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past, present and future

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Situating studies of education and conflict within the evolving field of Comparative and International Education: Past, present and future

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Situating studies of education and conflict within the evolving field of Comparative and International Education: Past, present and future

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Introduction

As two of the convenors responsible for the thematic group on Education and Conflict at the 2013 Comparative Education World Congress in Buenos Aires, we envisaged, in line with the conference theme of *New Times, New Voices,* a group of papers which would show how studies investigating the myriad faces of education in conflict are situated within the broader discipline of comparative and international education. We sought scholarship that would symbolise the why and how studies regarding education and conflict have moved from a periphery issue, to one that is now a key preoccupation of academics, development practitioners and policymakers. Acknowledging that the nature of conflict has changed, from inter to intrastate, geopolitical power balances have gone through tectonic shifts, and that economic and political security are under threat in many parts of the world, we also wanted papers to critically explore the place and space for education against this backdrop.

The chapters in this volume accomplish such objectives astonishingly well. They represent a diversity of methodological approaches, provide empirically rich case studies as well as more macro-level analysis, and cut across a spectrum of geographic spaces and scales. They engage with critical theoretical ideas, and draw on the lens of comparison in a number of different ways. According to Dale (2005), there has been a tendency within the field of comparative and international education, to analyse situations from a-historical, disciplinary parochial, and state-centric positions. What makes the body of work in this volume reflective of the changing face of the discipline is that they provide proof that *history*, *interdisciplinarity*, *critical theory, and multiscalar and contextualised analyses matter* when examining the relationship between education and conflict.

A set of emerging arguments

History matters

A first argument that emerged from a number of the chapters, sometimes very directly, other times implicitly, is that 'history matters'. For example, Brent Edwards' analysis of EDUCO's implementation in El Salvador helps to retrospectively unpack the politics of education occurring in the country after the country's long civil war, and understand the reason why EDUCO took on the form it did. Elsewhere, Candace Carter puts forth a compelling argument for why peace education cannot be effective without a clear understanding of how peace and peace-building processes have occurred in the past. In a similar vein, Pauline Kollontai's and Lynn Davies' chapters both speak to the importance of understanding how stories and histories embedded in religious texts and dogma can be actively manipulated to promote conflict inside classroom spaces, historically and at present. In her chapter, Anna Virkama explores the history of protest in the Maghreb countries, to identify how the Arab Spring protests were a response to more pragmatic livelihood concerns, and how this differs from protests of the past

which were deeply embedded in anti-colonial struggles. This, as she suggests, presents a different role both generationally and ideologically for the public intellectuals located within higher education institutions. From the same region, Alexis Artaud de la Ferriere's chapter critically unpacks the simple narrative of Algeria's independence struggle and suggests a complex and sometimes contradictory role for teachers within that time and space, a message which still has relevance today in other contexts around the world.

For the field of conflict and education it is critical that more of such analyses are undertaken moving forward. Bush and Saltarelli (2000), who coined the term the 'two faces of education in conflict', noted that any reform aimed at promoting education's positive faced needed to start with a critical and comparative historiography. Otherwise the danger, as always, is that history repeats itself moving forward.

Interdisciplinarity matters

While education in any context is intricately tied to political, economic and social relations, in times of conflict, education systems become both a manifestation of, and symbol of the tensions and contradictions within such relationships. Given this situation, many of the studies explicitly make the argument taking studies of education outside the education space. For example, Christine Monaghan put forth a compelling argument for locating studies of Education in Emergencies/Conflict within International Relations and Security Studies, given the need to challenge, contest and change the structural dimensions of an education system which might be perpetuating conflict. Similarly, Tajendra Pherali draws on political economy analysis to demonstrate how educational reconstruction following the end of Nepal's internal conflict, was strongly reflective of and reproducing aspects of the political and economic tensions that were part of the post-conflict settlement. Both Pherali's and Monaghan's work reminds us in different ways of the importance of locating education within the structural conditions of society when analysing its contribution for/against peacetime recovery.

This perspective then translates into the diversity of methods and frames of analysis on which the various authors represented in this volume draw on to shape their work. Drawing on the work of gender theorists Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, Zvi Bekerman and Michalinos Zembylas question the dominant and often unproblematised theoretical assumptions underpinning integrated education in conflict-affected societies. In another chapter, Julia Paulson and Robin Shields constructively blend quantitative and discursive forms of analysis to identify the possibilities and constraints of measuring and associating measures of state fragility and conflict to impacts on education. In their respective chapters, Grace Feuerverger and Zehavit Gross draw on the personal narrative to reflect on their work as practitioners of building peace inside their pedagogical spaces. In doing so they demonstrate the power of using personal experience to theorise on the complex mechanisms and dynamics underpinning conflict resolution and peace-building.

Multiscalar and contextualised analysis matters

A clear argument emerges from this collection in the need to engage with different 'levels' of analysis when exploring the relationship between education and conflict. For example, Julia Paulson and Robin Shields emphasise the need to look beyond the state level if we really want to understand how processes of conflict, fragility and education are related in positive or negative ways. This key assertion reinforces the fact that today

conflict is situated within a 'complex and highly unequal system of local, national, regional and global actors, institutions and practices' (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008: 483). Conversely, Lynn Davies, in her chapter, reminds that while we should maintain governments' responsibility for promoting what she calls 'dynamic secularism' in systems of governance, actual peacebuilding initiatives through 'secular approaches' for (religious or non-religious) education take place at the level of the school and community. Thus concern also needs to be given to levels beneath the state, and particularly the practices and institutions of schooling and religion at the community level. Connected to this need for multiscalar analysis, studies in this book also illustrate how analysis needs to be thoroughly 'contextualised', or adapted and made relevant to each specific context and scale of analysis. For example, Lynn Davies suggests how it would be foolish to compel religious Afghani schools to be 'secular' in scope.

