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DOI
10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144

Publication date
2016

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Comparative Education

License
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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A., & Shah, R. (2016). A conceptual framework to analyse the multiscalar politics of education for sustainable peacebuilding. *Comparative Education*, *52*(4), 516-537. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144

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Download date:08 Nov 2026

Comparative Education

ISSN: 0305-0068 (Print) 1360-0486 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cced20

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To cite this article: Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo & Ritesh Shah (2016) A conceptual framework to analyse the multiscalar politics of education for sustainable peacebuilding, Comparative Education, 52:4, 516-537, DOI: 10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144

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COMPARATIVE EDUCATION, 2016
VOL. 52, NO. 4, 516–537
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144

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A conceptual framework to analyse the multiscalar politics of education for sustainable peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

A critical and more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between projects of peacebuilding and educational provision is starting to develop. Drawing on an epistemological and ontological anchor of critical realism, and a methodology informed by the application of cultural political economy analysis and the strategic relational approach to understanding educational discourses, processes and outcomes, we illustrate how the 'many faces' of education in conflict-affected situations can be better theorised and conceptually represented. In doing so, we link goals of peacebuilding to those of social justice, and reinvigorate the notion of education playing a transformative rather than a restorative role in conflict-affected contexts. Making such ideas concrete, we provide examples of how such an analytical framework can be employed to understand the multi-faceted relationship between education and projects of social transformation in conflict-affected environments across the globe.

KEYWORDS

Critical realism; cultural political economy of education; strategic relational approach; peacebuilding; social justice

Introduction

'Neglecting education can sow the seeds for a next conflict. Education in emergencies is demanded, life-saving and life-sustaining', were the words of long-standing international education consultant Christopher Talbot, who presented at an international seminar in Geneva.[1] It is now well established that communities place high value on education in conflict-affected settings and perceive it as one of the few protective measures in situations of insecurity or instability (Smith 2005; Smith and Vaux 2003; UNESCO 2011; Winthrop 2011; Winthrop and Kirk 2008). In post-conflict periods, education can provide for psychosocial recovery, normalcy, hope and the inculcation of values and skills for building and maintaining a peaceful future (Sommers 2002, 18). Beyond this, the restoration of education provision is not only of importance to individuals and communities but also to the state. The restoration and reconstruction of the education sector is seen to be an

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This paper reflects the equal input and scholarly contribution of each of the two co-authors irrespective of the order in which the names appear. The paper was originally presented at the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies conference (Buenos Aires, June 24–28, 2013) and the Inaugural Cultural Political Economy Conference, September 2015, Lancaster University and was subsequently modified.

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important quick win in legitimising the role of the state (Rose and Greeley 2006). It is also seen as a critical component of restoring social cohesion that is often eroded during conflict, through a set of universal messages and shared values it can aim to promote (Tawil and Harley 2004).

Beginning, however, with Bush and Saltarelli's (2000) report, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict,* the widespread assumption that education is innately a positive transformative experience for students, teachers and communities fragmented by conflict, and naturally supportive of peacebuilding, has come under scrutiny. A strong body of evidence now exists which demonstrates how education may at best do no harm, or at worst exacerbate or perpetuate existing inequalities, doing little to transform underlying structural inequalities within society and the education sector (see e.g. Bakarat, Karpinska, and Paulson 2008; Davies 2010, 2013; Paulson 2008; Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2015). What is increasingly noted in this literature is that particular educational aspects (such as equity, relevance and management considerations) and conflict dimensions (such as security, economic factors and political representation) operate in contingent and specific ways. Education as a whole is rarely the panacea for conflict transformation, and paradoxically, particular dimensions of the system or its location within the post-conflict political economy in which it finds itself, may cause it to do more harm than good.

Following on this, and drawing on the work of Salmi (2000 in Seitz 2004), education is related to matters of conflict and violence in two ways: (1) direct violence/conflict where schools become ideological battlegrounds for control in conflict-affected states and instances where physical harm is being done (e.g. attacks on teachers, physical punishment of students), or alternatively serve a protective function against such conditions; or (2) indirect violence, through which social injustices and inequalities are perpetuated and legitimised in discriminatory or (culturally, linguistically, politically and religiously) biased schooling practices, provoking social exclusion and the seeds of further conflict, or alternatively actively seek to redress such conditions through more inclusive schooling practices. When education promotes either form of violence, the potential for it to sustain a fragile peace and meet expectations for supporting a transformative solution to society's woes is undermined.

With the recent ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), new questions have now arisen about how Goal 16 – which aims to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' – is linked to or associated to myriad sectoral goals within the SDGs, including education. The Incheon Declaration specifies that 'education is essential for peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development', but stops short of specifying how or whether this is always the case. In light of this renewed mandate at the global level to understand the relationship between education and sustainable, peaceful and equitable development, this paper presents a new conceptual and analytical framework for understanding how, and under what conditions, education might do this in Conflict-Affected Contexts (CACs); or in contrast, reproduce or exacerbate lingering tensions and inequalities and hence potentially contribute to (new or recurring) conflict. In doing so, we work from an understanding of peacebuilding that sees key post-conflict transformations as necessary to build sustainable peace – or positive peace (Galtung 1990). Positive peace, or 'the absence of structural violence, the presence of social justice and the conditions to eliminate the causes of violence' (Galtung 1975 in

Smith et al. 2011, 12–13) hence indicates a deliberate process beyond mere 'negative peace', or the absence of violence.

