

**Conflict Transformation through  
Educational and  
Youth Programmes**

Stephanie Schell-Faucon

## Abstract

Within a broad-based, multidimensional approach to Conflict Transformation, youth and educational work is a cross-cutting challenge. It should feed into many fields of activity (e.g. health care, media work, labour market policy, etc.), especially during phases of conflict latency and in post-conflict situations.

This article examines the theoretical and conceptual debate about the teaching of peace and conflict resolution skills. No off-the-shelf solutions can be formulated. On the contrary, peace education faces complex and even contradictory challenges. For example, the tension between individual behavioural patterns at micro level and social policy actions at macro level cannot be dismantled.

The article explores the various intervention options available within formal education (schools and vocational training) and non-formal education (social work, youth work and adult education). Ten potential fields of activity are identified: inter-institutional cooperation, education structures, language education, teaching materials/curriculum development, participation and peer group education, programmes for children and families, storytelling/remembrance, integration and community work, international exchange, and training/re-training of educators.

Further research is required in some fields which pose particular challenges, e.g. work with parents, pre-school education, intergenerational learning, linking remembrance with current human rights issues, and the role of spirituality. Above all, the prevailing Western individualised notion of education, on which most peace education concepts – including this article – are still based, must be critically re-appraised.

## About the Contributor

**Stephanie Schell Faucon** has lectured in adult education at the University of Cologne. She holds a teacher and a Masters degree in education. Her Ph.D. thesis sets out to examine peace and conflict education in divided societies. After being granted a fellowship in South Africa, she is, at present, conducting field research. Her special fields of interest are: intercultural, peace and Holocaust education.

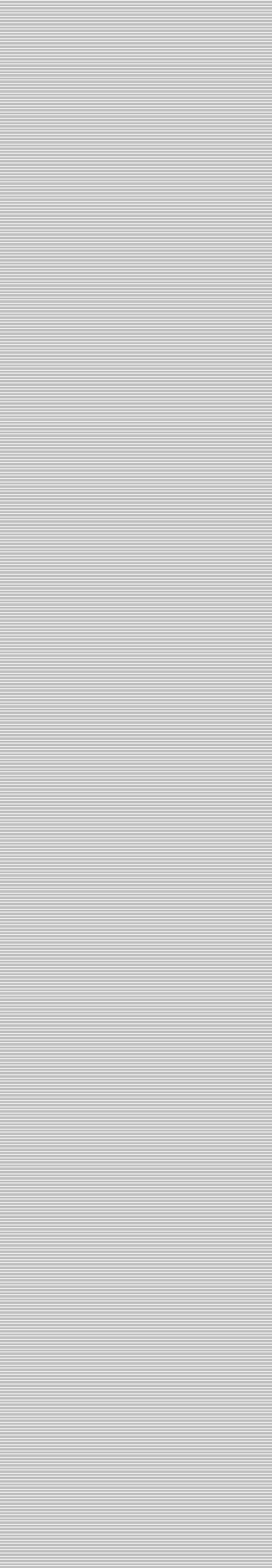
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**Contact Address:**  
info@berghof-center.org  
Berghof Research Center for Constructive  
Conflict Management,  
Altensteinstr. 48a,  
D-14195 Berlin,  
Germany.

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Youth and educational work is described in many international declarations as a key element for the promotion of peace. In its 1996 Report on Education for the Twenty-First Century, for example, UNESCO highlights *Learning to Live Together* and *Learning for Your Life* as two of the main pillars of future educational work.

The importance of youth and educational work is also underlined in peace and conflict research. This defines young people as the driving force of future development, and education as the guarantee of personal fulfilment and social transformation. Peace education is intended to help institutionalise a peaceful conflict culture and foster the structures and values of civil society (UNESCO 1996a; Chetkow-Yanoov 1997).

This article seeks to stimulate debate about the opportunities for, and limits to, *conflict transformation* through youth and educational work. It explores the following questions: What is the role of educational work within a multidimensional approach to conflict transformation? What are the theoretical and conceptual approaches that inform the debate? What are the key methodologies, learning principles and desired outcomes? Which intervention options are being discussed within formal education (schools and vocational training) and non-formal education (social and youth work, and adult education)? What are the main problems facing workers in this field? and finally, which questions are still unresolved?

Theoretical studies have identified many different approaches that educators in crisis and conflict regions try to adapt to local conditions. Nevertheless, little is known about the impact of these initiatives. A comprehensive and systematic analysis is required to identify the optimal conditions for the various methodologies, as well as their likely outcomes.

## II. Youth and Educational Work in Conflict Transformation

### II.1 Timeframe

*Educational and youth work is important in phases of conflict latency, in post-conflict situations and in times of peace. Its purpose is two-fold: to prevent conflict; and to encourage a critical reappraisal of the past as a step towards healing and reconciliation.*

In violent conflict, there are virtually no opportunities to exert any real influence through educational or youth work. In these situations, immediate action – ‘fire-fighting’ – is sometimes advocated as a short-

term response to events, but such measures overlook the need for a long-term approach in education and should therefore be viewed sceptically.

