacebuilding should combine classroom-based interactions with practical activities that relate to social, cultural and political issues and are based in the local communities. Bush and Saltarelli note that peacebuilding education should involve “a bottom-up rather than top down process driven by war-torn communities themselves, founded on their experiences and capacities. It would be firmly rooted in immediate realities, not in abstract ideas or theories”<sup>38</sup>. Gill and Niens also provide a useful synthesis of diverse theoretical concepts to develop a coherent framework for analysis of peacebuilding education. Drawing upon diverse pedagogical practices embedded in peacebuilding education initiatives, they propose a “dialogic humanising pedagogy” that builds on the foundations of critical theory and the Freirean pedagogy of participation, emancipation and transformation<sup>39</sup>. The role of education should expand from narrow view of preparation for employment in the corporate world to inculcating fundamental attributes of humanity - love, compassion and humility. Krishnamurti mentions that “education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating fact; it is to see the significance of life as a whole”<sup>40</sup>. He further suggests:

In over-emphasizing technique, we destroy man (*sic*). To cultivate capacity and efficiency without understanding life, without having a comprehensive perception of the ways of thought and desire, will only make us increasingly ruthless, which is to engender wars and jeopardize our physical security.<sup>41</sup>

Peace cannot be taught without engaging in critical debates and dialogues about the causes of conflict. Reconciliation and relation-building are important to rebuild societies that are ruined by violent conflict. For sustainable peacebuilding, alongside macro level structural reforms that are committed to social justice, inclusive democracy and improving life conditions of marginalised populations, it is also important to promote “humanising and transformative agenda”<sup>42</sup> in order to strengthen social foundations for peace. However, the existing educational systems are not conducive to ‘dialogic pedagogy’ and would require a



fundamental shift in order to accommodate new approaches to learning and teaching for peace<sup>43</sup>. This requires liberation of schools from the hegemonic control of the political elite where critical pedagogues “must help subordinated groups to deconstruct dominant ideologies”<sup>44</sup>. In this regard, teachers need to be viewed as intellectuals in their capacities as educators who have important social functions. Aronowitz and Giroux provide us four useful categories to understand the role of teachers as intellectuals: “hegemonic intellectuals”, who represent ideologies of the dominant groups and recreate educational environment and social class; “accommodating intellectuals”, who accept the system uncritically and refrain from political action by proclaiming professionalism; “critical intellectuals”, who are conscious about inequality and injustice and provide same education regardless of students’ backgrounds but hesitate to embark upon collective struggle and; “transformative intellectuals” who help students to resist hegemony and take proactive actions to empower students to take control of their education<sup>45</sup>. Transformative teachers are “able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform their practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and who work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of their labor, and embody in their teaching a vision of a better and more humane life”<sup>46</sup>.

Peacebuilding education is essentially a progressive project that is likely to face challenges from the elitist political and social systems. The idea of empowering the grassroots by engaging them in action-oriented learning can pose threats to the established orthodoxies that may turn antagonistic to the emancipatory pedagogical approaches. Additionally, the rise of global governance of education, as pursued through international development agencies, impedes diverse forms of learning and meanings of education, while imposing market-driven educational policies in developing countries. Such policies often nurture symbiotic relationships between privileged social groups and the exclusive opportunities, created by the meritocratic economic market (e.g. lucrative jobs in multinational companies and I/NGOs are likely to be occupied by highly qualified individuals with foreign language skills, usually from elitist educational backgrounds). Hence, educational reforms from a peacebuilding perspective must coincide with socioeconomic and political reforms that address structural inequalities and enhance inclusive democracy. In post-conflict settings where conventional political structures have been ruptured, more favourable environments and opportunities are likely to be available for progressive educational reforms.

## **Conclusion: education for peacebuilding**

Education can be a key force for unifying people from across dividing lines and transforming the culture of violence. However, it can also generate favourable conditions for violent conflict. Recognising this complex role of education enables us to engage in conflict sensitive educational programming in order to address the ‘negative face’ of education and enhance its ‘socially constructive impact’. This chapter has demonstrated that education is both victim and the cause of conflict but more importantly, it can play a key role in rebuilding post-conflict societies and nurturing the culture of mutual respect and peace. While education must be protected from violence, recognising the broader context (e.g. cultural, economic, political and social) within which education is situated lends us to understand education as a transformative force.

The knowledge, ideologies and perspectives that are represented by 'our major educating institutions' in society are 'partial representations of social reality' which 'simultaneously frame, fragment, and distort the perceptions and concerns of more subordinated groups'<sup>47</sup>. They inherently legitimise the thinking and monopoly of the dominant political class. It is the task of peacebuilding educators to systematically challenge and provide learners with necessary intellectual tools to question dominant structures that reproduce inequalities and normalise injustices. Post-conflict educational contexts can and should provide such a free space for transformative educators.

Peacebuilding education should help liberate minds from the tyranny of dominant ideologies that block progressive thoughts and erode learner's confidence to seek alternative meanings of human life. Educators should not only provide an impetus for the criticism of these dominant ideologies but also offer intellectual tools for and be part of the critical movement for social transformation. For building peace, there is an urgent need for rethinking and reevaluating philosophy of modern education if it has to envision a peaceful future for humanity. As Krishnamurti suggested:

Technical knowledge, however necessary, will in no way resolve our inner, psychological pressures and conflicts; and it is because we have acquired technical knowledge without understanding the total process of life that technology has become a means of destroying ourselves. The man who knows how to split the atom but has no love in his heart becomes a monster<sup>48</sup>.

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