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Education, Culture and Learning in Response to Conflict and Protracted Crisis

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Abstract

Panel Session at the Annual CIES Conference 2021. Chaired by Moskal, five papers address both the lived experiences and actions - in policy and practice - in conflict, post-conflict and UK contexts. A discussant (Odena) offers reflections on common threads and issues to reconsider, drawing on his experience leading The Arts of Inclusion network. Presenters examine youth policies in Colombia and Mexico (Arizpe & Gormally), experiences of doctoral students from Middle-Eastern conflict zones in the UK (Pacheco), skills development of refugees in India (Dagar), Arabic teaching with refugees in Italy (Aldegheri), and workshops with Syrian and Iraqi refugees at a UK university (Moskal). These studies engage in discussions of issues confronting youth in particular, their wellbeing, aspirations, learning and skills development. The panel presentations contribute understanding to education in crises, one of the major global challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4). Education is crucial in establishing peace-building processes, and for the wellbeing and economic integration of all individuals affected by conflict. Formal and non-formal learning has a strategic role to play in peace building, and promotion of equity and diversity.

Aims of this Panel Session

This Panel Session on Education, Culture and Learning in Response to Conflict and Protracted Crisis relates directly to one of the leading topics of the Annual CIES Conference 2021 on lived experience as shaped by changing contexts, spaces, cultural values, and actions. It will address both the lived experiences and the actions (in form of policy and practice) in changing contexts of conflict and post-conflict spaces. It will engage in discussions on the pressing issues confronting youth in particular, their wellbeing, futures and aspirations; livelihoods development; and learning and skills development, at all ages and definitions of youth. It will demonstrate the centrality of youth in forging a future that embraces social responsibility.

The panel contributions and discussion will address the following questions:

- How are the social constructions of gender, race, sexuality, cultural values, social hierarchies, and community relations changing relative to learning in conflict/ post-conflict and protracted crisis situations?
- What role the culture, cultural heritage, multiple identities and representations play in formal and non-formal learning contexts?
- What might social responsibility look like in the area of conflict/ post-conflict learning? Whom are we responsible, and why?
- What does social responsibility mean to educators, policy makers, within the development community to governments, and to activists? Who benefits from the work we do, and how?

The session format

The panel will follow a conventional format of short presentations and discussion with the involvement of the chair and discussant. This panel session will provide the opportunity for exchange among presenters working on the common theme of education, culture and learning in response to conflict and protracted crisis and problems related to the research and practice within this area. The panel will share in comparative manner recent empirical evidence and policy review in various international contexts and is, thus relevant to the field of comparative and international education.

The importance and relevance of the session

The panel presentations and discussion will contribute to understanding and responds education in conflict/post-conflict and crisis situation, which is one of the major global challenges that needs to address in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It responds to the UNESCO 2030 education agenda, which aims to alert students to violent forms of extremism, and threats to ethnic and cultural identities and heritages and to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; and to (SDG) 4 and SDG4.7 concerning the mainstreaming of global citizenship, where students in Higher Education are encouraged to be participating, responsible citizens and change agents.

Addressing these development challenges is a key objective of panel. Education is crucial in establishing a peace-building process, and for the wellbeing and economic integration of all individuals affected by conflict. Researchers and practitioners working in education and conflict areas have emphasised the vital role of schools and teachers in helping the students to make meaning of conflict and peace, global and local tensions, of formal and non-formal education, and personal, national, and other identities. Formal and non-formal learning has a strategic role to play in peace building, promotion of equity, diversity, knowledge and culture production beyond national borders. For example, in a refugee case, education provides a vital opportunity to reshape refugees' futures through their aspirations and necessary knowledge and skills needed to rebuild their life with dignity. This could enable refugees to make positive contributions in the host country and create opportunities for their spatial and social mobility. With this framing in

mind, education systems in host countries should recognise that they have a shared responsibility to adapt their academic provisions to meet refugee students' needs, which can facilitate partnerships with international funding agencies, host (including local) governments and refugee communities to promote a policy of inclusion, equity and expansion of development opportunities.

PAPER ONE

Learning from youth policies in Medellin: Towards a transferability peacebuilding model, by Evelyn Arizpe and Sinead Gormally, School of Education, University of Glasgow.

