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Novelli, M.; Lopes Cardozo, M.; Smith, A.

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The '4 Rs' as a tool for critical policy analysis of the education sector in conflict affected states

Mario Novelli, Professor of Political Economy of Education, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, UK
m.novelli@sussex.ac.uk
Mieke Lopes Cardozo, Assistant Professor, Governance and Inclusive Development, University of Amsterdam
T.A.LopesCardozo@uva.nl
Alan Smith, UNESCO Chair, Ulster University
a.smith@ulster.co.uk

Abstract

In this text, we discuss the 4Rs framework that we have designed as an analytical tool that allows researchers, policy-developers and practitioners to grasp the interconnected dimensions that shape and drive education systems, practices and outcomes in conflict affected contexts. The framework's central normative position is that inequalities and injustice (including within the education system) are important for understanding the reasons for the outbreak of violent conflict (the drivers of conflict) and that addressing inequalities (including in education), and the legacies of conflict, are necessary to bring about sustainable peace and overcome the legacies of conflict.

Key Words

Sustainable peace
Social justice
Conflict
Education

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Introduction

Since 2000, there has been a growing recognition of both the importance of working in conflict-affected contexts and the growing evidence of the very particular effects of conflict on educational access and quality and vice versa – the importance of education in driving conflicts or building peaceful societies (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2008). This has also led to an interest in understanding the particularities of the educational challenges faced in conflict-affected contexts, and to a growing recognition that policy makers, donors and practitioners working in the education sector in conflict-affected contexts are faced with huge and distinct challenges and priorities requiring new and innovative ways of funding, planning, governing and evaluating education policy interventions.
As a result of this rising interest, the literature on education and conflict has expanded greatly over the last decade (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Smith, 2003; Novelli, 2014). There is also interest in better understanding the relationship between education, conflict and peace and the way education systems might become more conflict sensitive (Novelli and Smith, 2012). Linked to this is interest in political economy research in the sector, and a mushrooming of political economy tools to facilitate policy development and planning (Novelli et al., 2014).

In this paper, we want to outline one such tool – the 4Rs Framework. This framework was developed with colleagues from the University of Amsterdam and Ulster University and applied to date in research in eight conflict-affected contexts (Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan, Kenya, Myanmar, Uganda,

Rwanda and South Africa) to examine educational governance and policy in relation to education, conflict and peace. The framework's central normative position is that inequalities and injustice (including within the education system) are important for understanding the reasons for the outbreak of civil wars (the drivers of conflict) and that addressing inequalities (including in education) is necessary to bring about sustainable peace and overcome the legacies of conflict.

When reflecting on inequalities, we had a strong sense that we needed to go beyond the economic. For this reason, we drew on a version of Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice, exploring educational inequalities more broadly in terms of Redistribution, Recognition and Representation (Fraser, 1995; 2005). In our understanding of these concepts they were linked respectively to economic inequalities relating to the funding and management of education (Redistribution); inequalities and injustices related to cultural representation and misrecognition (Recognition); and finally, inequalities linked to participation and democratic deficits in the governance and management of education (Representation). These 3Rs helped us to explore different dimensions of educational inequalities (economic, cultural and political) – as drivers of conflict, in education. We also added a 4th R (Reconciliation), which allowed us to explore not only the potential drivers of conflict, but also the legacies of conflict and how education might bring communities together through processes of healing and psycho-social interventions and transitional justice (truth, justice and reparations).

We believe that there is a dialectical relationship between the drivers of conflict and the legacies of conflict and that we need to reflect carefully on the balance between addressing inequalities and developing process that build trust within and between communities affected by conflict. That is to say that a political discussion is needed to balance the needs of historically marginalised communities who demand reforms to redress inequalities and the need for policies to be inclusive of both victims and perpetrators who would need to live side by side and reconstruct new relationships out of the violence and pain of war. The '4Rs' approach thus allowed us to develop a theoretically informed heuristic device to explore the multi-dimensional ways that education systems might produce or reduce educational and societal inequalities and in so doing undermine or promote sustainable peace and development in and through education.