John Paul Lederach (1997) sets out a timeframe for various intervention options and approaches, distinguishing between immediate action (2-6 months), short-range planning (1-2 years), decade thinking (5-10 years) and generational vision (20+ years). The latter two areas – decade thinking and generational vision – are where educational work can make its contribution.

In order to provide a vision of what can be achieved, it is important to generate spaces within the conflict settings to envision a commonly shared future. *The protected setting of educational work offers an ideal safe space in which to articulate the desired social changes, think through the processes (decade thinking) and develop shared generational vision.*

### **Box 1: Defining Youth**

In divided and violent transformation societies, youth cannot be defined in terms of rigid age categories. Ten-year-old child soldiers are adults in some ways. Thirty-five-year-old former combatants, who have sacrificed their youth to their cause, may become a ‘lost generation’ if they are denied access to education and employment.

The Western notion of youth as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood must be re-appraised. The process of (re)defining ‘youth’ offers fresh conflict potential.

## **II.2 Social Intervention and Management Levels**

For educational and youth work, the target groups are located at the local level (grassroots). The work offers great potential to (re)build trust within communities and develop relationships between hostile groups. However, the responsibility for education policy and planning, curriculum development and youth policy lies with the middle management in governmental and education institutions.

There is a great potential for interaction between these two levels. Practical education projects usually require support and/or legal safeguards from managers/policy-makers, while ‘top-down’ initiatives can only be implemented with the backing of practitioners. Coordination between the two levels is therefore a key element in educational and youth work if it is to achieve its primary goal of promoting peace.

## **II.3 A Cross-Cutting Challenge**

Youth and educational work is a cross-cutting challenge that should feed into all fields of activity relevant to conflict transformation. Education and youth policy, schools and training, and social work are obvious examples, but others – such as the media, health care, and socio-economic structures – also play an important role.

## **II.4 Synergies with other Disciplines**

Educational work, which aims to take account of different life situations and phases, must be underpinned by measures in other related disciplines. Work with refugees and former combatants, for example, both require highly integrative approaches within a community-building framework.

Synergies can also be created by linking with critical trauma work with its stronger focus on group and community education (Perren-Klingler 1995). Its findings about resource-oriented approaches are highly relevant to educational work in conflict regions. There is broad scope for action, offering many opportunities for linkage with peace alliances.

# **III. The Theoretical and Conceptual Debate**

## **III.1 Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills – Challenges and Dilemmas**

Education, and its role in promoting equality, is often said to be crucial to the democratisation process. The provision of a wide range of education opportunities for young people can undoubtedly help to foster democratic attitudes, but offers no guarantee that appropriate behavioural patterns will be adopted. A more targeted approach is required. Conflict resolution skills, storytelling and remembrance should therefore be incorporated into the mainstream school curriculum and out-of-school activities.

In relation to a partisan approach, conflict resolution skills can be taught in a variety of ways. Alongside peace education during the 1990s, other disciplines – such as human rights, third world and environmental education; intercultural, feminist and historical/political education; community work and trauma work – have developed concepts of constructive conflict management. They all aim to foster the knowledge, practical skills and attitudes that empower young people to exercise critical judgement and participate with confidence in society.

These disciplines set different priorities in their curricula and teaching materials such as cultural or gender-specific, and historical or development-related issues. Their partisan/political focus depends on the extent to which they have traditionally been anchored in political movements. Feminist/human rights education, for example, pursues a partisan approach, whereas intercultural and social work is sometimes said to be too divorced from politics; indeed, some studies suggest that it is in danger of contributing to a further skewing of power (WFD 1997; Gugel & Jäger 1997).

So, is a partisan approach appropriate in peace education? There is no clear-cut answer. It depends on the field of activity (formal, non-formal education), the actors involved (the state, international organisations and local NGOs) and country-specific conditions. A multidisciplinary approach can provide a focus for the teaching of conflict resolution skills.

Nonetheless, human rights education, intercultural education, storytelling and remembrance, and feminist education all have their place. It would be pointless to try to abolish or merge these disciplines, or even create a new one. Instead, the existing disciplines should be subjected to an ongoing process of critical appraisal in terms of the tensions defined below. Are there any blind spots or imbalances? Are the current approaches still justified or should they be modified?

### **Box 2: Tensions and Dilemmas in Peace Education**

#### *Social complexity*

In conflict situations, social complexity and individual behavioural options are limited. Intolerance and violence often gain more of a hearing among young people and minorities, which makes them attractive alternatives. Educational work must offer support and a framework of reference, especially during phases of social and political upheaval, without simplifying social complexity.

#### *Education for 'diversity' and 'unity'*

Education for diversity is important in pluralist and multicultural contexts. Nevertheless, there is tension between recognising and emphasising diversity and the aspirations for (national) unity in post-conflict societies and political transformation processes. How can a sense of unity be created without promoting new nationalisms and exclusion mechanisms? Is education for diversity compatible with key experiences about common humanity?



## Box 2: Tensions and Dilemmas in Peace Education (cont.)

### *Cooperation and confrontation skills*

Although violent conflict must be rejected, there is no need for conflict avoidance or premature consensus-forming. On the contrary, peaceful conflict offers the potential for positive social development. Constructive conflict management should therefore also foster ‘confrontation skills’ to enable hidden conflicts to be revealed and managed non-violently (Gugel 1997).

