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Losing ground: a critical analysis of teachers' agency for peacebuilding education in Sri Lanka

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This paper aims to explore the *agency* of teachers for peacebuilding education in Sri Lanka through a critical multiscalar analysis of the interplay between *context* – education policies and governance – and *agent* – teachers as strategic political actors. It draws on two studies conducted in Sri Lanka in 2006 and 2011 to give insight into a changing context from conflict to post-conflict. While peace education and social cohesion were high on the political agendas before the official ending of the conflict, the need for a continuous and integral peace education approach seems to be losing political ground in present-day Sri Lanka. The paper seeks to contribute to the broader debate on the complex role of education and teachers in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Keywords: Sri Lanka; teacher agency; peacebuilding education; critical analysis

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Introduction

At the global level, development aid is shifting its focus away from social development sectors – such as the health and education sectors that became popular in the 1990s – to more security-oriented development programmes. Often, more money is spent on military budgets in both high- and low-income countries, rather than on their education systems (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) GMR 2011), illustrating a 'securitisation' of development aid, especially after the attacks on the United States on 9/11 (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2012). In conflict and post-conflict countries the most vital and at the same time complex question remains how to build sustainable and inclusive peace. Many peacebuilding initiatives around the globe have focused on education as a means to work towards peace in war-affected societies. According to the UNESCO, teaching children how to live together in peace by recognising other ethnic groups and overcoming prejudice within and between individuals and their wider communities has been the principal aim of peace education (Nicolai 2009; Sinclair 2004).

However, during the past decade a growing body of research has pointed to the potential downsides of education in conflict and post-conflict settings. Various academics have underlined that education might also intensify conflict between opposing ethnic groups (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2005, 2010; Novelli and Smith 2012; among others). Following this line of argumentation, it is essential for research to critically analyse the functioning of education systems in pre-conflict,

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conflict and post-conflict contexts and examine under what conditions education can break down processes of conflict and contribute to peacebuilding. Novelli and Smith in a recent report on *The Role of Education on Peacebuilding,* commissioned by UNICEF (2012, 7), convincingly build the argument that education can provide 'knowledge and skills that provide protection' in the midst of conflict, while also fostering 'values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming' the structural causes and ongoing processes of conflict itself.

This paper critically analyses the education system in (post-) war Sri Lanka and in specific the role of teachers, as teachers can be perceived as important actors in the implementation and success of educational initiatives. However, drawing from the literature, we can argue that teachers do not act in isolation from their environment (O'Sullivan 2002; Vongalis-Macrow 2007; Weldon 2010; Welmond 2002), but even more so as strategic actors in an often-politicised context (Lopes Cardozo 2011; Lopes Cardozo and May 2009). We build on and aim to contribute to the ongoing debates about the importance of the role of teachers in peacebuilding processes. Firstly, investing in teachers is a necessary condition for countries to recover from crisis (UNICEF 2012). Secondly, teachers are often targets during conflicts (O'Malley 2010; UN 2012; UNICEF 2012). And thirdly, teachers can be viewed as crucial building blocks for healthy schools and empowered students/communities and play an important role in peacebuilding and restoring normality in conflict-affected environments (INEE 2011). A teacher's job is a political and highly responsible one and teachers' strategies in times of (post)war situations need to be investigated in relation to teachers' potential positive or negative influence on processes of peace/conflict. Teachers' actions (or inaction) cannot be disconnected from the potential positive or negative faces of education in Sri Lanka (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Lopes Cardozo 2008).

Our argumentation is based on research findings from two three-month ethnographic field studies conducted in Sri Lanka; one in 2006, when the conflict was still ongoing, and one in 2011, more than two years after the official end of the generation-long conflict. Both studies followed a mainly qualitative research approach, using interviews, focus group discussions, background surveys and (participatory) observation as main research methods to explore how various actors understand and implement peace education. The study in 2006 focused on formal and non-formal peace education initiatives mainly in the primary school sector, while the 2011 study focused on peace education in formal secondary schools. In total, almost 40, semi-structured interviews were conducted with national and regional policy administrators, 12 interviews with school principals and more than 70 interviews with teachers. Fourteen schools of different ethnic and religious composition in different parts of Sri Lanka and various interethnic school exchange programmes were visited and observed. Within schools, lessons were observed, including civic education classes, and various focus groups with pupils were organised.

The central premise of this paper revolves around the question: how in a changing context from war to post-war, teachers are strategically and selectively positioned; meaning that teachers (un)consciously and actively or passively develop strategies in relation to the socio-political context of peacebuilding education. By connecting Dale's three levels of education analysis (2006) with the strategic relational approach (SRA, Hay 2002a), the paper conceptualises teachers as strategic political actors who operate within a multiscalar, complex strategically selective and conflict-affected context, and examines the dynamic interplay between the two (Lopes Cardozo 2011).

