Abstract

Both research and evolving practice in peacebuilding and education have contributed to growing cross-fertilization between the two fields. Countries emerging from conflict face unique challenges, and actors working in such contexts have a responsibility to tailor their programs with a view to contributing directly or indirectly to peacebuilding. Peacebuilding requires a political strategy which provides a framework for greater coherence and collaboration on the part of diverse actors supporting a country’s multi-faceted needs through sector-specific interventions, including education. Experts recognize the special needs of the education sector in conflict contexts and the importance of addressing these needs through innovative policies and programs. In light of recent peacebuilding research and practice, it is particularly important to incorporate conflict sensitivity into the design and implementation of education policies and programs. Compiling comparative lessons on successful education programs in different conflict contexts is necessary to develop a cumulative body of knowledge and practice while identifying the difficult issues that require further research. As international peacebuilding and education experts and practitioners continue their collaboration, they need to engage their counterparts in conflict contexts in order to better incorporate country-specific experiences and perspectives.

Keywords: Conflict, education, peacebuilding, fragile states, conflict sensitivity

Introduction

Artificial boundaries between disciplinary and sectoral silos are steadily eroding—with far-reaching and exciting implications for research, policy and practice. In no field is this more important than in post-conflict peacebuilding. Conflict affects almost every aspect of life in a country; as a result, post-conflict peacebuilding deals with complex and multi-faceted challenges facing countries emerging from conflict. In post-conflict contexts, everything is urgent and inter-connected. Approaching pressing needs and priorities in a fragmented or sequential fashion is likely to be ineffective or even counter-productive. Instead, peacebuilding requires a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between concurrent needs for security, political stability, socio-economic reconstruction, environmental sustainability and psycho-social rehabilitation. It is in this context that the link between education and peacebuilding needs to be examined. Education specialists and practitioners have increasingly brought important sector-specific insights into addressing the diverse
educational needs of war-affected populations.\(^1\) Meanwhile, peacebuilding has been growing in leaps and bounds as a multidisciplinary field of research and practice.\(^2\) This brief essay reviews the opportunities for greater cross-fertilization between education and peacebuilding research and identifies key research questions that require sustained attention.

**Peacebuilding in a Nutshell**

The term peacebuilding first emerged over thirty years ago through the pioneering work of Johan Galtung. In his 1976 essay “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding,” Galtung called for structures to promote sustainable peace by addressing the ‘root causes’ of violent conflict and supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution (Galtung, 1976). While the concept was embraced by peace studies and practitioners of conflict transformation, it only gained widespread usage at the end of the Cold War with the release of then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s landmark report *An Agenda for Peace* (1992). The report identified post-conflict peacebuilding as one of a series of tools at the UN’s disposal following preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. Encompassing a wide range of activities, peacebuilding was defined as post-conflict “action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.” Since 1992, there has been a steady production of research, policy documents and academic literature devoted to examining peacebuilding from many perspectives.\(^3\)

Despite its widespread usage and conceptual evolution since the early 1990s, peacebuilding does not have a commonly-accepted definition. Instead, there are multiple definitions that reflect the diversity of perspectives and approaches that comprise peacebuilding in the post-Cold War era.\(^4\) It is widely accepted that there is no single blueprint for peacebuilding. Nonetheless, there is growing agreement that certain basic principles and features are essential to peacebuilding across different contexts. These include:

- **Specificity of peacebuilding**: because each context is unique and stages of conflict are non-linear, peacebuilding strategies have to be context-specific and address the sources of conflict.
- **Holistic approach**: peacebuilding encompasses multiple dimensions including security, socio-economic development, political stability, rule of law, human rights, and humanitarian assistance.
- **National ownership**: the primary responsibility for peacebuilding rests with national actors.
- **Role of external actors**: given the legacy of conflict and weakened national capacities, external actors can contribute in important ways to peacebuilding.
- **Coordination and mutual accountability**: national and international actors need to act in a coherent manner and share mutual accountability.
- **Importance of monitoring, evaluation and continual learning**: as a relatively new field involving constant experimentation and innovation, peacebuilding requires cumulative and comparative learning from successes as well as failures.

The challenge lies in applying the above principles in concrete contexts. Perhaps one of the key insights to emerge from two decades of peacebuilding research and practice since the end of the Cold War is that peacebuilding requires a coherent and sustainable political strategy. In the absence of such a strategy, well-intentioned interventions are unlikely to contribute to peacebuilding notwithstanding their intentions or technical merits. The implications of this key

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\(^1\) See, for example, the proceedings from the conference titled “Education and Conflict: Research, Policy and Practice” held at Oxford University on 11-12 April 2006 published in July 2006 as a supplement to * Forced Migration Review*; available at [http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/EducationSupplement/full.pdf](http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/EducationSupplement/full.pdf)

\(^2\) For a good summary of the origins and evolution of peacebuilding, see [www.peacebuildinginitiative.org](http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org).

\(^3\) For a good summary of the evolution of peacebuilding, see: [www.peacebuildinginitiative.org](http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org)

insight have yet to be fully understood and applied in post-conflict contexts. However, there are numerous efforts to design and implement a range of policy frameworks and planning tools aimed at bringing a more grounded and strategic approach to peacebuilding through new types of partnerships. Ultimately, the goal of such efforts is two-fold: to facilitate a common approach to peacebuilding, and to ensure that individual programs and projects do not inadvertently contribute to conflict.