In this paper we identify and operationalise a new epistemological, ontological and methodological take on the issue, one that reveals, rather than hides, the complex interplay between education and social, cultural, political and economic structures, institutions and actors at multiple levels in CACs. Drawing on and adapting elements of the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) (Jessop 2005; Hay 2002a, 2002b), a Critical Cultural Political Economy Analysis of Education (CCPEE) (Robertson 2014; Robertson and Dale 2014), and concepts of social justice (Fraser 1995; Keddie 2012) we provide an analytical framework for understanding how education works (or does not) to promote transformative solutions in such context. Throughout we provide examples of how the theoretical and analytical concepts we propose shed new light on various aspects of the educational apparatus in CACs, and the ways they engage with projects of peacebuilding and social transformation.

Understanding the peacebuilding/education nexus through a social justice lens

We begin by purposefully engaging with theoretical understandings of social justice and placing this in relation to understanding education's role in peacebuilding, taking a strongly normative stance on this issue. This is in line with Olsen and Sawyer's (2009) argumentation that critical thinking and analysis in social sciences (within and beyond radical geography) cannot escape from working with normative foundations, in order to make sense of human 'flourishing' rather than suffering. We perceive this as a helpful and needed step to then allow us to examine in how far education (actors, mechanisms, politics and narratives) *contributes towards* transformative processes that challenge a dominant, hegemonic status quo (in which often root causes of conflict are still lingering and remain unaddressed); and conversely, if and in what ways the educational 'moments' (as discussed below) can also function to (re-)produce (existing) inequalities and social injustices.

As part of this, it is important to identify what distinguishes education serving a positive and transformative, rather than a restorative or reproductive, role in CACs, particularly if the goal is to build a lasting peace. We argue that any educational framework that attempts to seriously work towards an objective of building peace would need to consider responsibilities around what Fraser (1995, 2005) has termed cultural (recognition), political (representation) and economic (redistribution) injustices.

Departing from, but not limited to, a critical feminist perspective, Fraser asserts that in order to reach 'parity of participation', the economic solution of redistribution should be targeted, and socio-cultural remedies of better recognition and political representation are necessary to ensure 'participation on par with others, as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser 2005, 73). Fraser also characterises two types of remedies to social injustices including 'affirmative remedies', which correct outcomes without changing structural frameworks; and 'transformative remedies', correcting outcomes by restructuring the underlying generative framework (Fraser 1995, 82, 86). Reflecting on this work, Keddie (2012) claims that

> Fraser's model should not be offered as an ideal of justice that is static and uncomplicated but rather as a productive lens for thinking about and addressing some of the key ways in which different dimensions of injustice are currently hindering the schooling participation, engagement and outcomes of marginalised students. (2012, 15)

Furthermore, Tikly and Barrett (2011, 3–4) argue how in developing contexts a social justice approach, drawing on the work of Nancy Fraser and Amartya Sen,

> can provide a fuller rationale for a policy focus on education quality than that provided by a human capital approach with its emphasis on economic growth or by the existing human rights approach with its emphasis on the role of the state in guaranteeing basic rights.

We contend that when education serves the three facets of redistribution, recognition and representation, it can effectively contribute to what Fraser termed a 'transformative remedy'. We see this transformative emphasis as connected to the notion of education playing an important (yet not exclusive or stand-alone) role in fostering positive peace and social justice, which are necessary to transform the root causes of conflict. Her framework is critical if the intent is for education to contribute to 'sustainable peacebuilding', or Galtung's notion of 'positive peace' referred to above. Positioning education in this light moves us beyond that of doing no harm, as Davies (2010) suggests is the best it can do in CACs, or as a means to an end such as delivering peace dividends, supporting statebuilding or promoting social cohesion as McCandless (2011) infers. We stand more aligned with the position of Novelli and Smith (2011, 14) who argue that acknowledging education's contribution to peacebuilding would entail 'the need for structural and institutional changes that involve changes to existing power relations within society'.

Combining Fraser's theory with various insights of scholars working on the relation between education and social justice (Connell 2012; Robertson and Dale 2014; Young 2006), we have developed three interrelated goals to ascertain education's contribution towards social justice/peacebuilding agendas in CACs. These are:

(1) Redistribute access to safe and secure educational opportunities and resources.
(2) Recognise culture diversity through a relevant (acceptable/adaptable) curriculum and pedagogy.
(3) Ensure fair and transparent representation and responsibility in educational governance.[2]

The rationale for why we have included these three dimensions in relation to education's role in post-conflict societies is articulated in brief below.

1. (Unequal) redistribution of educational access, opportunities and resources

'Education is dangerous', Raewyn Connell (2012, 681) asserts, as she writes how colonial rulers, and consequently numerous authoritarian governments and some (more orthodox) religions have persistently tried to control the content of education and ration its distribution to certain groups rather than others. In some situations of conflict, an education system is purposefully constructed to limit access to particular segments of the population (e.g. Apartheid-era South Africa, or arguably, for residents of the occupied Palestinian Territories). Even when not intentional, poor education service delivery can inadvertently contribute to a lack of access, particularly when resources are perceived to be not equitably deployed, delivered or managed. When a lack of meaningful access to education mirrors patterns of social, political or economic exclusion in society, it can serve as a significant grievance of citizens against ruling authorities (Dupuy 2008). Young (2006 in

Robertson and Dale 2013, 5) calls this (mis)distribution of who has access to what resources the 'social division of labour'.

In contrast, education that would work towards a *redistributive remedy* would foster more equal educational opportunities, this way ideally lessening societal tensions and working towards 'social cohesion'. In addition, particularly in CACs we need to consider the availability of a safe learning environment for all groups of pupils (including girls/women, minorities, students living in the cross-fire, refugees), as security issues obviously become a key priority. Dupuy (2008) argues here how protective and violence-free education is a necessary condition for building peace, as students may be less likely to accept violence as a way to solve conflicts. Moreover, better and safe school conditions and (job) opportunities for all may install fewer grievances, less motivation and fewer opportunities to engage in armed conflict, as the opportunity costs of engaging in armed conflict will be higher. This remains, however, an area where more research is needed.