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In the first section of the article, we briefly set out the Sri Lankan conflictive context. Here, we also briefly discuss the main characteristics of the education system, how peace education policies, initiatives and actors operate within it and how this policy situation differed between 2006 (war) and 2011 (post-war). In the second part, we turn to discuss the relevant theoretical and methodological inspirations for this article, including the SRA as well as relevant studies on critical pedagogy and peace(-building) education. We approach our analysis by drawing from Dale's three levels of education analysis (2006). The third part then focuses specifically on teachers' strategies and the factors that further or hinder their agency for peacebuilding education. The article concludes by reflecting on some potential ways forward.

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Positioning peace(-building) education in (post) war Sri Lanka

From 1983 to 2009, Sri Lanka was beset by violent warfare. The war has most often been portrayed as an ethnic power struggle between the Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighting for an independent state in the North-East of the island. However, different causes (e.g. historical, political, economic, social) have been at stake and power dynamics at different levels in society have influenced Sri Lankan life (Orjuela 2010; Perera, Wijetunge, and Balasooriya 2004; Richardson 2005). Since May 2009, when the government announced it had defeated the LTTE, the government proclaims the country to be a post-conflict setting. The Sri Lankan government consequently sees the terminology of 'conflict' and 'peace' as no longer necessary, since the war is 'over' (Davies 2011, 45). Nevertheless, conflicting power dynamics still characterise Sri Lanka and tend to threaten the sustainability of the peacebuilding process (Orjuela 2010; Rampton 2011; TISL 2010), as the current situation can be described as a 'victors peace', as Höglund and Orjuela (2011) argue. In order to tackle one of the most prominent causes of the conflict, a just and inclusively organised political system is indispensable to prevent future war (Davies 2011, 9), as well as a representation of such an inclusive and democratic system in educational institutes.

Shifts in geopolitics over the last decade resulted in less influence of European countries and the United States in the Asian region, including Sri Lanka, in favour of new international players such as China (Höglund and Orjuela 2011). The 'human rights campaign' of Western countries against the government of Sri Lanka has only further strengthened this geopolitical shift (Bandarage 2012). China, as one of the new international players in Sri Lanka, adopts a different approach to conflict prevention and in general tends to dissociate itself from mingling in domestic affairs. According to Höglund and Orjuela (2011, 20) 'the significant power asymmetry between the winning and the losing sides in the Sri Lankan conflict, coupled with the lack of power or interest of international actors to influence Sri Lanka's domestic affairs – have rendered "conflict prevention" a tool for continued domination and containment of conflicts'.

The generation-long war has had marked influence on the economic and social development of the country. Sri Lanka ranks 91st on the Human Development Index and thus is still considered to be a poor country. Although the economic growth rate is rising, income inequality remains high with a Gini Coefficient of 0.49 (CBSL 2012). The population of Sri Lanka is characterised by multiple ethnicities, religions and languages. The Sinhalese ethnic group (74%) is predominantly Buddhist and lives mainly in the South of the island, whereas the Tamils (16.5%) are mainly

Hindu and live mostly in the North and East. The rest of the population is Muslim (8.3%) or from other ethnic and religious backgrounds (DCSSL 2008).

From its independence in 1948 onwards education has been one of the top priorities of the newly formed government of Sri Lanka (Perera 2000). It has been free up until university and obligatory between the ages of five and thirteen. Following the millennium development goals (MDG's) and the education for all (EFA) targets, Sri Lankan education is well ahead of other developing countries, with most recently measured enrolment rates of 98.8% for primary education in 2010 and 87.11% for secondary education in 2004 (website World Bank 2012). It should be noted that the latter number excludes some Northern and Eastern provinces, due to the enduring violent conflict at the time of measurement. In contrast to high pupil enrolment, government expenditure on education remains relatively low (CBSL 2012) and several structural problems in education delivery and quality have been identified, including an unequal distribution of education resources, a widening gap between school and work, rigidity of the curriculum and a segregated education structure (Colenso 2005; Ginige 2002).

In 1948, to make school more accessible for the larger population of Sri Lanka, the government introduced mother tongue education to replace English medium. However, this gradually led to an ethnically and religiously segregated school system, wherein different ethnic groups were educated in separate schools in their own medium of instruction. Some argue that this segregated education structure has established and maintained misrecognition and contributed to the polarisation of society (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Jeyaratnam Wilson 2000; Lopes Cardozo 2008; Lopes Cardozo and May 2009; MoE 2006a).