### *Individual guidance vs. structural change*

Should peace education focus on changing behaviour in everyday conflict situations or on managing social conflicts and their causes? The tension between individual behavioural patterns on the micro level and socio-political action on the macro level cannot be dismantled. Dealing with conflict is important at both levels. Structural change to promote social ‘peace-ability’ can only be initiated by people who are not blocked by their own inner conflicts. The individualisation and de-politicisation of social conflicts should be avoided. However, as a result of targeting individuals, education can only exert direct influence via these contacts (Steinweg 1998; Gugel & Jäger 1997; Zdarzil 1997).

### *Gender-specific and (inter)cultural sensitivity*

The tension between gender-specific, intercultural and conflict prevention education has received little attention until now (see Francis in this Handbook). Peace education in same-sex groups is still in its infancy. Very few curricula take into account the sexes’ different experiences of violence and conflict styles. In intercultural contexts, the situation is even more complex. Sensitivity to different power relationships and discourses, such as patriarchal, colonial and modernist, is a key element in formulating effective conflict transformation strategies.

### *The teaching of values*

Should values be explicitly taught in pluralist societies and, if so, what form should this teaching take? The hidden curriculum – i.e. the learning environment and teachers’ attitudes – exerts greater influence over the implicit transmission of values than the formal curriculum (Elchardus et al 1999). It is important to facilitate debate about concepts of truth, justice and peace.

Peace education is incompatible with cultural dominance and prescription. Although the practice of drawing on local cultural resources in the management of conflicts and violent memories is gaining acceptance, cultural traditions are arbitrary historical constructs and highly inconsistent. In particular, post-colonial countries have hybrid cultures (Dawes & Honwana 1997). The issue in educational work is how a group’s cultural resources can be utilised without reverting to ethno-cultural stigmatisation and prescription.

### III.2 Methodologies, Learning Principles and Desired Outcomes

Empowering young people to develop critical judgement and participate confidently in society involves teaching personal, social and conflict management skills. They include:

- self-esteem;
- tolerance of frustration and ambiguity;
- self-awareness, awareness of others and empathy;
- communication and interaction skills;
- awareness of personal and cultural attitudes to conflict behaviour in conflict situations;
- ability to analyse and evaluate conflicts;
- practical skills to manage and overcome conflicts.

Educators can build on the creative tensions defined above to develop these learning outcomes.

Self-esteem is the basis for conflict management and is a crucial element in promoting peace. Aggressive and egotistical behaviour is often triggered by frustration and a lack of self-esteem. In facilitating peaceful conflict resolution, enhancing self-esteem is vital as this leads to greater assertiveness, civil courage and tolerance of ambiguity. A conscious awareness of one's own and others' prejudices, interests and emotions helps to promote empathy. The ability to see things from another perspective opens up creative alternatives.

These socio-psychological skills – self-awareness, empathy, and critical judgement – provide an important basis for the development of conflict resolution techniques. Sustained conflict transformation also requires a conscious reappraisal of one's own and prevailing social attitudes to conflict. Conflict dynamics and their potential for change must be experienced in a real form (Maringer & Steinweg 1997). This is problematical, if not impossible or even dangerous, in societies with a high level of violence. In some societies, the primary focus is on developing survival and adjustment strategies.

However, judgement, critical skills and empathy cannot be fostered merely by transmitting cognitive knowledge, which tends to be the usual approach, or through moralistic preaching. More appropriate learning principles and methodologies include:

- non-violent, voluntary learning;
- participation and active learning;
- practical follow-up training;
- holistic learning models;
- resource orientation;
- gender-specific learning;
- fostering attitudes instead of transmitting methodologies.

Psychological research has shown that people's values and ability to make moral judgements are the product of their interactions. This process can be facilitated through the various creative methodologies listed below. Some require a gender or age related approach appropriate to the subject's verbal and written skills.

- case studies and creative writing;
- biographical work;
- discussions with witnesses;
- role-play;
- drama, psychodrama and pantomime;
- problem-solving and group work;
- creative art work;
- media work.

*In institutional settings, it is especially important to ensure that learning takes place in a non-violent, voluntary context. This can be a difficult task. The risk that pressure may be exerted or subliminal attitudes to violence reproduced in peace education work should not be underestimated. A safe space and educators' credibility are critical factors for success. Adult education and comprehensive training/retraining for educators play a key role in this context (Steinweg 1998).*

## IV. Educational Fields of Activity and Intervention Options

This section provides an overview of conflict transformation approaches through youth and educational work. On a critical note, many of the suggested approaches (and the learning principles and methodologies listed above) are based on Western notions of education and democracy. They must therefore be adapted to the target group, local socio-economic and cultural conditions, and conflict parameters. In promoting the transition from help to self-help, priority should be given to local initiatives and actors.

### IV.1 Cross-Sectoral and Inter-Institutional Cooperation

In 1994, UNESCO's International Conference on Education adopted proposals on education for peace, human rights and democracy in schools and training institutions. They highlighted the need to make the formal education system more open to society and underlined the importance of cooperation with the non-formal sector. Further suggested was that traditional forms of education require fundamental changes.

