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Building peace through education in a post-conflict environment: A case study exploring perceptions of best practices

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the opinions of a Kenyan school population on the best practices for peace education. The school of study, which had previously experienced post-election violence in its community, implemented a UNICEF Peace Education Programme in 2008 as a starting point for developing peace education practices. The analysis reveals that the school focused on three levels of peace-building: individual, interpersonal, and community. This challenges the working-theory in the applied peace education programme, where peace education is solely focused on the interpersonal level.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, an increased amount of peace education programmes have been implemented in socially unstable environments throughout the world, both during and after conflicts. These programmes are often initiated by policy-makers and implemented using top-down approaches. Although such approaches can be fruitful, the implementation of educational programmes in this manner can prove difficult if local school stakeholders dispute the relevance of a programme or its theoretical or ideological foundations.

This paper explores the perceptions of school stakeholders concerning the best practices for peace education following a conflict. Such insights are crucial to examine, as conflicting understandings of what peace education should be might lead to peace education programmes not being implemented. Thus, the following research question was developed, which this paper will seek to answer: "What are the 'best practices' for peace education following conflict according to school stakeholders in Kenya?". In what follows, a case study of a school in Kenya that declared its environment to be a site of best practices in peace education will be examined. The foundations of the peace education initiative in this school were drawn from a peace education programme initiated by several educational bodies, including the Kenya Ministry of Education (MoE), the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2. Education for peace following conflict

Peace education can be understood as both a subject taught within an education system and a guiding principle for the way schools should be run. This literature review seeks to examine both of these understandings to better grasp the nature of peace education in the school.

The way a school is run can either fuel conflict or build peace. Unequal access to quality education can fuel conflict, especially when it is linked to identity-based categories such as race, culture, or religion (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2011; Smith, 2005). Conflict-fuelling discrimination can also develop from pedagogical practices. For example, using the mother tongue of one ethnic group as a language of instruction may threaten the identity of a minority group (UNESCO, 2011; Pherali and Gerratt, 2013). Furthermore, the teaching of one-sided narratives, for example, with regard to history, can have a similarly negative effect (UNESCO, 2011). Aside from teaching, aggressive practices such as corporal punishment are widely used as enforcement tools to facilitate learning in schools (Harber, 1996; UNESCO, 2010, 2011; Davies, 2004).

However, education can also play a strong role in peace-building (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2011; Smith, 2005). Knutzen and Smith (2012) identify three roles that education can

Abbreviations: MoE, Kenya Ministry of Education; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund; PEP, peace education programme; PEV, Post-election violence.

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play in peace-building: First, education can operate as a 'peace dividend'. That is, the end of a conflict can provide a valuable opportunity for governments to show greater commitment to improving social services and quality of education. Second, education can potentially contribute to stability if it is 'conflict sensitive'. Finally, education can be 'transformative' in terms of "transform[ing] values, attitudes and behaviours" (p. 64). The Kenyan Peace Education Programme (PEP), introduced following the PEV, relates to this third notion of education as transformation.

Peace education can be understood as both a philosophy and a process (Harris and Morrison, 2003). When understood as a philosophy, peace education refers to education underpinned by values such as social justice, nonviolence and environmental justice (e.g., Andrzejewski et al., 2009; Goldstein and Selby, 2000; Harris and Morrison, 2003). Peace education as a process refers to education that seeks to empower pupils and students with the necessary skills to achieve a society wherein such values are standards to be upheld. While these two basic understandings of peace education are closely interlinked, the Kenyan PEP most closely resembles the tradition of peace education as process. The programme involved the distribution of activity books with detailed lesson plans to teachers. These lesson plans covered topics such as listening, communication, handling emotions, co-operation, problem-solving, mediation and conflict resolution (MoE et al., 2008a). An analysis of the teaching materials reveals a focus on peace as practice, with peace seen as achievable if the abovementioned skills are internalised by pupils.

As the field of peace education includes a wide range of philosophies and practices, the implementation of peace education can be vastly different across contexts. However, a distinction can be made between integrative and additive approaches (Cardozo and May, 2009; Harris and Morrison, 2003; Hicks, 1988; Sommers, 2001). Of these, Carson and Lange (1997) argue that an integrative approach to peace education (i.e., whereby peace studies are made foundational within a curriculum) is the most effective approach, as it more consistently offers challenges for students to reflect upon critically. On the other hand, the World Bank (2005) argues that peace education programmes are more likely to succeed when added to already existing curricula materials and given a dedicated slot in timetables.