In acknowledgement of a potential negative connection between education segregation and ethnic tension, already in 1991, the government of Sri Lanka introduced peace education into the education system of Sri Lanka; including themes of peace, empathy, cooperation, positive and critical thinking, decision-making and assertiveness, conflict resolution, community building, protection of the environment and intercultural understanding. Six years later, the 1997 General Education Reform specified that all pupils should learn both Sinhala and Tamil languages. Within the field of teacher education the reform introduced a new emphasis on human rights and values, principles of democracy and national cohesion, gender rights, environmental protection and proficiency in all three languages (Davies 2011; Lopes Cardozo 2008). A special *Unit for Social Cohesion and Peace Education* was formed within the Ministry of Education to initiate and coordinate activities aimed at uniting pupils and stimulating harmony. Although some aspects of peace education were promoted under different policies until 2008, a proper and unified plan for implementation was missing (Lopes Cardozo 2008). Therefore, with support from the German organisation GIZ a *National Policy on Education for Peace and Social Cohesion and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions* was formulated in 2008 to increase innovation of existing programmes, provide coherence and coverage, avoid duplication and ensure sustainability (Davies 2011; Hoeks 2012).

Multiple actors have been involved in the implementation of peace education in Sri Lanka. At the national government level, the main bodies are the Unit for Social Cohesion and Peace Education and the National Institute of Education. The main non-governmental bodies are GIZ and UNESCO (Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008). From the 1990s onwards, the governance of most schools has been more and more decentralised to the nine provincial education offices and the 95 education

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zones (MoE 2006b). Each province and zone should have its own peace education coordinator. However, often these coordinators have a wide range of responsibilities, limiting their time for peace education. In regards to teacher education, pre-service training is given in the National Teacher Education Institutions, while in-service education is offered in universities and in national and regional in-service teacher training centres. However, peace education is not yet integrated in the pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula and instead, is sometimes delivered through extra-curricular documents or activities. At the school level, principals fulfil an important role in stimulating their staff to develop a peaceful school management and learning environment (Kodituwakku 2006).

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SRA and teachers' agency for peacebuilding education

In order to analyse and understand the above-mentioned complex reality of peace education in Sri Lanka, we draw from a critical realist stance, which in its ontological and epistemological perspective engages with both semiosis (discourses, ideas, beliefs, attitudes) and material realities in society. Building on this stance, our research approach draws on Dale's (1994) notion that a dialogue exists between the politics of education and educational policies. By doing so, it examines the 'three levels of education questions' proposed by Dale (2006, 190). The 'first level' of analysis focuses on the level of educational practice, and includes questions such as *who is taught, by whom, where and when, under what circumstances and with what results*? The 'second level' deals with education policies, and questions like *how, by whom and at what scale are these issues problematised, determined, coordinated, governed, administered and managed*? While Dale uses the term 'education politics' here, we have adapted this to 'education policies' as we felt this provides a clearer destinction to the third level. Finally, this more abstract 'third level' engages with 'the politics of education', and asks questions including *in whose interest are these practices and policies carried out; what is the scope of education and what are its relations to other sectors/scales*? Without claiming to cover the wide array of questions proposed, in this paper, we aim to engage with these three levels of analysis with regard to peace education in Sri Lanka.

Our analysis is further informed by the SRA, which is connected to Dale's work, in that they are both rooted in a critical realist theoretical perspective. The SRA analytically treats structures and agents as separate entities, but sees a contingent and dialectical relationship between the two while the agency they employ is clearly articulated (Hay 2002a; Jessop 2005). In the SRA, structures are seen as *strategically selective* meaning that within the confines of particular periods and spaces, specific structural configurations can selectively reinforce the action, tactics, activities and strategies of actors, and discourage others. 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 2002b, 381). Action is framed by constant engagements of actors within their environment, and can lead to the pursuit of different strategies and tactics in different circumstances (Jessop 2005, 48–49). For this reason, 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, 129).

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Following from this perspective, the paper conceptualises teachers as strategic political actors who operate within a complex strategically selective context, and examines the dynamic interplay between the two (Hay 2002a). This positions teachers as critical, complex and perhaps troublesome agents of transformation (Vongalis-Macrow 2007), or in some cases, of reproduction. Teachers around the globe (willingly and unwilling) have space to manoeuvre – or agency – to challenge or contest reforms that do or do not resonate with their ideological positions (Munter, McKinley, and Sarabia 2012). We argue that the SRA enables an analysis of teachers' agency for peace education practice in the Sri Lankan context, by understanding teachers' (lack of) strategies as strategically and selectively positioned and operated within specific structural and material constraints (Hay 2002a; Vongalis-Macrow 2007), and in relation to the broader post-war context. In other words, the SRA helps to move away from analyses that view teachers' (in) effectiveness in reform implementation in isolation, and as the sole panacea or obstacle to education reform. Rather, combining Dale's multiscalar approach and education questions with the SRA, we can move into a more nuanced and multi-layered understanding of teachers' complex, sometimes contradictory, strategies in relation to their wider socio-political, economic and cultural contexts.