This paper stems from a British Academy funded study which explores lessons of the peacebuilding process that took place in city of Medellin (Colombia) and analyses transferable traits. Working with the city of Acapulco (Mexico), which currently suffers from criminal and other drug-related violence, we are exploring lived experiences as shaped by this context and questioning what actions young people and community-based practitioners feel may change the current context of conflict.

The study analyses the policies and programs from the last two decades through which Medellin managed to reduce violence and implement an inclusive and lifelong learning strategy for young people. It also explores the current policies and context of Acapulco, discussing with local practitioners the question of who has responsibility in making sense of the conflict and in moving away from it. This is a multidimensional analysis taking lessons from a post-conflict society and integrating these with the current lived realities of those in a conflict area.

Preliminary findings reveal the critical aspects of education and culture, which formed part of Medellin's most recent administration (2004-2019), that contributed to peacebuilding. These policies actively placed communities and young people as key in forging a positive future through building hubs, providing equipment and subsidizing activities to guarantee the success of the interventions for young people, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The development and appropriation of public spaces for young people through art-based activities and nonformal education have also been characteristic features of the city's overall strategy. In addition to programmes designed to socially integrate armed groups, citizen coexistence training was offered by a range of different local institutions in order to generate trust and confidence among communities and the local government. Finally, promoting Medellin as a "to-visit" place helped to create a positive identity, impacting on the perception of peace amongst its citizens as well as from an outside perspective. In this paper we will explore how community relations changed by placing education and culture at the forefront of the lived experiences of young people and how social responsibility was encouraged as part of the integration and interactions which placed young people at the centre of the peacebuilding process. The paper will end with a reference to

how these findings will be integrated with those from other research methods (interviews, surveys, and participatory mapping) in order to create a transferability peacebuilding model.

PAPER TWO

Responsibility and ethics of hosting international students from conflict zones in higher education, by Emilie-Marie Pacheco, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Higher education institutions that host international students sojourning from countries experiencing political conflict often act as places of refuge and opportunity. However, there is little discussion in the field regarding the responsibilities of higher education institutions when committing to act as hosts to incoming students from places experiencing conflict. To address this gap, we present empirical evidence from a social psychological qualitative study that investigated the experiences of Middle-Eastern international doctoral students abroad for study in the United Kingdom, during a time of conflict in their home countries. Semi-structured interviews with Syrian (n=15), Palestinian (n=5), and Turkish (n=5) cohorts were analysed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). The findings provide insight into these issues from the students' perspectives, highlighting they seek to be supported and acknowledged above all else. This study emphasises the need for governing bodies to consider host institutions' responsibilities when committing to officially receive and take into their care, incoming students from places experiencing conflict; the ethical implications for institutions that fail to meet these responsibilities are also highlighted. Based on this empirical work and a review of previous discourse on these issues, a series of practical recommendations for various stakeholders, including institutions, educators, and policymakers, are presented.

PAPER THREE

Sustainable livelihood and social integration through skills development for urban refugees, by Preeti Dagar, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Contrary to common assumptions, the vast majority of the world's urban refugees are not relocating to cities in the global North but are moving to neighbouring countries and developing cities in Asia, Africa and the Middle East (UNHCR, 2019). Providing educational, lifelong learning and skills development opportunities to refugees remains a challenge for international organisations and national governments. The UNHCR, as the largest international actor and coordinator in refugee crisis has started focusing on livelihood approaches as a major strategy. UNHCR livelihood programming promotes access to vocational, technical, skills and entrepreneurship training for refugees to generate employment. However, there are multiple challenges related to the success and sustainability of these programmes.

This presentation focuses on a recent research project aimed at measuring the direct impact of skills and vocational training for livelihood generation, and various factors that affect the perception, engagement and participation of refugees in these programmes. The research is a comparative case study of refugee participants from Afghanistan, Myanmar (Rohingya and Chin), Tibet and Somalia in three big cities in India: Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur. The study employs semi-structured interviews focus groups and participatory drawing with 66 participants. Looking through the lens of capabilities approach and intersectionality, the study explores the effect of intersecting gender, class, ethnic, racial and religious identities of refugees on their employment opportunities, social freedoms and livelihood outcomes. It further examines the interactions of global strategies and targets with national policies and local realities at the state and regional level. I argue that learning opportunities and livelihood strategies should not only be targeted at income generation but also towards social inclusion, well-being and holistic development of refugee groups. It is crucial to recognise refugees' previous knowledge, qualifications and skills. Additionally, skills policies and strategies should support the sustainable livelihood for both the refugee population and the host community.

