



Review Article

Perspectives on education, children and young people in disaster risk reduction



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 December 2014

Received in revised form

24 June 2015

Accepted 25 June 2015

Available online 2 July 2015

Keywords:

Disaster risk reduction

Disaster education

Schools

Children and young people

ABSTRACT

This article presents a synthesis of education focused disaster risk reduction (DRR) literature. Our aim was to understand the landscape of DRR with a focus on education, schools, children and young people. A review of 40 international reports and peer-reviewed academic journal articles published between 2003 and 2014 across a range of disciplines health, urban planning, public policy, and emergency management, and a range of intergovernmental, international aid and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) examine various aspects of education related DRR activities. The corresponding analysis identifies common themes across the multi-disciplinary literature as well as several gaps in research about education's role in DRR highlighting the complexity of DRR research, which reflects the multiplicity of purposes, audiences, and social and political perspectives they represent. The article concludes with recommendations for future research.

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1. Introduction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) crosses multidisciplinary boundaries from fields such as health, urban planning, public policy, education and emergency management, and is the purview of a range of inter-governmental and non-government

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organizations (NGOs). Research from each field represents a range of different expertise, as well as varying purposes, audiences and goals. For instance, organizations, such as NGOs, collect data and produce publications to inform their constituencies and the public. As such, these organizations are often consumers rather than producers of DRR research, whose aim lies largely in promoting and guiding future actions in their respective fields amongst their primary audiences.

This review of selected international DRR literature focuses on publications relevant to education's role in DRR. The series of reports and academic peer-reviewed journals examined as part of this review reflect the diversity of DRR research related to education, children and young people. We begin by outlining some of common definitions and frameworks found within the selected literature as a means of introducing readers to some of the key concepts employed in our discussion of education focused DRR literature. Further contextualization of the literature lies in the discussion of the unique economic, social and environmental contexts of disasters. The corresponding analysis and discussion provides an overview of some key issues and trends in education focused DRR research. The second part of the discussion shifts towards identifying some of the existing gaps in research about the role of education in DRR. We conclude with a discussion of potential areas for future development, particularly for education focused DRR initiatives.

2. Background

2.1. Definitions

Disaster Risk Reduction has emerged as a growing area of emphasis within the field of disaster and emergency management [7]. Its multi-disciplinary nature highlights the complexity of the field and presents the challenge of its own definition. Multiple definitions and uses of the term DRR were found within the selected literature. For instance, the NGO ActionAid describes DRR as a “relatively new concept that focuses on three key areas: preparedness, prevention, and mitigation” ([1], p.1). Within academic settings these three areas are often associated with natural hazards such as climate change [2], earthquakes [18], fire, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis [9], and cyclones [39]. At a broader level, the World Meteorological Organization, a United Nations special agency, defines DRR as a “conceptual framework of elements aimed at minimiz[ing] vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development” [43]. Meanwhile, the UNISDR defines DRR as:

The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events ([35,37], p.10).

We employ the UNISDR definition of DRR in this article due to its prevalence within the selected literature and its focus on an ethic of prevention [43].

2.2. Frameworks and models

The existence of multiple DRR approaches, frameworks, and models is a related challenge. Numerous frameworks, representing different foci and goals were found across disciplines, and academic and NGO circles. For instance, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [13] presents a community

based humanitarian protection model as a form of prevention. Their protection or ‘egg’ model is particularly relevant to individuals and families displaced by natural disasters. Related discussions of vulnerability and protection assists to empower communities to engage in the development of prevention strategies to mitigate insecurities and stress (environmental, social, and personal) associated with recovery. The model encompasses three types of action: “responsive, remedial and environment building with an emphasis on the latter which seeks to foster a political, social, cultural, institutional and legislative environment that enables or encourages the authorities to respect their obligations and the rights of individuals” ([13], p. 65). Plan International [21] has developed a child-centered DRR approach through their Safe village disaster preparedness model. Using the example of flooding in South Vietnam, the model focuses on incorporating the unique knowledge and experience of children in their local environment, and their suggestions on mitigating floods. Long-term outcomes include minimizing the economic impact of property and production losses and overall improvements in community well-being. Enhanced information, awareness, knowledge and disaster preparedness operationalized at local, national and international levels are advanced as actions necessary to successfully achieve these long-term goals. Gibbs et al. [11] present a third child and community based ‘Ecological’ DRR model. The authors describe their ecological or community based health approach as one that “recognizes the interplay between an individual’s health behaviors and outcomes and the multiple layers of influence from their physical and sociocultural environment” (p. 17). The contextual nature of the disaster and the individual and community responses to it are central to this approach. The Japanese Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework uses a tsunami and earthquake disaster prevention strategy [30]. The ESD framework illustrates how strong partnerships with community, city government and national level agencies are central to achieving the goal of extending natural awareness to communities through a range of school based and community oriented initiatives.

Numerous national DRR frameworks are also in place but the UNISDR’s Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) remains one of the most commonly cited (UNISDR, n.d.a). Prevention, preparedness, and education with the aim of fostering a culture of safety and resilience are central to the HFA. Meanwhile the HFA’s scope for national and local implementation align with its goal of reducing social, economic and environmental losses in disaster contexts. The HFA’s prominence across sectors may also reflect its development in consultation with governments, international agencies, disaster experts and community groups.

2.3. Economic, social, and environmental contexts

The complexity of making sense of multiple DRR approaches across various disciplines, definitions and frameworks is further complicated by the unique economic, social, and environmental contexts of disasters. Mitigation of the potential social, economic and environmental impact of disasters is evident within many international community DRR frameworks. While the economic impact of disasters is a prominent feature within the literature, measures of social and personal well-being are also important areas of DRR research [13]. For example, the UNISDR HFA seeks to reduce the social, economic and environmental losses in disasters at local and national levels. Similarly, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society’s protection model frames the economic and social impact of disasters through discussions of reducing insecurities and stress encountered by individuals and communities post-disaster.

The historical and environmental context of disasters also becomes visible in a geographical analysis of DRR research. Whilst

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