Over the past decade, with rising interest in the connection between development, peace/conflict and education in both academic and policy circles, there has been considerable international attention for 'peace education' (Page 2004). While earlier forms of peace education often followed the notion of a 'negative peace' – or the mere absence of violence (Simpson 2004, 1–4), since the 1990s, a somewhat more humanistic and perhaps holistic view of peace education developed, focusing on civil, domestic, cultural and ethnic forms of violence. These contemporary peace education approaches are based on what has been termed a notion of 'positive peace', aiming at the development of a culture of peace and at the eradication of poverty and injustice (see for instance Ardizzone 2001, 7; Bretherton, Weston, and Zbar 2003, 12; Burns and Apselagh 1996, 10; Harris 2002, 20–21; Perkins 2002, 38; Salomon and Nevo 2002, xi, 5; Simpson 2004, 3–4).

There is little consensus in the literature on a clear conceptualisation of 'peace education', and considering the many and various areas of conflict and fragility around the world, we should also question whether we should actually strive for one singular understanding. Each particular context requires a specific approach to educating for/about peace, taking into consideration a location's historical, socio-political, economic and cultural characteristics of the conflict context. There is, however, some common ground in the academic debates about peace education in various regions, when it comes to the most appropriate teaching styles and techniques, which ideally include critical and reflexive dialogue and participatory forms of pedagogy (Lopes Cardozo and May 2009; Reardon and Snauwaert 2011). In this line of thinking, according to the Sri Lankan peace education expert Balasooriya (2007) 'one of the primary functions of peace education is to broaden the vision of pupils, [as] narrow cultural, ethnic, religious, political and parochial views divide mankind, leading to war' (6). Building from the critical and multiscalar theoretical inspirations above, in this article, we draw from debates on social justice in/through education (Apple 1982, 2009; Cochran-Smith 2004; Cochran-Smith et al. 2009; Giroux 2003; Sleeter 2009) and some relevant sources of the more critical perspective on peace (building) education (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2005, 2006; Novelli and Smith 2012; Reardon and Snauwaert 2011). According to Snauwaert (2011), social justice theory from a

capabilities perspective can serve as a robust foundation for more critical forms of peace education theory and practice.

Peace education, or similar educational initiatives carrying different names, can occur in various forms. Peace education can be included 'integrally' in the core (national) curriculum of a country; it can be included as a specific teaching subject; but it can also be part of non-formal or extra-curricular educational activities. In the case of Sri Lanka, we found how policies aim for inclusion of peace education 'integrally' in the curriculum, as a specific subject through 'civic education', while it is also implemented through various extra-curricular activities. While 'peace education initiatives' are continuously receiving international attention and funding, it is important to note that peace education cannot succeed on its own (Lopes Cardozo 2008). Moreover, there seems to be a serious gap between what is stated in policy discourse, and what happens in actual educational reality (Davies 2011; Hoeks 2012), as we will further detail in our analysis below.

While acknowledging the use of 'peace education' in Sri Lanka's political discourse, this paper adopts a critical and broad understanding of 'peacebuilding education' that is not restricted to one subject, but extends to the whole curriculum, the school environment and the wider social and political structures in society, and is rooted in a social justice perspective on the desire for transformations of social injustices. Following the politics of education approach of Dale, and the SRA approach, we should understand initiatives that aim for peacebuilding through education as part of a larger structured and strategically selective context. This is in line with Davies' (2011, 43) observations that a genuine solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka will be mostly political, and that while there are limits to what education – and educators – can do, it should not be ignored in its and their potential role in structural transformation.

Analysing teachers' agency for peace education in Sri Lanka

Let us come back to the central question of this paper: how in a changing context from war to post-war, teachers (un)consciously and actively or passively develop strategies in relation to the policies and politics of peace education. In Sri Lanka there are both enhancing and limiting factors, which determine the political space for manoeuvre wherein teachers act, and thus define teachers' agency for peace education. Following the classification of Dale, we analyse teachers' agency or the strategies they can adopt within this 'space', by looking into the *politics of education*, the *education policies* and the *educational practice*.

The politics of education

Examining the 'politics of education' – in whose interests the peace education practices are carried out, and what its scope and its relation to other sectors is – an ambivalent political discourse around the need for peace education seems to exist in post-war Sri Lanka. While the field study of 2006 seems to indicate that political attention was given to peace education (Lopes Cardozo 2008), in the years after the ending of the war in 2009 the need for peace education within the larger political discourse seems to be losing ground. The fact that the Unit for Social Cohesion and Peace Education within the MoE has been reduced in size and importance since 2008 reflects this declining political interest (Hoeks 2012, 47, 69). Moreover, minority

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ethnic groups are still under-represented in education institutions, which tends to undermine a just political representation (Fraser 2005). This is reflected in a quote of an education governance actor in 2011:

> The government officials, who are mostly Sinhalese, in charge of education, will they be able to come up with a version of history, of conflict resolution, of peace studies that transcends our ethnicities and is fair by both points of view?