2. A lack of cultural recognition and educational relevance

When education is not perceived to be relevant it has also been shown to be a significant source of grievance amongst populations. This lack of recognition of the diversity of learners and their relevant needs can occur within the curriculum owing to the language(s) of instruction in schooling effectively excluding particular linguistic groups within a nation-state or when learning content presents biased or intolerant messages towards specific ethnic or cultural groups. The converse problem can also exist where, in attempts to 'sanitize' the content of the curriculum following conflict or ethnic tension by removing any references to difference, citizens feel that important questions of identity and struggle are artificially glossed over. For example, history textbooks have infamously been reported to be biased and exclusive of minority views, as was the case in Sri Lanka (Lopes Cardozo 2008). A lack of relevance can also be the product of education not being seen to provide social mobility, increased economic opportunity and improved livelihoods. In such circumstances, citizens may feel that the skill-set that education has given them is poorly matched to the realities of their daily lives or the demands of the labour market into which they enter.

In order to foster recognition in and through education, some authors have argued for a critical intercultural pedagogy which respects minorities as indigenous rather than identifying them as 'infiltrators', and a pedagogy that stays away from uncritical and stereotyping forms of multiculturalism that do not take into account issues of religion, race, class or gender (Davies 2011, 13, 17, 34; Keddie 2012, 9). Such an approach requires a 'critical engagement with *all* relations and knowledges (i.e. within dominant *and* subordinate cultures) that oppress and marginalize' (Keddie 2012, 11). Here we can also draw from debates on coloniality/decolonisation of societies and education systems, in order to analyse and deconstruct how alternative knowledges and epistemic approaches can help to foster a more equitable and socially, politically and economically just future (Lopes Cardozo 2011). Eventually, rather than following a global (neoliberal) market agenda for education, including tendencies of competitiveness and standardised testing for educational 'effectiveness' (Robertson and Dale 2013), a just education system would rather respond to diversities and promote curricular justice by providing relevant education to all. This means drawing extensively on 'indigenous knowledge,

working-class experience, women's experience, immigrant cultures, multiple languages, and so on; aiming for richness rather than testability' (Connell 2012, 681–682). And while the work of Than (2011 in Bhopal 2012) argues that Islamic education is both growing and of an inclusive nature in the context of Indonesia, our own findings in both state and madrassah schools in Acehnese question the openness to other religious and cultural traditions outside of Islamic ones (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014).

3. Limited transparency, participation and representation

The way in which educational management functions and processes of education systems are laid out, and how stakeholders' participation is facilitated within them can foster constructive interactions and relationship building, or promote distrust and entrench intolerance. Decision-making power (Young 2006) and political representation (Fraser 2005) should ideally be fostered though fair representation (of all kinds and categories) at multiple (supra and sub) national scales of educational governance. Centrally controlled and managed educational provision can lead to a general lack of accountability and transparency between citizens and the state, particularly when educational resources and services are seen to be inequitably deployed. As a solution, mechanisms such as school-based management and decentralisation of authority and control have the potential to promote citizenship, social inclusion and cooperation, and also increase levels of accountability between educational service providers and communities. Moreover, when participation and cooperation between various educational actors enhance trust, this can become beneficial for broader aims of peacebuilding (Dupuy 2008). Nevertheless, they also hold the danger of exacerbating differential access to resources, to lead to partisan decision-making influenced by local politics and to carry the potential for dominant groups to force their views at the local level, limiting rather than enhancing levels of trust. Connell (2012, 682) argues in this regard how curricular justice can only take shape if decision-making is decentralised to the classroom level, and when classroom teaching is separated from 'audit mechanisms of competitive testing'. This, she recognises, needs firm institutional support and a sound teacher education system that would prepare teachers to develop relevant curriculum. In CACs, however, these institutional mechanisms are often absent or significantly under-resourced (Shah 2012a, 2012b). This notion of relevance and representation, is not without contestation, and sociologists like Young et al. (2014) have suggested that there are powerful knowledges, that are potentially denied to those most marginalised when curriculum control is decentralised. Yet, as is often the case in CACs, visible or invisible relations of power, forged by (neo)colonialism, ethnic, cultural or sectarian divides, or geography often mean that spaces to debate what and how students should learn are absent, leading to processes of social stratification and/or reproduction.

Moving beyond a problem-solving and positivist epistemology and ontology to studying education and peacebuilding: the place for critical realism

As a central premise, we follow the argument of critical theorists that research should question and challenge conditions perceived to be hegemonic in a quest for social change (e.g. Cox and Sinclair 1996; Sayer 2000). Rather than a consensual process, educational policy production, reproduction, modification and adaptation in such settings is located within highly contested projects of state, nation and region building. The

limitations of current research in this specific field of education and peacebuilding are noted in a literature review conducted as part of the Education and Emergencies and Post-Conflict Transitions (EEPCT) research project (Smith et al. 2011), and include:

(1) A lack of emphasis on the role of education in longer term peacebuilding efforts.
(2) Insufficient attention to the context, political will and motivations, of various actors involved in education projects in CACs.
(3) An overemphasis on concerns of educational service delivery in CACs, with less attention given to education's location within broader governance and social change agendas.
(4) A dearth of theory on education's complex relationship to peacebuilding, and a general lack of acknowledgement of education's location within a broader political economy on a number of different scales (local, national, regional and global).
(5) A lack of theory on the relationship between education and the drivers of conflict in dimensions such as social mobility, social inclusion, economic opportunity, social justice and social norms.