The hallmarks of the formal education system are stability and continuity, but it is also cumbersome and slow to change. The non-formal sector is more flexible and has different scope for action. It can focus more readily on community- and job-oriented education, and reach social groups who have little or no access to regular schooling.

In making schools more accessible, inter-institutional cooperation with civil society plays a key role. This should include links and exchange with health organisations, psychological services and the churches. Exchange-based study placements are ideal in this context as they offer an insight into the activities of the participating institutions and provide an element of supervision. Links with the media and employment sector, and with key figures in the local community are also helpful. Networks can be effective as long as they have a long-term focus and an institution-building dimension. However, in regions where civil society is poorly developed, establishing network structures is of secondary importance. Instead, the focus should be on implementing and promoting viable local initiatives (Fischer & Tumler 2000).

Nonetheless, the use of non-formal education should not simply be a pretext for the state to invest less in the formal system. It should also be borne in mind that any education institution's scope will be limited if it operates selection criteria, whether or not it becomes more open to society.

### Case Study: Medellín's Youth Alliance "Paisajoven" (Colombia)

This non-profit organisation draws together public and private institutions such as social services, the churches, NGOs, schools and colleges, and companies. It aims to coordinate youth work in disadvantaged marginal areas of the city, professionalise workers, and carry out pilot projects. Paisajoven offers training and support in planning methodologies, management and project evaluation, and publicises key research findings. It highlights youth as an issue throughout its work, which in future must focus to a greater extent on the development potential of young people themselves (Grote 1998).

## IV.2 Reforming Educational Structures

In countries where conflict demarcation lines are evident within the education system, 'softening' this divide can be a crucial step. Establishing integrated, bi- or multi-lingual model schools is helpful in this context.

In Northern Ireland, for example, the existence of such schools, together with ongoing encounter programmes between schools from the two communities, has gradually led to a more open system. Education for *mutual understanding* permeates every aspect of school life, and although participation in exchange is voluntary, it has increased since its adoption into the formal curriculum. Nonetheless, there is still a need for targeted financial support, training for head teachers and educators, and integration work at higher education level (Fitzduff 1999; Smith & Robinson 1996).

In a segregated education system, a single core curriculum, which is developed democratically by all the interest groups working together, is a crucial bridge-builder between hostile communities. However, this cannot be taken for granted. A shared core curriculum for history has only existed in Northern Ireland since 1990, and in Israel, the Arab-language curriculum for Palestinian students focuses almost entirely on Jewish history and culture. The design of core curricula offers scope for regional content and priorities, and should be deliberated in conjunction with all the relevant interest groups (Rupasinghe 1999).

Establishing an integrated education system is not the only option: a community's own schools are also important in strengthening minorities and their role in society. This is especially relevant if the schools are able to develop a future-oriented focus.

Ultimately, the success of educational measures is dependent on the existence of a clear legal framework and adequate financial support.

### **IV.3 Language Education**

The importance of the mother tongue in emotional and psychological development is well-known. The mother tongue, as the teaching language, plays a key role in promoting a sense of identity and developing interaction skills, especially at the primary-school level. If teaching literacy skills in the mother tongue is problematical, it should at least be included in oral classwork.

The success of mother-tongue teaching and its acceptance by the community are ultimately dependent on current language policy and the presence and status of specific languages in public life. In some cases, promoting the mother tongue may lead to discrimination and the emergence of new power asymmetries, especially if social advancement is linked to specific language competence. Bi-lingual classes, the teaching of foreign languages and intercultural skills are useful at an early stage in schooling in this situation.

Foreign-language teaching plays an important role in educational work. Learning another language helps students to look at issues from a different perspective. The opportunity to learn the other community's language is a key element in promoting all forms of encounter. Acknowledging the other's language is the first step towards understanding and partnership. Tandem and tutor work, in which participants teach each other their mother tongue, are therefore helpful in building bridges and facilitating cultural exchange.

However, teaching should not be confined to language tuition. In order to foster a deeper understanding of other cultures, and thus promote peace, it is important to ensure cultural and minority issues, and power relations are also included as a core element of the language syllabus.

### **IV.4 Reform and Development of Curricula, Examinations and Teaching Materials**

Peace, human rights and intercultural education are rarely included as separate subjects in the curriculum. They are rightly viewed as cross-cutting themes. In order to introduce training in conflict resolution skills into the curriculum as a multidisciplinary principle, educational guidelines, examination content and teaching materials must

be overhauled. Specific proposals for implementation in school curricula, adult education and vocational training are required.

### **Box 3: Producing New Materials**

Producing new educational materials offers an opportunity to focus on conflict themes. Different fields of conflict can be explored, including:

- family life;
- the community;
- national, cultural or religious conflict;
- environmental policy;
- the role of power, gender and culture.

Putting forward different viewpoints on individual conflict themes helps to foster empathy.

- Which examples of conflict should be presented?
- How should they be analysed?
- Which methodologies and solution options should be proposed?

Cross-conflict and international cooperation adds value in this field of work.

In reviewing the curriculum, it is important to challenge the underlying sources, implicit and explicit prejudices, and dominance of specific cultural values. For example, when Namibia reviewed its national examinations in terms of their cultural and gender-specific imbalances, they were found to have a strong cultural bias towards European content (Brock-Utne 1999).