The reduced emphasis on peacebuilding can be placed within the wider discourse around peace governance in Sri Lanka, where the war and processes of conflict are largely negated and the focus seems to be on peace through economic development. Whereas some people believe that Sri Lanka is already at peace, others stress the need for more positive notions of peace, extending the mere absence of violence. The latter belief is needed to encourage peacebuilding through addressing and structurally transforming the causes of conflict (Novelli and Smith 2012), an approach that potentially includes a form of socially just and inclusive peace education.

Dale's 'politics of education' urges us to look from a 'cultural political economy' perspective at education and its connections to these other sectors. In this sense, the strong exam-oriented system (further discussed below) that pushes both Sri Lankan students and teachers in a tight 'production model' of academic excellence fits with a globally inspired and nationally adopted neoliberal economic push for competitiveness. Finally, while a political will for peace education seems to be losing ground, a focus on social cohesion and the creation of a strong (and single?) national identity through education could be viewed as being of interest to a Sinhala-dominated political elite.

(Peace) education policies

Extending our focus from the politics of education to the level of 'education policies', we analyse the questions how, by whom and at what scale peace education is determined, coordinated and administered. Therefore, we turn back to look at the *National Policy on Education for Peace and Social Cohesion and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions* that was formulated in 2008. The policy aspires to create a Sri Lankan citizen who is in peace with the other, in peace with nature and in peace with oneself. The latter, inner peace, is defined by a Sri Lankan peace education expert as 'harmony and peace with oneself, good health, absence of inner conflicts, joy, sense of freedom, insight, spiritual peace, feelings of kindness, compassion and content and appreciation of art' (Balasooriya 2007, 4). To create this desired citizen, the policy document promotes peace education in seven strategic areas: curriculum, teacher education, second national language, integrated schools, co-curricular activities, whole school environment and research (Davies 2011; Hoeks 2012; MoE 2008).

In regards to teachers, the policy encourages every teacher to teach about peace and underlines the need to develop guidelines on how to integrate peace in every subject, as it is perceived that an integrative approach will bear greater potential to internalise peace values and attitudes. To better prepare teachers to act as agents of peace, the policy stipulates that peace education should be integrated in pre-service and in-service teacher training. It further stresses the importance of civic education, as this subject contains explicit modules on peace, conflict, human values, multiculturalism and democracy. Furthermore, to increase intercultural harmony and

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understanding the policy promotes integrated schools, where pupils from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are taught together. Teaching of Sinhala and Tamil and English as linking language is an essential precondition. Finally, the policy document promotes a peaceful school environment and underlines the importance of co-curricular activities, which according to the literature in some cases might boost 'desegregation of the mind' (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, 16–17) and dialogue (Davies 2006) among different groups engaged, while it is also emphasised how mere 'intercultural encounters' in educational settings are more complex in terms of the desired outcomes (Bekerman 2012, 558).

The formulation of the specific peace education policy in 2008, as described above, seems promising for the advancement of peace education in Sri Lanka. However, the six priorities of the 2008 EFA Mid-Decade Assessment did not include any notion on interethnic peace and understanding (Davies 2011), and three years after its formulation, the large majority of education governance actors engaged in peace education report that the implementation remains weak. During the field research in 2011, education governance actors working on peace education reported that there is no proper implementation structure yet, to transcend peace education from ministry to school level, while monitoring and evaluation remains poor and funding for peace education is generally lacking.

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The practice of peace education

Zooming into Dale's third category of 'educational practice' – *who is taught, by whom, where and when, under what circumstances and with what results* – and looking into teachers' strategies more closely reveals that the implementation of peace education at school level has remained rather poor between 2006 and 2011. Following the SRA, teachers base their strategies, on the one hand, on their beliefs and knowledge concerning peace education and, on the other hand, on the perceived challenges and opportunities in the wider education policy framework; two points of reference to which we will turn now.

With regard to teachers' beliefs and knowledge about peace education, the majority of teachers from all three ethnic backgrounds included in the studies – Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim – seem to subscribe the continuing need for peace education in the changing context from war to post-war, especially to improve mutual understanding, as a dialogue with a Sinhalese teacher in 2011 portrays:

> Respondent: 'After the war we pay more attention to peace education in this school […]
> Interviewer: Why?
> Respondent: Because we believe that the reason for the war is the lack of mutual understanding. Thus, as teachers we try to give them mutual understanding and peace education, so they can respect and learn about other races and religions. I think peace education is a good solution for the war and for other related problems'.