As noted by Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008), too much attention has been given to solving the policy dilemmas caused by conflict/fragility on matters of educational access and quality; and conversely, insufficient concern has been given to questioning the underlying premises, values and functions under which educational problems are both identified and defined in such situations. Driven by the pragmatic concerns of practitioners and institutions operating 'on the ground', the assumptions were that educational interventions failed because they were the product of poor policy design or implementation failure. Such thinking is what Dale and Robertson (2009) would identify as too 'educationalist' in nature – accepting the status quo and educational problems as internal to education itself – rather than noting its position within broader social structures and institutions of conflict-affected environments. Such a problem-solving approach largely ignores the interrelationships between micro/meso-scale action and macro-systemic issues that may have led to, or could lead to, a reproduction of an unequal status quo or even a return to conflict.

Additionally, the education and conflict literature has often been too 'state-centric' in its modes of analysis. Understanding of the location, function and role of education as solely within the envelope of the nation-state limits acknowledgement of the fact that 'conflict and its resolution is shaped by a range of structures, institutions and agents that operate below, around, above and beyond the nation-state (local government, national state, neighbour states, regional agreements, supranational bodies, other nation-states)' (Novelli 2011, 7). This is especially true for the contemporary field of education and peacebuilding, which is located in a 'complex and highly unequal system of local, national, regional and global actors, institutions and practices' (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008, 483). Another pressing issue in need of research is the difficult marriage between immediate- and short-term humanitarian responses versus longer term development approaches (Novelli and Smith 2011; Talbot 2013). There is a lack of evidence on the role of the state as well as broader institutional change and challenges in the transition phase from (often) donor-led humanitarian assistance to domestically financed long-term development strategies. Yet, we need to be careful not to simplify the transition phase between these two

spheres as a linear binary, as the field of education in conflict and emergencies often operates on the thin boundaries in between (INEE 2009, 18).

Additionally, as Davies (2013, 3) notes, research that has tried to link particular actions and interventions in the education sector to particular outcomes in CACs is severely flawed. She remarks that input–output models do not work in social terms, as too many messy contextual factors and power interests intervene. The 'attribution gap' is too big. Even if conflict were to decrease, it is almost impossible to trace this back to something in education. For that reason positivist, reductionist and deterministic understandings based on mapping clear cause–effect relationships between education and conflict are wholly insufficient. Her observation is one that is duly noted in a recent INEE (2011, x) synthesis report, which concluded that, 'the issue of discriminating the interlinking and cross-cutting dynamics between [various] domains' made it, 'apparent that a full understanding of fragility dynamics was necessary before beginning to tease out how education interacts and interfaces with indicators of fragility'.

Finally, while increasingly, political economy approaches to analysing education's role in CAC's is being undertaken by international and domestic actors, much of this has been driven by a particular orthodoxy of providing simplified policy solutions. The danger, as Novelli et al. (2014) illustrate, is that this presents the West as the ideal type, sees education and development issues as endogenous, views donors and international actors as 'neutral', pays little attention to matters of social justice, and treats culture as something that will fade away as modernisation takes hold. It does little for understanding the dynamic interplay between structures, agents and institutions in various states of flux, and ignores the importance of culture, in particular religion, nationalism, identities, values and knowledge, on shaping outcomes and processes of policy implementation observed.

We argue that a critical realist approach is best suited within the broad field of critical theory to mapping the contingent interactions that exist between education, conflict and peacebuilding. Ontologically, critical realism understands reality as stratified and composed of:

(1) The **real**, or the structures, mechanisms and powers that exist by virtue of an object's nature but that may or may not be activated.
(2) The **actual**, which are the potential events and outcomes that could occur if and when particular powers and mechanisms are activated, and which happen continuously whether we experience them or not.
(3) The **empirical**, which is what we experience and observe of the world, either directly or indirectly (Pawson et al. 2005).

Within such an ontological and epistemological frame, the role of the researcher is to 'investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world', through what is labelled a process of *retroduction* (Danermark et al. 2002, 21). Critical realism differs from positivist forms of enquiry in its explicit focus on *how objects work in relation to their context*, acknowledging that structures and institutions of society do, in fact, matter in myriad outcomes. The contingent and spatio-temporal nature of education's relation to society in post-conflict society comes

to the fore, largely because analysis becomes situated in the relationship between events and underlying mechanisms (structures, institutions, discourses and beliefs/values).

The role of the researcher becomes attuned to, 'establish[ing] the presence of [processes and mechanisms], how they work and with what outcomes' (Robertson and Dale 2014, 5). Critical realism allows us to work backwards from what we see within the educational landscape to the mechanisms and power relations which underpinning this, making visible what may otherwise remain invisible with positivist and problem-solving lines of enquiry.

Drawing on the work of Sum (2015) and Sum and Jessop (2013) and inspired by (neo-) Gramscian thought, we see critical realism as a way to unravel the ways in which hegemonies and counter-hegemonies are constructed through '*material* and *discursive* mechanisms, processes and practices' (Sum 2015) and 'as processes that involve actors discursively framing economic/political imaginaries (e.g. competitiveness, development, modernization, nationalism, poverty, crisis, hope, etc.)'. As Sayer (2000, 15) describes, 'critical realism acknowledges that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them'. For CAC's in particular, what Sayer claims is important given that labels such as 'post-conflict' or 'fragile state' are contentious and open to multiple interpretation and deployed strategically and selectively, within and outside the education space (Bengtsson 2011). This process of sense-making is critical to understanding the mechanisms which drive particular educational outcomes and phenomena observed in the world of the actual (Tao 2008), and is a key conceptual concern of this form of research inquiry.

A set of conceptual, methodological and analytical tools

Methodologically, we draw on the SRA and cultural political economy (CPE) analysis to illustrate how one might go about conducting research from this ontological and epistemological perspective. We argue that these conceptual tools help to:

(1) articulate a multiscalar relationship that recognises both external and internal factors and their dynamic interrelationship in the production and resolution of conflict in education;
(2) capture the dynamics of education and peacebuilding interventions, including the divergent interests and practices that these are part of;
(3) ground analysis in an explicit understanding of the historical basis on which existing discursive and material settlements within society have or were formed; and
(4) provide a method for closely interrogating how actors understand and act on the 'crisis' created by conflict, and the ways in which educational discourses, structures, and institutions are (re)constructed in the post-conflict moment.