As with much of the work in our field of inquiry, we sought to develop a tool that was policy relevant – but one which was unashamedly informed by ideals of promoting peace with social justice – which we continue to believe is the only way that long term sustainable peace can be achieved in countries affected by conflict. We developed the 4Rs approach as a heuristic device to support the process of design, data collection, and analysis in order to reflect on the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in supporting the positive role that education might play in conflict affected contexts. Our aim is that this framework becomes a diagnostic tool that will spark a dialogue among key stakeholders and be adapted in ways relevant to different cultural, political, and economic contexts (see Figure 1).

While the approach and its application remains a work in progress, it already allows for a much sharper focus on the complex ways that inequalities within education, in their multiple and varied manifestations, might be linked to conflict drivers. Furthermore, it allows us to go beyond the narrow 'access' and 'quality' debates prevalent in the field of education and international development – both from a human capital and a rights-based perspective - and allow us to reflect more holistically on the education systems' relationship to economic, social, cultural and political development processes and its role and relationship to the production of inequalities that fuel the grievances that often drive conflicts.

Recognising the tensions within and between social justice and reconciliation

Building on Fraser's (2005) work, we position the potentially transformative role education can play as inherently connected to and embedded in processes of social justice and societal transformation. Fraser, a philosopher by training who departs from but is not limited to a critical feminist perspective, asserts that a socially just society would entail 'parity of participation.' She argues further that, to ensure 'participation on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser, 2005: 73), one should adopt the economic solution of redistributing resources and opportunities and include sociocultural remedies for better recognition and political representation.