The introduction of civic education as a separate subject in schools and vocational training should be encouraged. ‘Practical democracy’ classes should be offered alongside the usual lessons in institutions and law. Methods of constructive conflict management should be tested and tensions experienced. Overall, the materials should be designed in an open-ended way, so there is scope for students to devise creative solutions.

The difficulties associated with designing teaching materials should not be underestimated (Lindo-Fuentes 1999). The way in which the historical context is presented and taught is often a factor in – and may actually escalate – conflicts in regions with ethnopolitical tensions (Ropers 1995). The manuals produced by UNESCO and the Council of Europe may offer guidance in this situation. However, these materials

may not be suitable for the local conflict-specific context. Even the international UNESCO *Manual for Human Rights Education* (1998), which contains articles from different societies with culturally specific examples of human rights problems, has shortcomings. It helps to promote a different perspective but does not create a diversity of viewpoints. It is up to educators to draw the pieces together.

In countries where political education is or has been an integral part of the curriculum, it is important to consider which framework for democracy training is likely to be effective, and which educators are credible from the students' point of view.

#### **IV.5 Participatory Structures and Peer Group Education**

Democracy education should offer genuine opportunities for participation. Through self- and co-determination, young people should be able to influence the learning environment and content. They also need safe spaces, especially in violent societies, as a refuge from the pressures exerted by gangs, drug abuse etc. and to build a positive youth culture: a 'peaceful counter-culture'.

Participatory structures, such as youth forums, students' associations and self-organised youth groups, should therefore be encouraged. Youth councils are helpful in enabling young people to experience democratic principles for themselves. An elected youth parliament gives young people an opportunity to practise decision-making, e.g. on the publicising and funding of peace education initiatives. Participatory structures should also be incorporated into workshops, youth camps and multicultural encounters. Project-based approaches and peer group education are helpful in facilitating the smooth transition from participation to self-determination.

The key feature of peer group education is that the 'educators' are similar in age, and sometimes also in origin and gender, to the target group. Peer group influence is often portrayed in a negative light, exemplified by drug abuse. Yet peers can also play a positive role in promoting values and dismantling prejudices within their group without losing credibility. In Africa and Asia, there are many campaigns to reduce the risk of AIDS infection that build on the energies and commitment of young people of similar age to the target group.

A number of approaches can be adopted in work with youth and school groups:

- *Organised workshops and camps* should offer young people a safe space in which to articulate their hopes and develop visions for the future of their communities and environment. One option is to



design small-scale peace projects, which can be implemented on the micro level.

- *'Outdoor education'* is becoming increasingly significant. Its purpose is to remove young people from their usual social environment. However, it is important to build a bridge with normal daily life and support young people on their return home. The greater the distance between camp and daily life, the more important it is to ensure that these valuable peripheral experiences and exercises in non-violence are reflected in daily life. It is a good idea for several people from a community or school to participate in the projects together.
- *A gender-specific approach:* In many societies, it is impossible for girls to attend a co-educational camp. Women and girls also have different experiences of, and reactions to, conflict and violence. This greatly increases the importance of gender-specific work. Young women and girls should therefore be encouraged to participate in projects which take account of their particular needs.

#### **Box 4: Peer Mediation in Schools**

Peer mediation is used in secondary and, increasingly, in primary education as well as in community work.

Its purpose is to enhance young people's sense of responsibility and empower them to resolve both their problems among themselves as well as with teachers and adults.

Some of the 'building blocks' commonly used in training are:

- conflicts and emotions;
- conflict causes and conflict analysis;
- discussion;
- reaching a consensus: what is a win-win situation?
- planning and management of mediation talks.

The following step-by-step process is recommended for schools (Council of Europe 1997):

- introducing educators to the basic principles of constructive conflict management and mediation;
- introducing classes to constructive conflict management;
- mediation training for the pupils selected by classes (without teachers);
- introducing the mediators; using their help on a voluntary basis; regular exchange of experience.

As young people learn to help themselves, the traditional relationship between teacher and pupil will inevitably change. In less hierarchical societies in which young people are seen as equal partners, their participation is more likely to be accepted than in societies with highly-structured power hierarchies (Hofstede 1993). Training local or school mediators is only useful if they have the chance to put their newly acquired skills into practice. Otherwise, it merely leads to frustration, prompting the actors to doubt the usefulness of mediation. The role of adults must also be examined as an issue.

The same applies to training which is divorced from the cultural context. It makes little sense to introduce Western techniques of (peer) mediation in an environment in which identifying and analysing conflict is a violation of social rules. It is important to stimulate new ideas and develop strategies that are appropriate for this situation.

There are various problems with peer group education:

- it tends to focus on better-situated young people;
- adults often exert considerable influence over content and methodology;
- it can obscure the lack of communication and contact between the generations;
- adults may disregard their educational responsibilities in favour of simple cost-effectiveness;
- there are dangers in using young people as mediators in 'hot' conflicts. A context-, age-group and culture-specific approach is always required.

These are challenges for the future. Young people should be encouraged to identify their own forms of participation based on self-determination. Educators must set aside their own preconceptions in order to facilitate this process (Bauch 1999; Rudolph 1999; Paisajoven & GTZ 1999).