At the same time, teachers hold different beliefs regarding the government's engagement to peace education and its inclusion in the formal school syllabus. During the field study in 2011, one-fifth of the interviewed teachers (38 in total) explicitly indicated that they were unaware of any peace education government programme, although based on personal observations this number might be

somewhat higher. For instance, as one Tamil teacher conveyed: *Peace education is not in the government syllabus*. At the same time, the words of another Sinhalese teacher are illustrative of the view of some of the teachers interviewed: 'This government is very actively involved in this peace program. Earlier we could not see this kind of textbook or [civic education] subject. This government wants to improve the peace program'. The stark difference between these quotes, with the second one being somewhat 'politically correct', do reflect how not all teachers are well informed about the peace education policies, resulting in a strategically and *selective* context, that favours some actors over others that are less informed. This can be influential in the different (un)conscious strategies teachers adopt to (not) implement peace education. Another example is that during the formulation of the policy two schools in the capital Colombo were consulted (Hoeks 2012; MoE 2008). Ideally, a larger number of (representatives of) teachers, from different regions of the country, should have been part of the policy design earlier on for teachers to be able to develop a sense of ownership, and to further develop implementation strategies. It seems that the somewhat top-down reform, as well as unfavourable working conditions (discussed below), leaves teachers little opportunity to develop successful peace education strategies.

As mentioned above, both field studies revealed that the peace education policy is not yet sufficiently translated into pre-service and in-service teacher training (Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008). This might not only explain the somewhat divergent understanding between teachers, but also between governance actors and teachers of what peace education is and should be. Whereas governance actors underlined the need for a holistic approach to peace education, implying that all teachers can and should include notions of peace in their lessons, most teachers report that peace education can only be taught through certain subjects, such as the new subject 'life competencies and civic education', religion, the second national language and English as link language (Hoeks 2012, 48, 61). The majority of teachers reported in 2011 that they would like to gain deeper insight into the peace education policy, and how it can be implemented into their classes. To bridge the gap between 'education policies' and 'educational practice' and to increase teachers' agency, both pre-service and in-service teachers would need to be better informed about the rationale behind and the practical implications of the peace education policy.

Despite the continuing lack of targeted teacher training, most governance actors and teachers agree that the teacher should be a role model for peace and that group exercises might stimulate cooperation and mutual understanding between pupils in a more general sense. However, both governance actors and teachers identified a number of challenges that tend to undermine the agency of teachers to fulfil this role in their daily reality at school.

As discussed above the peace education policy brings forward some promising strategies to bridge the gap between different groups in society, such as teaching of language skills and organising intergroup meetings. This might lead to effective communication, which following the literature can discourage stereotyping; reduce feelings of fear towards the other (Giroux 1992); and might help to foster positive attitudes towards social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Davies 2011, 18). In specific, the policy promotes the learning of the second national language, which implies that Sinhalese learn Tamil and Tamils learn Sinhala, with English as a linking language for all. As one Tamil teacher put forward in 2011: *By practicing bilingualism in proper manner I hope we can achieve peace in the future*. However,

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in practice, if the second national language is taught in schools, only one hour is dedicated to the subject and pupils have limited opportunity to practise the acquired language skills due to the segregated society where many live. An encouraging initiative is that specific teacher training centres have been set up for English and the second national language (Hoeks 2012; MoE 2008). The policy also promotes the organisation of intergroup meetings, such as interschool sports competitions and exchange camps, where pupils and teachers from different ethnicities and religions get the opportunity to meet and interact (Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008). These activities might have a positive impact in terms of intercultural understanding, although careful guidance is essential, as respondents have mentioned how improper implementation might increase intolerance and stereotyping (Hoeks 2012). Unfortunately, due to the high costs of implementation, the number of intergroup meetings remains low, while teachers often feel incapable and demotivated to engage in these activities, reflecting a strategy of (forced) inaction. This is, on the one hand, related to the changing politics of peace education between 2006 and 2011, which was discussed above, and, on the other hand, to a number of structural challenges in the education system.

The section above on the politics of education illustrated that while the political will for peace education was increasing in 2006, this political motivation seems to have faded since the official ending of the war in 2009. This political shift threatens to undermine the prior results reached by ministry officials and teachers, and restricts the motivation and freedom to implement peace education and to openly address the war and the social and political inequalities in class. Next to the changing and largely unfavourable political environment, various structural challenges undermine teachers' agency for peace education. One structural challenge is the segregated school structure, often extending to the surrounding village and region, which according to several teachers limits the possibilities of interethnic learning. Although the peace education policy promotes a more integrated school structure (MoE 2008), in practice, integrated schools remain the exception. Following the literature on more critical forms of pedagogy, schools should be a place to build mutual understanding, where teachers encourage pupils to broaden their vision, respect and recognise the other, and adopt hybrid and inclusive identities (Balasooriya 2007; Ben-Nun 2013; Giroux 1992; Nicolai 2009; Said 2000; Weldon 2010). Whereas most teachers interviewed in 2011 subscribed this notion, one teacher seemed to explicitly discard this belief: 'since we do not have children from other ethnic backgrounds in this school, we do not need to teach about how to deal with differences between ethnic groups. Such problems we do not have in this school'. This teacher's 'strategy of neglect' reflects the earlier mentioned attitude of negation of the conflict at the political national level. By the same token, the war is almost completely silenced within the curricula, textbooks and wider school context. Davies (2011, 45) comments how school texts for the civics subject talk about conflict but only related to other contexts, such as Rwanda. Both field studies revealed that most teachers choose not to discuss the war in their lessons, again reflecting a 'strategy of neglect'.