We believe that coupling SRA with CPE provides us the ability to move beyond overly structuralist and state-centric accounts of how change comes about, but likewise avoid taking an overally agential approach to accounting for processes of change or reproduction. It allows us, as we identify below, to closely explore the interplay between a set of political, economic and cultural conditions and the meaning-making process of actors and institutions that are part of (re)shaping such conditions at multiple scales.

Strategic relational approach

In the SRA model, structures and agents are treated analytically as separate entities, but a contingent and dialectal relationship between structures, agents and the agency they employ is clearly articulated (Hay 2002b; Jessop 2005). Specifically, structures are seen as *strategically selective*. Within the confines of particular temporal periods and spaces, specific structures and structural configurations can selectively reinforce the action, tactics, activities and strategies of actors, and discourage others. All actors have tendencies, or preferences for action, but the structural spaces they operate within may allow only certain tendencies to be realised. The social, economic and political spaces in which actors operate are 'densely structured and highly contoured' which presents an 'unevenly distributed configuration of opportunity and constraint to actors' (Hay 2002a, 381). A key aspect of structures being strategically selective is that resource- and knowledge-rich actors may be well capable of achieving their tendencies, while those without such endowments are likely to view these structures as an obstacle. SRA, like Boltanski's (2011) notion of the agency of a situation, identifies that varying contexts will force different regimes of action, and that based on the regime of action which prevails through processes of selectivity, different kinds of capacities inherent in individuals can or will be mobilised. This sociological perspective affords a certain ontological pluralism, and epistemologically moves away from the privileged position of other critical sociologies that seek to find a reductive explanation of the causal mechanisms and power structures, which cause agents to act as they do.

Using SRA, it is argued that actors respond to these conditions by being 'reflective … reformulat[ing] within limits their own identities, and … engag[ing] in strategic calculation about the "objective" interests that flow from these alternative identities in particular junctures' (Hay 2002b, 129). Thus, action is framed by a constant engagement of actors within their environment, and can lead to the pursuit of different strategies and tactics in different conjectures. The idea of *strategy* is an essential concept of the SRA, in the belief that actors have 'intentional conduct oriented towards the environment … to realize certain outcomes and objectives which motivate action' (Hay 2002b). While we view such an understanding of the (un-)conscious strategic nature of actors helpful in our analysis of the interplay between education actors, mechanisms and agency in CACs, we see a limitation on the use of 'strategic calculation' employed by Hay. Rather, we feel the need to stress the sometimes uncalculated manner in which actors might respond and develop strategies, which can vary in different moments in time, and are driven by a combination of political, economic, as well as more semiotic (beliefs, narratives, ideas, hopes and dreams) or 'cultural' instigations. This is where we feel a combination of SRA and a CCPEE, which acknowledges this cultural turn, is a useful way forwards for applying SRA (as is further detailed below).

Emergence and transformation come about from the ability of actors to respond to and alter the structures governing them. SRA acknowledges that different individuals and groups may have varying opportunities to do so and constraints due to their levels of access to particular strategic resources (social, political, cultural and economic capital). The unequal access to such resources is also strongly connected to issues of social justice, as we further assert below. For one, actors may at the same time be differentially motivated in a desire to alter such structures, acting in ways that consciously and

unconsciously serve to reproduce/transform existing conditions. Additionally, actors often lack perfect information of their context, and 'their knowledge of their terrain and its strategic selectively is partial, at worst it is demonstrably false'. Imperfect information leads to false assumptions and actions that may appear unintentional, but are responding to a set of perceived structural constraints, which may not be perceived correctly (Hay 2002a, 381–383).

Hay's notion of *strategically selective context* in educational terms can be described as: 'a space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility' (Apple 1980 as cited in Giroux 2003a, 6); or, as explained by Giroux we should:

> view schools as economic, cultural and social sites that are inextricably tied to issues of politics, power and control. […] schools actually are contested spheres that embody and express struggle over what forms of authority, types of knowledge, forms of moral regulation and versions of the past and future should be legitimated and transmitted to students …(2003b, 48).

It might be assumed that, over time (educational) actors would come to better understand and respond in kind to their context through the routine monitoring of the consequences of their actions. However, very rarely do the environments in which these actors act remain static. This is particularly true in the changing environment of CACs, where a density of existing institutions and practices, and a proliferation of new strategic actors and new discourses lead to the possibility of changing strategic selectivities.

In thinking about the role of education-sector and school-based actors, and more specifically their agency to act in such contexts, there are two important dimensions to consider. On the one hand, there is a belief that in spaces of 'social groundlessness', where state capacity is sometimes weak, and political will and motivations greatly vary, these educational actors often have an important role to play in societal transformation (see e.g. Shriberg, Kirk and Winthrop 2007; Davies and Talbot 2008; Kirk 2008; Kirk and Winthrop 2007). Yet, such space for manoeuvre is often either perceived to be or actually is tightly bounded by institutional histories and cultures of practice, political or economic relations, or deeply entrenched in religious, ethnic or community-based values (see e.g. Shah 2013). Thus, an important distinction must be made between the powers such actors possess and the degree and fashion in which such actors (can) use such power, either consciously or unconsciously.