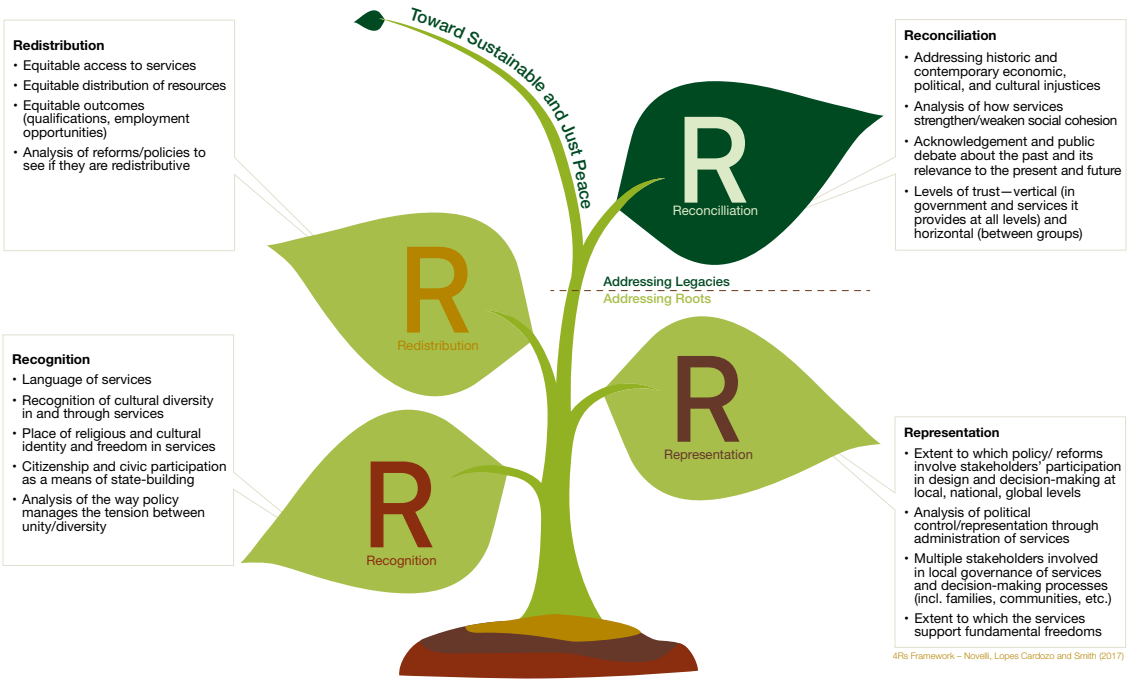

Figure 1: The 4Rs framework

It is important to note that, in keeping with Fraser's line of thought, while the dimensions of the 4Rs are separated for analytical purposes, they are actually closely interlinked. We also need to acknowledge how internal relations between these 'Rs' can be reinforcing or conflictive. For example, recognising formerly excluded ethnic languages in education and redistributing resources to train teachers and develop material to enhance this process could lead to greater representation of ethnic minority graduates in decision-making positions at the school governance level or later in political positions. However, opening up to diverse languages also might hinder the reconciliation process, as some minority languages might be included as a language of instruction while others are not, thus creating resentment among various groups of students.

Similarly, addressing and redressing inequalities that drive conflicts is not necessarily a win-win process, and previous/current dominant social groups might feel threatened by redistributive policies that seek to rebalance societal privileges in favour of oppressed groups. This is where tensions might emerge between those who want to emphasise social justice and those who seek to emphasise peace and reconciliation. For example, while treating everyone the same – such as equalising the per capita education spending on all children might work as a mechanism for 'Reconciliation' where all citizens feel they are being treated the same regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender etc – this equality of treatment in a highly unequal society, might be inadvertently reproducing the historical inequalities that underpin social injustice. Such an approach to education policy might give the illusion of change without any real transformation.

Applying the 4Rs to analyse the relation between education and peacebuilding

So, what does this analytical framework mean in terms of examining the relationships between education, armed conflict and peace, whether in research projects or when designing or reviewing policy-related or programmatic work? Sustainable peacebuilding should not be conceptualised just as a means 'to' education (access) but also 'in and through' education. It should consider how teaching and learning processes and outcomes reproduce certain (socioeconomic, cultural, and political) inequalities (Keddie, 2012) and thus can stand in the way of, or reinforce, processes of reconciliation and foster education's negative, or positive, face.

We also see the 4Rs model as a possible approach to design and structure (research, programmatic) projects, whereby starting from a comprehensive 4Rs-inspired context-and-conflict analysis informs the choices made. The 4Rs framework has also been applied to analyse and examine the way specific interventions positively or negatively impact sustainable peace outcomes on various fronts.

To do justice to education's full potential, the model aims to move away from narrow technical approaches to understanding, designing, and implementing education in conflict-affected regions, and toward a model that allows for the examination of and positive engagement with a wider range of conflict drivers and legacies.

	To what extent is education contributing to sustainable peacebuilding (4Rs)? Potential "indicators" for a mixed-methods approach
Redistribution (addressing inequalities)	Quantitative analysis of existing data to examine vertical and horizontal inequalities relevant to education inputs, resources, and outcomes. Analysis of macro education reforms or policies to see if they are redistributive; for example, the impact of decentralisation, privatisation, and how they impact different groups and affect conflict dynamics.
Recognition (respecting difference)	Language of instruction polices. Recognition of cultural diversity through curriculum. Place of religious identity and religious diversity in teaching practices. (Re)production of gendered relations and norms in the education system. Citizenship, civic, sexuality, and history education in relation to state-building.
Representation (ensuring participation)	The extent to which education policy and reforms are produced through participation (local, national, global). Analysis of political control and representation through the administration of education. School governance, school-based management, involvement in decision-making (teachers, parents, students, civil society). The extent to which education system supports fundamental freedoms, including equal gender representation.
Reconciliation (dealing with the legacies of the conflict)	The extent to which the historical and contemporary economic, political, and sociocultural injustices that underpin conflict are redressed in/through education (e.g., quota systems, school relocation, textbooks, teacher allocation). Analysis of how education contributes to integration and segregation (social cohesion, shared or separate institutions). Teaching about the past and its relevance to the present and future. (Dis)connection of educational activities to the work of truth and reconciliation committees, when available. Levels of trust—vertical (trust in schools and the education system) and horizontal (trust between different identity-based groups).