Another structural challenge further complicating the position of teachers is the lack of comparative perspective and bias towards the majority group in teaching material. In both field studies, a number of governance actors and teachers referred to bias in the history curriculum and the lack of comparative perspective in the religion subject (Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008). For instance, as one Sinhalese

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history teacher in 2011 remarked 'especially our history belongs to Buddhism and Sinhala culture. [Therefore,] sometimes we criticize them (Muslim pupils) badly in our history'. Or in the words of one Tamil history teacher: 'Both communities identity should be mentioned equally. However, the current curriculum teaches history mainly from the Sinhala perspective, [and tells] little about Tamil history'. Both teachers expressed the worry that the excluded groups, respectively, Muslim and Tamil pupils, feel discouraged to study the history subject, while several Tamil history teachers noted that due to the full curriculum they have hardly any time to include notions of Tamil history in their lessons.

Furthermore, in both field studies teachers referred to poor school facilities, lack of space within schools, overcrowded classrooms, full curricula and an education system that is built around competitive examinations. As only 10% of pupils can enter university, a lot of pressure is put on these exams, creating stress for both pupils and teachers and reducing the time and space for teachers to include notions of peace in their lessons. It has also been reported (Davies 2011; Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo and May 2009) how school principals seem to play an important role in promoting or resisting change. It is important here to recognise that often, school principals see their agency being limited by the overcrowded and exam-burdened curricula on which their school is judged upon by education officials.

On top of the high workload, teachers' salary, career perspectives and incentives are poor. As one Sinhalese teacher noted in 2011: 'In our profession there are no good targets given, which means no promotions, [and] a salary [that remains] the same'. Teachers are often forced to give extra-tuition classes outside school hours, which not only heightens their already heavy workload but also limits their opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities, prepare their lessons or follow in-service training courses. Not surprisingly, many teachers reported feeling stressed and overburdened (Hoeks 2012). Without any opportunity for teachers to give their voice and share their thoughts concerning their working conditions and the implementation of the peace education policy, their agency to practise peace education in schools is rather constrained, as the following quote of a Tamil English teacher in 2011 reveals:

> It is simply coming, and working, working, working. I think very soon we will end up in asylums, if it goes on like this. But the education authorities do not care, they are only dictating, we are not even given a chance to voice our opinion. Sometimes when they come, I really feel like stand[ing] up and telling them, we are not machines, we are human beings.

When analysing teachers' practice in Sri Lankan schools, a rather unique aspect is the importance given to the development of self-esteem and personal development of pupils through the learning of *inner peace*. In several interviews in 2006 and 2011, the Sri Lankan peace education expert Balasooriya stressed the importance of inner peace: before one can be in peace with others, one needs to be in peace with oneself. Creative classes and meditation are practised in schools to stimulate inner peace among pupils. Within the post-war context of Sri Lanka, the creation of intrapersonal peace seems important to address growing school violence, psychosocial issues and suicide rate among Sri Lankan pupils (Hoeks 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008). The relevance of peace education, including the intrapersonal aspect of inner peace, extends borders. Peace education and inner peace seem equally relevant for various other diverse contexts around the globe, including Western societies, where

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conflict within schools and within society at large seem to pose growing challenges (Lopes Cardozo 2008, 25). However, Davies (2011) and Balasooriya (2007) rightly warn against uncritically accepting 'inner-peace' as a universal and multi-religious concept, while it has obvious Buddhist roots. Therefore, peace education should also contain a 'socio-political dimension which examine[s] social justice and intergroup as well as interpersonal tensions' (Balasooriya 2007, 27). This view aligns with what could be called a critical, multiscalar and social justice approach to peace, where it is considered that in order to have deeper and more structural potential for transformation, peace education should ideally be focused at the personal, interpersonal, community and national level to challenge the continuous lack of open and critical dialogue in school, politics, culture and society at large and stimulate the development of critical and societal awareness among pupils and teachers (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Colenso 2005; Davies 2005; Keerawella 2012; Lopes Cardozo 2008; Zembylas and Bekerman 2013). Relating the inner peace discourse to the politics of education, it seems that defining the conflict solely as an intrapersonal problem threatens to overlook the wider political inequalities and grievances, and moves the responsibility away from the government to the individual. However, in the classroom, the tense political reality does influence peace education practices. For instance, most teachers feel constrained in their efforts to practice peace education due to the restricted freedom of speech: they tend to be afraid to address the conflict openly in class. While valuing the importance of the emphasis on inner-peace in Sri Lanka's policy, there is a need to move away from a non-critical form of 'education of inner-peace', which negates structural causes of continuing conflict and injustices, towards a more critical and inclusive approach to peace education, furthering various (personal – interpersonal, community – intercommunity and national – international) levels of non-violence and peace.