For this reason, inspired but also moving beyond SRA, in our work *agency* is defined as the space for manoeuvre of key educational actors and institutions within and beyond the education sector and its various (school, community, provincial/state, national and international) levels. Actors are seen within SRA as *political* and *strategic* actors, navigating a multiscalar and strategically selective context, to actively or passively develop intended or unintended *strategies* that work to enhance or obstruct processes of social inclusion and conflict mitigation. These actors face an uneven distribution of opportunities and constraints in their contexts, thus different access to strategic resources (knowledge, capital, training and opportunities) may be a significant determinant of the capacity of actors to realise opportunities (Hay 2002a, 164–166). As Jessop (2005, 51) notes, 'knowledge of their terrain and its strategic selectivity is partial, at worst it is demonstrably false'. In this strategically selective environment, the outcomes of the decisions educational actors make can vary greatly, with 'resistances' to goals of peacebuilding and social justice driven by multiple agendas in terms of their intentionality, objectives, and purpose.

Empirically, this understanding allows us to open up spaces for exploring the role of particular educational agents in CACs in more nuanced ways. Specifically, questions have been raised about the capacity or role of teachers to act as transformative agents of change within societies in transition. As noted in a recent literature review, teachers' agency as peacebuilders is multidimensional, situated and dynamic rather than static, fixed and essentialised (Horner et al. 2015). For example, in the case of both Timor-Leste and Bolivia, an outward narrative of teacher resistance and opposition to reform can be understood using SRA, as the product of teachers operating within multiple and simultaneous realities, juxtaposing their own beliefs, motivations and perceptions of their space for manoeuvre within a (changing) context which is both strategic and selective (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016). Similarly in the context of Peru, Wilson (2000) identifies how teachers both during and after the conflict, often took up the critical discourse of the profession as a vocation and 'adapt[ed] it to their own personal political projects and to the situations they faced in the communities where they worked' (15). And our recent work undertaken in Aceh, reveals how it may be unrealistic for teachers to be expected to act as 'peacebuilders' if underlying political, social and economic realities and dilemmas which they faced during the province's nearly 30-year separatist struggle are not identified in current reform efforts.

SRA can also be used to understand the agency of a situation for actors such as national governments, international organisations and INGOs in CACs. For example, in contexts where the power of the state is usurped by international peacekeeping apparatus, the space for manoeuvre for the traditional actors involved in education reform (i.e. national actors) may shift. As Shah (2012a, 2012b) identified in the case of Timor-Leste, the precedent and legacy established by a UN-led government in the country's transition to independence had long-lasting legacies on the trajectory which post-conflict reconstruction of the education sector took. International actors, particularly former colonial rulers such as the Portuguese and agencies like UNICEF, approached the process of reform from a tabula rasa approach, leaving less scope for actors at the national and sub-national level to forge an education system which acknowledged the country's complex past, established a path forward that was reconciliatory, inclusive and transformative for all. Similarly, in contexts like Iraq and Afghanistan where the US-led reconstruction of the state, the space for national actors to lead education reform was superseded by economic, security and political interest from the outside (Novelli 2010; Vongalis-Macrow 2006).

It can be argued that in these contexts, there is limited interest in seeing education as part of the transformative remedy. Rather, education fits within a 'liberal peace thesis' as discussed by Paris (2004). This rather narrow, yet not uncommon approach, prioritises investments in establishing or strengthening liberal democracy and market forces as key drivers of stability, as the most important first steps to take once security has been achieved (Paris 2010). However, such a trickle-down peacebuilding model (Castañeda 2009) often means relatively low investment in social services – health, education and welfare. It sees education merely as a way to win the hearts and minds of (sometimes a specific group within) the population, and promote a particular type of liberal, economically rational and modern individual who is able to engage 'peacefully' in the global marketplace.

Understanding the strategically selective context using a critical CPE of education

CPE analysis can improve understanding of the dynamics and constitution of the context that influences the choices of educational actors. It complements critical realist ontology and the SRA in acknowledging that: (1) history and institutions matter in economic and political dynamics occurring at present; (2) a complex relationship exists between meanings and practice; and (3) the strategic selectivity of this relationship leads to a process of variation, selection and retention of particular meanings and practices which, over time, leads to the production of particular hegemonic conditions. In CPE, the role of culture is brought into equal footing with political and economic structures and institutions, as a constitutive element and as a contingent factor in the actions of actors. Social processes come to be understood as a related set of 'moments' between the cultural (discourse, language, beliefs and values), the political (power and institutions) and economic (the practices in which social relations are produced and articulated) (Jessop 2015; Robertson and Dale 2014). What CPE analysis brings back is acknowledgement that there are multiple cultural forms and scripts, economies and forms of political organisation, and it allows us, for example to identify how peacebuilding as a concept evolves discursively and materially in relation to the multiplicity of other narratives for education. This, we believe, is critically important in the contexts of the CACs, where sedimented and hegemonic conditions are more prone to being uprooted, contested and challenged in sometimes-violent ways.

CPE, when critically applied to education (hence becoming CCPEE, see Robertson and Dale 2014) locates educational policy production, reproduction, modification and adaptation within the aspiration of legitimating a particular social, political and economic order (Jones 2010; Robertson 2012). CCPEE allows one to make explicit the struggles and conflicts between discourses, practices and institutions of schooling, and the impact these have on the on-going social contract (Robertson 2012). Aligned with a critical realist ontology, Robertson and Dale (2014, 7–8) have developed a series of 'education moments' that can help to guide such exploration:

(1) The *moment of educational practice* – where one looks into the questions of who is taught, what and the circumstances in which education takes place.
(2) The *moment of educational politics* – where the relationship between policy and practice is analysed, acknowledging that not everything that happens in practice is a direct consequence of the decision and actions of policy-making.
(3) The *moment of the politics of education* – where the rules of the games set limits to what is possible and desirable in education are analysed, and where education is understood in relation to the broader economic, political and cultural projects (i.e. the relationship between neoliberalism and education).
(4) The *moment of the outcomes of education* – where the consequences of educational practices, policies and politics are studied in relation to both immediate actions and wider social relations and processes.