In addition, multiscalar here also implies looking beyond the education sector as an entity which functions in and onto itself. Zehavit Gross' piece documents the conflict that ensues inside her own pedagogical space as *Operation Cast Lead* in Gaza unfolds outside the walls of her classroom. As Gross identifies, understanding the mechanisms and dynamics of that conflict, and attempting to resolve the tensions she documents through her case study, required her as facilitator to engage with students on the highly institutionalised and historical roots of the conflict in the region, as well as her own position and emotions within this. In a similar vein, Timothy Cashman's piece situates the discourses and tensions of border politics between the United States and Mexico within the pedagogical spaces of a high school. Cashman's piece, like Gross' serve as timely reminders of powerful position of schooling institutions and educators in situations of conflict to either reinforce or challenge the economic, political and social tensions brewing outside the classroom walls.

Moving the field forward

Given that this volume is part of a broader series of works coming out of the World Congress in Buenos Aires, it would seem appropriate to reflect on where studies exploring the relationship between education, conflict, peace-building and conflict resolution fit within the broader field, now and moving forward.

As Klees (2008: 302) notes, our field is fortunate in that we are open to the theories, methods, practices, debates, and controversies across the social sciences, wielding a 'permeability that forms a great opportunity and a great challenge'. The opportunities of the opening of traditional borders are demonstrated in this volume where it is clearly apparent that what we do as scholars within the field and how we go about doing it varies tremendously. In many ways the chapters are a microcosm of the broader dilemmas and preoccupations guiding comparative and international education research today. Several chapters touch on issues of marginalization, poverty, or inequality. Others explore issues of national sovereignty and the primacy, role and legitimacy of the nation-state (and state-actors) as they relate to education. Collectively, the chapters are also reflections of historical or current forms of globalisation and the ways in which social, political, cultural, religious, ethnic and class based conflicts within education are innately tied to tensions brought about by the movement and flow of ideas, goods, services, and people within and across borders.

The challenge is identifying what unites this incredibly diversity of topics, methods, and disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Our sense is that while we may differ in how or what we study, what unites us as scholars and practitioners is our shared conviction of education's potential role in brokering a positive peace—in other words a transformative solution to the forms of political, social, economic and cultural conflict that mar our societies historically and at present.

What does all this mean for inquiries and studies exploring the relationship between education and conflict moving forward?

Within the area of education and conflict, research has traditionally been influenced by the need to address a particular problem created by armed conflict, with the objective of identifying how to get the system back up and running (Smith, McCandless, Paulson, and Wheaton 2011). Underlying this is an acceptance of the broader status quo as given with the aim of identifying how to return things to 'normalcy'. Dale and Robertson (2009) would identify this approach 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.

Additionally, with the growing influence of international interventions in domestic conflicts, there needs to be acknowledgement 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).

Finally, as Davies (2013: 3) notes, research that has tried to link particular actions and interventions in the education sector, to particular outcomes in conflict-affected societies, 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 huge. Even if conflict were to decrease, it is almost impossible to trace this back to something in education." For the reason that she notes, that 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."

We see the chapters in this volume as an important evolution away from problem-solving approaches towards ones that could broadly categorised under the umbrella of critical theory. Critical theorists (Cox and Sinclair 1996; Sayer 2000) argue that research should question and challenge conditions perceived to be hegemonic in a quest for social transformation. Based on what we identify as the collective aspiration of these chapters—namely to argue that other realities and narratives are indeed possible and already do exist—critical theory is well utilised in various ways to present such alternatives.

For example, some studies in this volume suggest that it is insufficient to restore educational provision without any consideration for the cultural, political, economic and social structures it feeds into and belongs to. It also limits education's potential to act as a transformative measure, by accepting the status quo and identifying all educational problems as the fault of the education system itself. Other chapters of this volume are vivid evidence of the challenges facing education in conflict-affected settings, and are the product of historical (and colonial legacies), long-standing social and economic structures, and political regimes and affiliations of power and privilege. These issues extend well beyond the borders of education itself. Finally, several chapters are examples of what Davies (2005) identified as key contributions of research on education and conflict to the broader field of comparative and international education. Specifically Davies (Ibid: 368-9) encourages studies to use comparison to: (1) promote alternative mechanisms of assessing the relevance and quality of education using conflict-based indicator and (2) better explore how schools and educators teach about matters of citizenship, peace and democracy as well as matters of conflict.

As a complete volume, the book provides for better understanding of the ways in which: (1) education is both a reflection of and contributor to past, present and future social relations, experiences, and practices; (2) the ways in which education fits into existing relations of production, distribution and exchange in society; and (3) how and by whom education's purpose, role and function in society has and is being determined and governed in such contexts. Rather than presenting an evolutionary or consensual process of change, education is acknowledged in each of the chapters as existing within highly contested projects of state, nation and region building, an argument we have advanced in our own recent research (see for example Shah and Lopes Cardozo, 2014). This more critical perspective helps us begin to understand the context, political will, and motivations of various actors involved in education projects in conflict-affected states. It allows us to see the many faces education has in relation to conflict and fragility.

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