There are also many obstacles to self-organised youth work, especially in rural regions where people live in scattered communities and in societies with a poorly-developed NGO sector. In seeking to link in with existing structures, it is important to ascertain whether they are compatible with the new social concepts. Some Eastern European countries, for example, already have a sophisticated youth work infrastructure. In some circumstances, however, peace activities are unlikely to encounter wide acceptance.

## IV.6 Community Programmes for Children and Families

Families and the community play a key role as the basic framework of reference in people's lives. Special support should therefore be given to programmes for children and families, including intergenerational projects, within cultural and community work.

Children should be encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, space must be created to allow children to develop their own experiences. Play (movement, improvisation), pottery, toy-making, storytelling, themed painting, dance and music activities all encourage creativity. The activities should allow for a range of creative solutions. For example, stories can be chosen to reflect children's personal dilemmas. Opening up the outcomes – in the form of drama, exhibitions or readings for other children or parents – can help to establish links with others. The children's ideas, conflict solutions and visions for the future can be used as a basis for parents' discussion groups. The work with children thus helps both sides to deal with their experiences and promotes sensitivity to constructive conflict management.

It is important to ensure that any project dealing with traumatised children also involves specialists in trauma work. It may also be appropriate to offer separate therapy, but this will depend on the cultural context. The Mozambican Association for Public Health (AMOSAPU), for example, prefers not to isolate former child soldiers from their peers. Creating an environment within which the community's children can play has facilitated reintegration of both sides and fits in with the local cultural practices of involving families and the community in the healing process, where cleansing rituals are used to encourage active 'forgetting' of the past and promote healing and reconciliation (Honwana 1999).

### **Case Study: Playgroups for Children and Parents in Malawi Refugee Programme**

Trusted persons from the refugee community were involved in devising and implementing the programme. They contributed their knowledge of the children's behaviour and needs. The playgroups were designed to promote the children's 'normal' development and address the family as a whole in order to help parents regain their lost role of protector. Themed meetings (e.g. friendship, separation) were held over several weeks and were led by women and men from the community, who were also available for talks. A great deal of importance was attached to creative and physical activities which enabled children to express themselves, boost their self-esteem and experience positive social cooperation. An evaluation confirmed that the project had been successful, but also pointed out that not enough sensitivity had been shown to the cultural practices governing parents' care of their children (Straker 1995).

## IV.7 Storytelling and Remembrance Work

As yet, there is no systematic review of the opportunities and limits to storytelling and remembrance in youth and education work (see both Theissen and Becker in this Handbook). What are the educational implications of social anthropological findings about the influence of storytelling over further conflict dynamics? This question is still unresolved. It is also unclear how educational work can help ensure that people can tell the story of their lives and communities apart from dominant discourses (Fordred 1999).

Until now, the process of examining the past in crisis and conflict areas has been undertaken primarily by non-formal cultural and educational initiatives. Its introduction across the board in education and youth work is desirable, and does not appear to pose any real difficulties. Writing down family stories or compiling local history reading materials are activities which can easily be undertaken in schools and youth groups, or in adult education. They help to promote exchange between the older and younger generations, and strengthen shared recollections of pre-war experiences.

Community building and community education also offer opportunities for collective remembrance. Through facilitation and mediation, for example, some communities have agreed to create a memorial dedicated to all the victims of conflict, regardless of the lines drawn within the conflict. However, as the South African experience has shown, creating monuments can be painful and counterproductive if the surviving victims and their communities have no influence over the process. Remembrance cannot be prescribed or undertaken on someone else's behalf. For this reason, its institutionalisation into the school curriculum is problematical.

### **Box 5: Remembrance Projects: Problems and Challenges**

Remembrance work often provokes feelings of unease and resistance from some sections of the community. These feelings are then passed onto the younger generations. It may also release emotions and stories that overwhelm participants and educators alike. The fear that this could happen accounts, at least in part, for the reluctance to initiate remembrance projects.

The limits to therapy must also be respected. The extent to which therapy is helpful is dependent on the social context (e.g. access to, and acceptance of, therapy).

### **Box 5: Remembrance Projects: Problems and Challenges (cont.)**

Educators should therefore focus on the following issues:

- How can a safe space be created where family and community stories can be discussed? When is therapy required?
- How is it possible to overcome the barriers between the victims and perpetrators, who have experienced war and persecution, and the younger generations?
- How can educators work positively with witnesses without violating their personal boundaries?
- How can the different roles of men and women in war, and their direct and indirect opportunities to exert influence, be examined as a theme?
- What opportunities for remembrance exist within the specific cultural context?

Remembrance projects that ignore the critical issue of continuity in the present, and the need to dismantle existing power asymmetries, will rapidly lose credibility.

The following are just some suggestions of the various remembrance projects which could be carried out in conjunction with encounter groups and community centres: an interactive exhibition on 'life in the community yesterday, today and tomorrow', involving all age and interest groups and focussing also on children, young people and women. Interviews carried out by young people with older members of the community. The older generation is asked to talk about the past, and the stories are used as the basis for a video, newspaper article or drama to be performed or presented within the community. A '*discovering the past*' project to identify key historical sites in the community where memorial plaques can be erected. They recall not only the violence but also the positive events in the community's history.