The Role of Education in Peacebuilding

The education sector is an important component of a country’s peacebuilding and early recovery efforts. Inevitably, there are strong pressures to continue providing education in emergencies and to restore educational institutions rapidly as part of an early recovery strategy. Indeed, in 2000, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was created as an open global network of representatives from NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, governments, academic institutions, schools and affected populations to work together to ensure the right to quality and safe education in emergencies and post-crisis recovery.

In conflict and post-conflict contexts, the educational sector is often burdened with additional challenges beyond the usual limitations. As the World Bank has noted with respect to fragile states (many of which are also conflict-affected):

[T]he mix and urgency of the challenges that face fragile states are usually different, which is why fragile states warrant a significantly more intense approach. For example, frequently there is an additional legacy of conflict, including massive schooling and infrastructure backlogs, additional constituencies that require urgent attention (e.g. child soldiers, refugees/returnees, demobilized or alienated youth) and additional demands on the education system issues (e.g. peace-building, vocational training, psychosocial support). Fragile situations often call for different modes of interaction with education authorities, which may be conflicted, fragmented, de facto, or illegitimate, and interaction with different international partners, including peace-keeping, humanitarian and diplomatic partners.

Yet, as recent research on peacebuilding demonstrates, it is difficult to make advances in key socio-economic sectors in the absence of a longer-term political strategy. In other words, the education sector needs to be part of a country’s larger strategy for peace consolidation. In a number of post-conflict countries, there is a growing trend towards better integration between the country’s primary development framework (which is often the Poverty Reduction Strategy) and its peacebuilding strategy. Clearly, education is central to both.

Nonetheless, not all efforts in post-conflict contexts can be directly linked to peacebuilding. It is increasingly recognized that working in a conflict context requires “conflict sensitivity” as an essential element for any effective intervention. With respect to education, the distinction between peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity is particularly relevant. Peacebuilding involves deliberate efforts to address the root causes of conflict and build mechanisms to institute peace. Conflict sensitivity, on the other hand, requires that actors working in a conflict context seek to:

a) understand the context in which they are operating as well as the interaction between their intervention and the context; and

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5 For a recent review of a range of peacebuilding strategic tools and frameworks, see the special issue of the Journal of Peacebuilding & Development titled “Advancing Coherence and Integrating Peacebuilding in Strategic Policy Frameworks” (2010) 5:2.
8 For more on the links between PRSPs and peacebuilding, see the Briefing Notes in the special issue of the Journal of Peacebuilding & Development titled “Advancing Coherence and Integrating Peacebuilding in Strategic Policy Frameworks” (2010) 5:2.
b) build upon that understanding in order to avoid the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts of their intervention on the conflict.\textsuperscript{10}

To the extent that it helps shape attitudes, behavior and social structures, education can be an underlying source of conflict. Similarly, it can also serve as a powerful instrument of peacebuilding. Indeed, there are many examples whereby the education sector has played a critical role in promoting peace by, for example, addressing inequalities, overcoming prejudices and fostering new values and institutions. Yet, beyond education’s direct contributions to peacebuilding, there is a compelling need to incorporate conflict sensitivity into the design and implementation of education programs and projects in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Indeed, many donors have begun to mainstream conflict sensitivity into their sectoral programs through various methodologies such as peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) and other similar tools.\textsuperscript{11}

Building on Evolving Research and Practice

As already noted, new research and innovative practices both in peacebuilding and education have facilitated increased cross-fertilization between the two fields. Yet, recognizing that peacebuilding is context-specific, it is critical to shine a closer light on lessons emerging from diverse contexts such as Liberia, Afghanistan and Lebanon and to document successes as well as failures in different conflict environments. Despite impressive advances to date, the peacebuilding tool kit is still quite limited when it comes to dealing with the many dilemmas confronting education in conflict contexts, in particular:

- How do we reconcile short-term vs. long-term needs?
- How do we address the special needs of certain war-affected populations (such as former combatants and child soldiers) outside the formal education system?
- What should be the balance between primary vs. secondary/tertiary education in post-conflict contexts?
- How can education reforms prioritize women’s education in countries emerging from conflict?
- How can educational programs be designed to overcome horizontal inequalities which are often one of the main sources of conflict?

The answers to these questions lie in monitoring, documenting and evaluating the innovative education programs that are currently underway in many conflict and post-conflict contexts and feeding the comparative lessons from these experiences into the design and implementation of the next generation of education programs and projects in conflict contexts. Moreover, there is a pressing need to engage national researchers and research institutes in conflict-affected countries in international research networks and communities of practice in order to better incorporate country-specific experiences and learning. Conflict and Education promises to become an important platform where researchers, policymakers and practitioners from the global South and global North can continue to build stronger bridges between education and peacebuilding.

\textsuperscript{10} For more on conflict sensitivity, see International Alert et al., 2004. Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource Pack. London: International Alert (available for download at www.conflictsensitivity.org


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References