PAPER FOUR

'Learning the family language': Arabic language teaching to young refugees from the MENA region in Turin, by Esa Aldegheri, School of Education, University of Glasgow

While there is much focus on young refugees learning the language of receiving communities to support integration, the importance of learning and retaining the language of their families is often overlooked. This presentation investigates the roles and responsibilities of teaching Arabic to young refugees from Arabic-speaking families who sought sanctuary in Turin from conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The paper is based on qualitative, ethnographic data collected via semi-structured interviews with an Arabic language teacher who is herself a refugee from the MENA region, and participant observation. It identifies the benefits and challenges of learning 'the family language' for these young people in a peri-conflict setting, with particular consideration of issues surrounding the integration of young refugees in Turin.

PAPER FIVE

Social Responsibility and Higher Education: university engagement in intercultural dialogue with excluded refugee youth, by Marta Moskal

Higher Education is now at the forefront of the international discourse to promote the social responsibility and to lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges, which involve education in conflict and crisis situations and intercultural dialogue. (The Conference Communiqué of the UNESCO World Conference of Higher Education (WCHE) in 2009). The plight of refugee young people is a misfortune that requires sensitive care and attention to better. They have come to the UK to seek sanctuary from war caused by geopolitical events to which our European and American countries – the so-called Global North – have contributed. The paper offers a critical engagement with the idea of intercultural dialogue (UNESCO 2013) to explore how university can engage with excluded refugees and how higher education can prepare the students to be the cultural mediators.

Through the case study, elite university students met with refugees' youth of Syrian and Iraqi background who have arrived in the area. Three case study's workshops focused on building bridges, sharing life narratives and educational experiences through photo exposes, learning a song together, taking a walking tour of the university campus, and co-constructing the "ideal" university. In exploring whether higher education can create a sense of solidarity and intercultural dialogue between excluded refugee and university students, we present observation of and reflection on the process, and the multiple understandings of experience collected from university students and refugee youth to identify the spaces of inclusion of these young people into the structures of our society – education, language, and culture. The discussion of the findings considers whether and how higher education can create a sense of solidarity and intercultural dialogue between excluded refugee and university students.

DISCUSSANT

Education responses to conflict panel: discussant reflections, by Oscar Odena, School of Education and School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow

In my reflections I outline three common threads and three issues to reconsider, drawing on the literature, the papers presented and my own experience leading the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council network 'The Arts of Inclusion'. Across all papers discussed today we can see a number of common threads. For brevity I focus on the following three, although I acknowledge the audience may see additional threads: (1) the relevance of non-formal education, for example in arts-based activities in Colombia and holistic development activities with refugees in India; (2) the centrality of young people and skills development; and (3) a tendency to develop interventions designed to address 'perceived need' e.g. by funders, policy and practice leaders.

In terms of issues in need for reconsideration and in light of today's papers I would like to delve further into the following three issues: (1) understanding the context matters, for example, to see the interactions between global strategies and realities at regional and local levels; (2) effective

practice needs to be reconsidered on a case-by-case basis, in terms of (a) content, (b) frequency and (c) continuity of activities. Drawing on social psychology and the consecutive stages of intergroup contact between groups outlined in Pettigrew's Intergroup Contact Theory, many interventions may not move from the 1st stage of initial contact (Pettigrew in Odena's 'The power of musical creativity for cross-community integration', *Musical Creativity Revisited*, pp. 80-104, Routledge, 2018); and (3) how to develop knowledge exchange between policy, practice and research needs to be reassessed. A similar issue emerged working with the AHRC-RSE The Arts of Inclusion network, www.tai.international. My suggestion would be to engage with non-academics for the long term, and let this engagement inform our practice as researchers as much as we expect our research to impact beyond the academy.

Additional Panel Information

The study from which Arizpe and Gormally's paper was developed was funded by the British Academy (Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises). The study by Moskal was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (Building an intercultural pedagogy for higher education in conditions of conflict and protracted crises). Odena's work with The Arts of Inclusion network was supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant Ref. AH/S003851/1) and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Grant Ref. 62292). The co-authors participation at CIES 65th Annual Conference was sponsored by the School of Education, University of Glasgow.