### **IV.8 Socio-Economic Integration and Community Work**

Conflict demarcation lines are not only evident within many communities; they often divide families as well. Individual, family and community-based healing and reconciliation are therefore interwoven. In many post-war societies, children and young people often grow up without parents, while older persons are left without the care and support of their children. This requires the development of new family- and community-oriented support systems.

Long-term youth work must have a strong community basis and be responsive to changes within the local environment. A lack of training

and employment opportunities for young people alienates them from their communities. Young men in this situation are especially susceptible to recruitment by conflict parties who have an interest in perpetuating violence (Centre for Conflict Resolution 1998).

In order to bring broad sections of the community together on a long-term basis, communities need a multi-purpose centre for encounter and open learning. This offers several advantages:

- an *employment-oriented approach* to community work and community education. Creating a community centre can offer training and jobs to young people, and can greatly contribute to the re(building) of communities.
- the *development of democratic processes, mediation concepts and win-win solutions*. This can be achieved through the participation of many different interest and age groups in designing the centre's range of activities. Local mediators or ombudspersons should be included in this process.

In line with the concept of Open Learning Communities (UNESCO 1996b), the community centre should offer basic education, vocational training courses and life skills programmes as well as culture and entertainment. Open learning must also allow participants to stop and start their training as necessary, depending on their employment situation. However, this requires a highly individualised approach to training.

A lasting peaceful conflict culture cannot be achieved without socio-economic integration. This includes fostering individual initiative through small-loan programmes to support self-help projects and new businesses, and providing training in business and fundraising skills. The initiatives should also raise awareness of non-violent ways of dealing with conflict, such as between employers and employees, and offer opportunities to develop anti-exploitation strategies.

It is important to ensure that these new skills can be used in daily life; otherwise, there is a risk of further isolation. If the community does not value young people's newly acquired skills and experiences, and offers no opportunity to use them, the 'old' conflict solution strategies will be reinvoked and may become even more entrenched. This can only be countered effectively through ongoing support and follow-up projects.

A community centre is therefore only useful if it conforms to the community's own wishes and ideas, and if the community is actively involved in creating the centre and feels responsible for its future.

### Case Study: Wilderness Project (National Peace Accord Trust in South Africa)

Militarised young people, who are former enemies from the same community, are brought together on a seven-day 'Transformation Trail'. The project aims to contribute to the building of a culture of peace in the community by addressing individual healing, reconciliation between opposing groups, and re-integration with the community. Conventional types of therapeutic intervention appeared unsuccessful because of the young people's suspicion of authority figures, the fear of having to reveal their role in the killings, and the perception that therapy is for 'mad' people. Wilderness Therapy was seen to be sufficiently robust. The physical obstacles, challenges, achievements and their parallel psychological equivalents are dealt with in terms of the same process. The Trail includes a night in sacred Bushmen caves – a site of healing trance dance. To reframe the community's perception of the criminalized young people, the project draws on a tradition of millennia that affords heroic status to individuals returning to a community from the wilderness. After the Trail, participants become involved in an ongoing support programme comprising informal counselling, life skills workshops, job and entrepreneurial-skills training. Participants have grouped together to form small businesses. Some earn their living as Trail assistants. An informal club was established, allowing youths to continue building relationships and become involved in cultural activities and community development projects (Robertson 1999).

#### IV.9 International Exchange

International cooperation is a key element in promoting peaceful coexistence and transnational awareness. Suitable projects include multinational work camps and encounter seminars for young people. Specialist training is required for team leaders.

Transnational school exchange projects are also important. Training courses and study placements should be provided for educators in this context too.

Integrating peace educators in youth and community projects can also promote intercultural learning. The following approaches are particularly relevant to conflict transformation:

- *Strengthening transregional exchange*  
Young people from non-Western conflict regions often know more about Western countries than about neighbouring states with a similar history, culture and customs to their own. Strengthening East-East or South-South relations offer great benefits in peace education. It is easier for people from neighbouring countries to develop empathy for each other's needs. They can then be

encouraged to challenge Western models and broaden their own cultural approaches.

- *Exchange between countries with similar conflict situations*  
Encounters and seminars with people from countries with similar conflict situations enable participants to distance themselves from their own conflicts. This opens up new perspectives and strengthens group activities. A good example is a project involving young people from Israel/Palestine and South Africa, who have begun – via a video-conference link – to work on a joint anti-violence youth television project.
- *Enhancing sensitivity to North-South issues*  
Cultural exchange between industrialised and developing countries is important but must be viewed critically in terms of its learning outcomes. It can feed the insecurities of young people from poor countries and add to the emotional embarrassment of participants from prosperous industrialised countries, thus impeding the learning process. Educators should therefore be given special training to avoid this problem such as through study placements.

#### **Case Study: Youth Empowerment Programme (International Fellowship of Reconciliation)**

One example of a transregional youth encounter is the Asian Pacific Youth Gathering. This involved young people from Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Cambodia. For many of them, this was their first opportunity to meet people from neighbouring countries. In addition to discussions and creative exercises on conflicts in the family, violence in daily life and the role of young people as peacemakers, the young people also exchanged dances, songs and meditation practices. Finally, a number of practical initiatives were planned, to be carried out within the individual countries or in cooperation with others. They included, for example, the Campus Peace Initiative, and Peace and Justice Clubs in schools. In late 1999, a second Asian Youth Camp and Non-violence Training project took place, when young people set up a network to coordinate their activities during the UNESCO Year for a Culture of Peace.