Table 1. Applying the analytical framework to understand education's role in peacebuilding

A number of important aspects emerge when exploring the four interrelated Rs. An important aspect of redistribution (not limited to this dimension) is all students having equal access to a safe journey to and through their learning environment. Within education, the inclusion of all students—regardless of age, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, race, language, class means including formerly marginalized or disadvantaged groups. This aspect is also connected to reconciliation. The affirmation and recognition of learners' diversity and everyone's learning needs in educational processes, structures, and content can be defined as "curricular justice" (Connell, 2012). This aspect of recognition is strongly related to the redistributive aspect of equal opportunities and outcomes for children and youth of different groups in society. The structure and content that feed into pedagogical processes are again connected to both reconciliation (e.g., if/how history is taught or if attitudinal change is part of an educational initiative) and representation (e.g., whether learners are made aware of their various rights and responsibilities as citizens, and if/how/why (certain) political and conflict-related issues are discussed/negated). Issues around representation extend further into the actual 'equitable participation' of various stakeholders, including teachers, students, youth, parents, and community members of all genders at the grassroots level. The actual decision-making power is often related to the allocation, use, and (re)distribution of human and material resources (Young, 2006; Robertson and Dale, 2013).

Conclusion: Theory-building in progress

In this short piece, we have shared the 4Rs analytical framework, calling for a peace with social justice and reconciliation approach to education systems affected by violent conflict. While aspects of the model are potentially relevant across different contexts, it must be tailored to the specific needs of each area of research or intervention. This will allow researchers and practitioners alike to produce high-quality, relevant understanding of the challenges, roles, and possibilities of education's contribution to promoting sustainable peace.

We are conscious that like any research tool it is the skill of the researcher(s) that will determine whether it's application is open enough to capture the complex interactions between the different R's and that the research is grounded in sufficient depth and knowledge of the particular historical, political, economic, social and cultural conditions of the research context. We therefore hope it is treated as a starting point for critical reflection rather than a normative and simplistic endpoint.

We hope to refine, develop, sharpen, and transform the framework so it can more accurately reflect the combined knowledge that emerges from the ongoing research process. In that sense, we approach theory-making as a non-static process that is informed and reshaped through empirical fieldwork and findings—hence we see this framework as theory-building in progress.

Author Bios

Mario Novelli is Professor of the Political Economy of Education & Director of the Centre for International Education (CIE) at the University of Sussex (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cie/about), a global leader in research on International development and education. He specialises in research on the relationship between education and conflict and has led research for a range of international organisations including: DFID, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNICEF, UNESCO. Over the last two decades he has published widely on issues relating to globalisation, education in conflict affected contexts, peacebuilding and reconciliation. He has taught at the Universities of Bristol, Amsterdam and Sussex.

Mieke Lopes Cardozo is Assistant Professor at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research of the University of Amsterdam, and part of the Governance and Inclusive Development Research Group. Her academic research and teaching focuses on the role of education in processes of peacebuilding, social justice and transformation in the contexts of Myanmar, Aceh/Indonesia, Bolivia and Sri Lanka. She recently co-directed the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding in collaboration with the University of Sussex, Ulster University and UNICEF, and coordinated the Education and International Development Academie in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was appointed as Advisor for the Security Council mandated Progress Study on Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

Alan Smith is UNESCO Chair in Education for Pluralism, Human Rights and Democracy at Ulster University in Northern Ireland. He has over thirty years' experience in research with particular expertise in education, conflict and international development. He has completed research for the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Nuffield Foundation, as well as a range of NGO, government and UN organisations, including International Alert, Save the Children, DFID, EU, GIZ, Norad, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank.

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