Context can strongly influence perceptions of peace education and its practice. The background context of this paper is a post-conflict environment. In this context, peace education is understood as education specifically aimed at supporting communities to overcome identity-based conflicts and build a peaceful future. Although peace education has been found to have a positive transformative effect (e.g., Arnon and Galily, 2014; Levy, 2014), research has also shown context-related obstacles to peace education following conflict (e.g. Rosen and Salomon, 2011). For example, studies have found that the attitudes of parents and teachers strongly influence pupils' internalisation of peace values (Yahya et al., 2012; Zembylas et al., 2011, 2012). In the context of Cyprus, teachers were found to resist a peace education initiative initiated by the government (Zembylas et al., 2012). In a similar study, Zembylas et al. (2011) found that while teacher participants were largely supportive of the idea of reconciliation, they were reluctant toward the idea of implementing a peace education programme for both ideological and practical reasons. In Kenya, the PEP was not as widely implemented as policy-makers had planned. Perceived relevance, the school's location, school leadership, and perceived policies, all influenced the way the programme was perceived and to what degree it was implemented (Lauritzen, 2016).

That education can both build peace and fuel conflict serves to emphasise the importance of providing the 'right' education. Whereas peace education programmes appear to be an effective way of steering education in the direction of peace-building, this literature review reveals that such programmes have met resistance by school populations in various contexts. It would therefore appear important for the field of research to be thoroughly informed as to how school populations understand best practice. Only through such knowledge will agencies and schools be able to work in the same direction.

3. Methods and analysis

This paper analyses data from a case study of a primary school in Kenya. Three sampling criteria were integral to this case: the school had been affected by post-election violence (PEP), teachers had been trained in the PEP, and the school population perceived itself to be an example of best practices in peace education. With regard to the latter, the school was chosen for study based on it being an extreme case. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that this type of selection is useful in order to "obtain information on unusual cases, which can be especially problematic or especially good in a more closely defined sense" (230). In my study, the school was selected because the school's stakeholders perceived the school as displaying best practices in peace education. 'Best practice' is a debated term. Critics argue that it simplifies our understanding of educational processes, underestimates the importance of context, and disempower teachers (see for example Bullough, 2012; Osburn et al., 2011). In this paper, however, I use the term differently than in most best practice-research. I am not after finding a 'best practice' for peace education which can be transferred to other context. Rather, I am exploring how best practice is perceived in one specific context, and how this understanding relates to the peace education presented in the Kenyan PEP.

A qualitative research strategy was adopted in this study to gain in-depth knowledge of the various practices and processes of the examined school, with multiple methods applied to facilitate the triangulation of findings. The main data set of the study consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with the school's head teacher ($n = 1$), deputy head ($n = 1$), members of the school management committee ($n = 5$), parents ($n = 6$), teachers ($n = 7$), and pupils ($n = 35$). The seventh grade in the school was chosen in collaboration with the head teacher as the main group of focus for the study. These pupils were old enough to remember the post-election violence, though were not in their final year of school, as the research might have then interfered with exam preparations. In total, 55 people were interviewed, either in focus groups (pupils, parents and School Management Committee members), or individually (head teacher, deputy head teacher and teachers). All interview guides focused on five thematic areas: 1) what happened during the post-election violence, 2) what role the school played during that time, 3) what role the school played in rebuilding the community after the violence, 4) what the school had put in place following the violence, and finally 5) what the school had put in place as a result of the PEP. As the interviews were semi-structured, the participants predominantly led the conversations. In the focus group interviews, this meant that the participants largely built on each other's answers. The thematic areas of the interview schedule were therefore mainly used as a checklist of conversation starters. The interviews were analysed using template analysis (King, 2012), whereby codes derived from the interview schedule, research questions and preliminary readings were first combined with codes emerging from an inductive reading of a sample of the material, and then applied to the entire set of transcribed interviews in Nvivo.

Two life-skills classes and two social studies classes were video-taped and later transcribed. In addition, one class of 44 pupils wrote diaries for one week. These pupils were encouraged to write on topics related to peace and conflict. During a period of four

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