Using this analytical lens, scrutiny can be given to how problems and solutions in education ensemble have been conceptualised in policy discourse and reflected in the structures that emanate from them. That which is empirically observed in schools is understood

as connected to a particular conceptualisation and rationalisation of political, economic and social relationships in society at a particular time, space and place (Robertson 2000, 8–9).

Underpinning the four moments noted above is explicit attention to Bernstein's question of '… how power and control translate into principles of communicating, and how these principles of communication differentially regulate forms of consciousness with respect to their reproduction and their possibilities for change' (2000,4). In the context of a post-conflict or post-colonial society, where meanings, purposes, and beliefs about the role of education are thrown into question, we contend that CPEE can offer a powerful tool for retroductively unpacking how discursive claims on education's role and function and society have been reconsidered, and subsequently relocated into a new framework that attempts to legitimate and/or restore the social contract between citizen and state. The types of claims, beliefs and values made, and the material capabilities they enable/constrain can have powerful resonance in terms of education's potential to serve productive means of building a more peaceful and socially just society. It provides a concrete analytical frame to understand what Bernstein (1990) identifies as 'recontextualisation', or the dynamic transfer of something from one discourse to another in a period in flux, by forcing us to identify the cultural, economic and political hegemonies and counter-hegemonies in play at any particular time.

Specifically, a CCPEE analysis provides a clear and comprehensive roadmap for exploring how:

(1) The relationship between education and peacebuilding is articulated discursively and materially through social relations, experiences and practices (the cultural).
(2) The ways in which education and peacebuilding fit into relations of production, distribution and exchange in society (the economic).
(3) The fashion in which an agenda promoting education's links to peacebuilding has been determined and subsequently governed (the political).

Doing so helps us to locate education in CACs within cultural scripts in which it is constructed and mediated, as well as to understand the relationships it holds (political, economic and social) with actors and institutions on the supranational, national and subnational scales. These insights from the work of Robertson and Dale (2014) help us to move between *what is* (the moment of outcomes) and the moments of educational practice, educational politics and the politics of education.

For example, the case of Myanmar is a prime example of how the 'rules of the game' and specifically a reframing and reclassification of education's role in the country have played themselves out since the start of a democratic transition period since 2010. On the one hand, education reform has attempted to wrestle with competing and contradictory narratives for change within what is seen to be a new era for the country. These competing ideas include, among others, a desire to see education as: a vehicle for economic growth, development and modernisation; a tool for reconciliation through more effective service delivery; and a symbol of a new more pluralistic national identify. Yet, what becomes clear in further analysis, is the strength of modernisation as a discursive framing for current action. This is linked to the country's broader project of opening its markets to the outside world, nominally moving towards democratic political systems,

and seeking to remake what was perceived to be a cloistered and closed state, now opening up to outside ideas and interest.

As a cultural, economic and political project, the narrative of modernisation also plays into the sense of Myanmar's citizens moving out of a parochial past and into a globally connected and oriented future. Playing on such modernisation language serves to move beyond the deeply sectarian, ethnic-based divisions that remain very real in the country, and promotes a banner of a new-shared nationhood built on knowledge and prosperity, rather than an acknowledgement or redressing of such roots causes of inequalities, grievances and tensions. The Ministry for example makes this clear in its initiation of the reform project, that such change, 'promotes a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age' and that it helps to build 'a modern developed nation through education' (Comprehensive Education Sector Review Myanmar 2012). A separate Asian Development Bank report (2013, 6) locates education reform '… within a national development process that is focused on poverty alleviation, rural development and decentralization'. Nowhere in this framing is acknowledgement of the very real divisions and tensions that are embedded in the present education system, particularly on contentious issues such as language and ethnic minority rights, recognition of plurality, various interpretations of historical narratives or the pressing concerns about unequal access and outcomes of education. As such, this signals the makings of a new hegemonic project that seeks to remake citizens as modern, economic subjects who prescribe to a yet fictitious national identify. Past conflicts and divisions within and outside of education are subsumed to the country's accession into the global marketplace, pretty much following the earlier mentioned narrow trickle-down peacebuilding or liberal peace model. The lack of explicit attention to peacebuilding through and within education and other social services will potentially exacerbate or lead to new types of social fragmentation (Higgins, Maber, Lopes Cardozo and Shah forthcoming).

In a very different way, incorporating the cultural into a multiscalar political economy analysis of reform has proven absolutely essential in our analysis of the role of education in the context of post-tsunami/post-conflict Aceh. There, we analysed the transformation of Aceh's education system during the reconstruction and post-war period, moving towards the promotion of a more Islamic and distinct Acehnese identity. This transformation has been driven by political, economic and cultural processes, following from the peace negotiations starting in 2005, which designated Aceh as a special autonomous region within the Republic of Indonesia, affording local and provincial governments much greater control over most matters of state, including educational provision. The agreement also included a commitment to significantly increase the province's share of Aceh's mineral wealth as a way to redress past injustices over how financing for education and other basic services disadvantaged the province. The project of building a socially just and harmonious society following the signing of the accord has been symbolised by several challenges, including: the decision to restore Islamic, or sharia law in the province; the lack of local capacity to deliver basic services to its citizens and manage the large inflow of funds from Jakarta and the international community; and issues of rampant corruption, clientelism, and growing inequities within Acehnese society as former military combatants are reintegrated into society and political functions (Aspinall 2009; Dwyer 2012; Miller 2010; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2010). Although these challenges meant that the province was more marked by a story of continuity than change, and a marked

gap between policy intentions and educational realities in communities and schools, what *has* changed to a certain extent is a (slightly) increased space for manoeuvre – or agency – for educational policymakers and school-level actors. While these changes need to be seen in the light of a change from open warfare to a situation of 'negative peace', which meant at least a halt to violent conflict between warring parties, the signs of continuity in many areas of the education space signals limited progress towards a more positive peace.