The greater the distance between the two worlds, the more important it is to weigh up the opportunities and risks associated with cooperation. International exchange is often a privilege that contributes indirectly to the formation of elites. Possible counterproductive outcomes must therefore be assessed, and factors such as the urban-rural divide, divergent social and economic problems, and educational issues taken into account. Encounter work should be a long-term project. Research has shown that one-off short-term encounters are unlikely to dismantle prejudices and may actually entrench stereotypes. Continuity, longer stays and lengthy preparation periods, exemplified through the Internet



and video exchanges, combined with follow-up programmes at the national and local levels, are useful in this context. It is also helpful to focus on a specific work project (e.g. building a youth centre, and producing a radio programme).

#### **IV.10 Training and Re-Training Educators**

The educators involved in these approaches to youth and educational work must be properly trained. Targeted training and re-training, support with teaching methods and supervision should equip educators with the necessary in-depth knowledge and skills to work in constructive conflict management, intercultural learning and peer group education. It is also important for them to learn to deal sensitively with traumatised persons. As a minimum, educators should understand how to work with and encourage children and young people who have experienced violence and loss. They should also learn how to examine their own attitudes and personal approach to conflict and trauma so that they avoid replicating their own conflict defence mechanisms in their educational work. Educational work cannot, and should not, be a substitute for trauma therapy.

It is also important for educators to recognise that they are role models. Through their personal and social skills, they have an opportunity to influence the learning environment and achieve a greater impact, in terms of the transmission of values, than the formal curriculum. Furthermore, if educators feel they have the support of their institutional directors, this will have a positive impact on the learning environment (Elchardus et al. 1999). This places a particular onus on directors to lend their weight to such initiatives.

## **V. Summary**

No society can afford the marginalisation of its young people. Integration opportunities which are responsive to the divergent needs of child soldiers, resistance fighters, refugees, street children, young offenders and victims of violence are extremely important, offering a great deal of long-term potential for peace consolidation. Providing education for the 'insecure' and 'hidden' sections of the population who are seeking a focus in their lives can also play a key role in crisis prevention. Neglecting this area can lead to a brain drain as people migrate to other countries.

The contribution made by youth and educational work to conflict transformation has been acknowledged in numerous international declarations. Unfortunately, this contrasts sharply with the

minimal financial support, which it receives in practice. Funding for educational work is hampered by the lack of visibility of successful peace policy measures. Peace education has a long-term focus and is undermined by the need to achieve rapid successes in order to safeguard follow-up funding. This impedes the development of local initiatives and leads to dependence on, and decision-making by, outside actors. The pressure to achieve quick successes also leads to a focus on 'visible and viable' aspects such as rapid integration into employment. Holistic approaches need a longer timeframe, and their impact is difficult to quantify.

Although a secure economic perspective is vital, it is insufficient on its own. Psychological and social stability is also required for long-term conflict transformation. Efforts to integrate young militant resistance fighters into the South African police or security services have failed in a number of regions because no account was taken of trauma (i.e. the need for psychological stability), the ambivalent attitudes of the local population towards the police, and feelings of group loyalty (i.e. the need for social stability). As a result, a disproportionately high number of suicides have occurred (Seiler 1999).

Successes must be monitored in the interests of future peace education projects. There is a need to develop and test appropriate evaluation tools and strategies, which will undoubtedly feature on the research agenda in future. Another key question is how a culture of self-reflection and openness to learning can be promoted in everyday peace work. Further theoretical and practical research is required in the following areas:

- work with parents, and peace education for pre-school children (e.g. intercultural learning processes);
- intergenerational learning (there are very few case studies on the sensitive use of intergenerational approaches in conflict regions);
- linking remembrance with current human rights issues and measures to overcome structural disadvantages;
- opportunities to link educational activities with employment and community work. Education projects should be reviewed to determine whether they offer a suitable learning environment for democratic behaviour and constructive conflict management.

So, which social groups can be reached with educational work, and which cannot? A critical appraisal of this issue is required, as is an evaluation of the opportunities and limits to educational work in conflict transformation. Experiences and contributions from societies with different concepts of education rarely feature in the literature. This article itself is based on a Western, individualised notion of education. The role

of spirituality, for example, is not discussed. Yet, its significance in non-Western educational processes should not be overlooked.

The practical implementation of peace education in the school curricula is painfully slow (UNESCO 1994; Chetkow-Yanoov 1997). This may be because governments, which use the school system as an instrument to impose their system of rule, feel threatened by peace education, which focuses on human rights, has a partisan and political approach, and challenges power structures. This may prove to be an insoluble dilemma. Governments feel especially insecure during their consolidation phase. Targeted lobbying and information work about the goals of peace education and conflict management are therefore required. The South African experience has shown that the insecurity associated with democratisation, and the handling of 'old' loyalties, continue to play a significant role. Awareness-raising through information work can be effective in this context.

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