How to move forward?

> Unless young people can analyse the roots of conflict and prevent these roots from regrowing into branches later on, any peace will be fragile. (Davies 2011, 45)

The question on how to move forward is not easy to answer, and it is obviously beyond the scope of what we can discuss here to provide a complete answer to the question. With political will for peace education diminishing, a tendency towards silencing the conflict in school and in wider society, and a general poor implementation of the peace education and social cohesion policy, there is a need to reconsider the state of and direction for peacebuilding education in Sri Lanka. Just as Höglund and Orjuela (2011) argue, the relevant questions in the Sri Lankan context are 'about the kind of peace' that is emerging in Sri Lanka, and how stable such peace will be. Similarly, we like to argue that the relevant question here is 'what kind of peace (-building) education' is indispensable for a sustainable and just peace, and what is needed in order to reach that objective.

In this paper, we have followed Roger Dale's (2006, 190) 'three levels of education questions', and consequently our analysis focused on the levels of education practices, education policies and the politics of education. Our analysis showed how at the level of 'education policies' for the case of Sri Lanka, the formulation of the peace education policy by the MoE Unit for Peace and Social Cohesion in 2008 seems a promising development. By looking into the dimension of the 'politics of

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education', this article also showed how implementation is undermined by a discourse that negates the need for peace education within the official post-war state of the country. Whereas government actors directly involved in peace education programmes seem motivated, the need for a more comprehensive peacebuilding education is losing ground within the larger post-war political discourse, wherein the war and processes of conflict are largely disregarded. Hence, there is a gap between the education policies – at the discursive level – and the education practice level, where implementation remains rather poor due to a range of structural and more agency-related factors.

Data collected at the 'educational practice' level shows there is a lack of funds; no clear structure to translate peace education from the ministry to school level; no effective monitoring and evaluation system; and a lack of teacher training in peace education, creating serious structural challenges to the implementation. Our analysis of teachers' practices at the school level illustrate how due to poor implementation and lack of teacher training, teachers have different understandings compared to government officials of what peace education is and how it should be practised. This divergent understanding limits the strategies teachers (can) adopt to effectively turn the policy discourse into a reality. Although the identities of teachers, based on their personal experiences with the conflict and peace education, will lead to varied political engagement to peace education (Weldon 2010), training can provide teachers with the basic knowledge and practical guidance needed to implement peace education in the classroom. The majority of teachers feel constrained in their practice of peace education by a full and exam-oriented curriculum, low teacher incentives, a lack of training on the topic and poor political participation. In a recent publication, Robertson and Dale (2014) review these 'education questions' and convincingly add a fourth 'dimension', namely the 'moment of educational outcomes'. This analytical focus area urges future studies to not only look into the immediate consequences of educational practices, policies and politics, but also the wider individual, collective, social and economic qualities and impacts arising from them, and how in a context of globalisation 'successes of some' might be achieved at the expense of others.

Ultimately, teachers are at the core of peace education programmes as they are the key implementing agents. In her case study of Sri Lanka (2011, 42), Davies argues for the need of further (action) research on

> what changes teachers to use more critical thinking, more conflict analysis, understand human rights and the rights of the child and move away from the rigid, authoritarian methods which do not help to create the critical citizen and even perpetuate acceptance of discrimination or violence as normal.

She continues by stating that 'in theory' there is nothing to stop a teacher from discussing the dynamics of conflict and war within the classroom, 'if they had the training, disposition and support to tackle controversial issues' (2011, 45). Through applying an SRA perspective (Hay 2002a), it is exactly this 'if' that we have aimed to explore here: while hypothetically Sri Lankan teachers could function as agents of change, in reality the time and (political) space available to teachers, as well as a lack of targeted training and support, seriously limits their agency to work towards inclusive and sustainable peace. Sri Lankan teachers *could* function as strategic catalysts of inclusive and sustainable forms of peacebuilding; yet, the present context – including a lack of adequate training, an overcrowded curriculum combined with a fierce exam-oriented system and restricted political freedom of speech – does not

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leave much space for manoeuvre for teachers to take up this role. From a critical theoretical perspective, an approach which avoids reconciliation and negates the need to include conflict resolution and peacebuilding in and beyond Sri Lankan classrooms and the educational community will not help to change the status quo, as it continues to reproduce structures of inequality and (in)direct violence. In other words, peacebuilding education cannot succeed on its own, and educators aiming to work toward structural and positive forms of peace similarly cannot succeed without a favourable and supportive environment.

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