While not a unique story, the benefit of the analytical scrutiny given to each moment allowed us to trace how this cultural project was innately influenced and connected to broader political and economic projects occurring at the regional, national and international scale – including continued national and international interest in maintaining a secular and stable Indonesia – which sat in tension with processes of localisation and Islamification (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014). What this means for the moment of educational outcomes is that there remain significant challenges to realising the province's stated political, economic and cultural ambitions for education, and for the broader project of social transformation which the post-tsunami/post-conflict moment afforded. While education access has increased, lingering political tensions remain and root causes of conflict are unaddressed and in some cases, have been exacerbated by the patronage politics that have ensued following the signing of the peace accord. Additionally, longstanding inequity of outcomes, and in some cases access, remain in the education system, and increasingly concern mounts for minority and marginalised voices and cultures within Aceh's current cultural and political climate. The humanitarian-focused and neoliberal paradigm of 'building Aceh back better' has reinforced the primacy of the individual over that of the collective, and the short-term over longer term, more sustainable forms of inclusive development (Gupta, Pouw, and Ros-Tonen 2015). That withstanding, we found that in various ways, actors – including male and female educators, activists and academics – have engaged with and taken advantage of the changing selectivities of the political, cultural and economic environment to advance agendas that do in fact create a new space for manoeuvre for education in the province – in ways that are simultaneously reproductive and transformative.

Conclusion

For too long, studies of education and conflict have employed a descriptive or problem-solving approach and failed to reveal dynamics of power and mask complexities in an attempt for quick fix solutions. While we acknowledge the urgency of need to provision for education in CACs, there is also a danger that without an element of criticality, the positive and transformative face of education in such settings will remain unrealised. In order to effectuate such a transformative, sustainable (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2015) and positive face of education in conflict-affected regions (Bush and Saltarelli 2000), the analytical tools suggested in this paper aim to support a much needed deeper understanding of the historically embedded, multiscalar and sometimes 'invisible' mechanisms that operate within and through the 'moments of outcomes' of education (Robertson and Dale 2014). Our approach aims to follow Dale's (2015) (critical realist inspired) suggestion to foster the explanatory potential of comparative studies of education, by locating and critically understanding educational spaces and mechanisms in relation to the structural

strategically selective contexts, and moving beyond mere problem-solving approaches towards more critically and theoretically grounded forms of analysis. Dale stresses how by

> seeking to discover the causes of things […] there is, of course, no guarantee that discovering such explanations will change the world, but it may possibly enable more of the 'reality' of the world, and especially of what sustains it in its present forms, to be revealed (2015, 359).

Hence, what we have aimed to illustrate here is an alternative way forward, using critical realism-informed methodological approaches such as SRA and CPE analysis to understand both the potential positive as well as negative contributions of education to peacebuilding, through a transformative/social justice lens. Firstly, SRA enables an exploration of agency – including the passive and active, conscious and unconscious strategies developed by education actors at multiple scales – in dialectical relation to the strategically selective context they navigate within. It helps us begin to understand the political will, and motivations of various actors involved in education projects in the context of conflict-affected states. Secondly, CPE analysis helps us to acknowledge and explore how: (1) education is both a reflection of and contributor to past, present and future social relations, experiences, and practices (the cultural); (2) the ways in which education fits into existing relations of production, distribution and exchange in society (the economic); and (3) how and by whom education's purpose, role and function in society has and is being determined and governed (the political) in such contexts. Rather than presenting an evolutionary or consensual process of change, educational policy production, reproduction, modification and adaptation become located within highly contested projects of state, nation and region building. And thirdly, we have aimed to articulate how education might contribute to positive societal transformations and sustainable forms of peacebuilding using Fraser's conceptualisation of social justice as an inspiration. Each context within and beyond the contexts referred to in this article will see this framework applied differently, and will consequently influence the ways in which equity is addressed and prioritised in terms of redistributive, recognition or representative measures.

As Novelli and Smith (2011, 6–8) suggest, 'the nature of the education system [in CACs] is at the heart of societal debates on social justice and well-being' (2011, 27). It is this close connection between the role of educational governance, the agency of educational actors and these crucial processes of political, economic and cultural transformations that this methodological paper speaks to. With this framework in mind, a more critical realm of possibilities is opened up to move scholarship on education in CACs in new, divergent directions.

Notes

1. NORRAG Policy Seminar, Education in Conflict Emergencies in the Context of the post-2015 MDG and EFA Agendas, Thursday 30 May 2013, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.
2. Culture is understood in its broadest terms, namely the meanings given to social life and material objects and the concrete practices they enable and depend on for their continuance/transformation. Jessop (2004) originally interpreted culture in his proposition of CPE as semiosis defined as the intersubjective production of meaning, including narrativity, rhetoric, hermeneutics, identity, reflexivity, historicity and discourse. Robertson (2014) takes the notion of culture a step further by adding the materiality of social relations, and the constraints

agents face to such analysis. According to her, in order to fully comprehend the complexities of the field of educational governance and practice, critical examination of the meaning-making process is vital for us to understand, '… how worlds, meanings and consciousness are formed' (Robertson 2012, 3).

Acknowledgements

We thank our team members, including master students and Ph.D. researchers at our departments, for the valuable discussions that helped us to develop this framework. We also appreciate the feedback provided to us by participants of the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies in Buenos Aires, where we presented an earlier version of this paper. We are grateful for financial and/or institutional support of the IS Academie/University of Amsterdam, the University of Auckland and the International Centre for Acehnese and Indian Ocean Studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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