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Education and Peace Building:
The Role of the Teacher within and Beyond the School

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Abstract:
Generally, education aims at solving societal problems. Conflict is a major obstacle to development in Africa. Violence and conflict have become a part of everyday life and threaten education and societal development on the African continent. The impact of violent conflict and fragility on a country's society, economy and political governance is devastating and encompassing. So, conflict has become a societal problem that demands the identification and practice of strategies to maintain peace. As a result, peace education is a critical and the curriculum is a significant vehicle for peace education which includes peace building. The teacher is a key factor in developing and implementing educational plans. Therefore, teachers have the capacity to enhance peace building both in the classroom and beyond. Unfortunately, there is a relative lack of consideration of teachers as agents of peace-building. Teachers do not seem to be aware of the significant role they can play in peace building both within the school and within the community. Thus, this paper aims at identifying and discussing the positive role of the teacher in peace building along with some key strategies to facilitate this role.

Keywords: Peace building, peace education, teachers, role, democratic strategies, civil society

1. Introduction

The personal suffering of African citizens injured or displaced and the loss of potential development and economic opportunity due to high levels of violence cannot be overemphasized. With regard to the types of political violence, ACLED (2016) reports that rioting and protesting increased significantly in more than half of African countries, revealing that popular demonstrations and domestic unrest pose a major challenge to a growing number of governments across the continent. Civilian involvement in conflict also constitutes a critical and recurring element of contemporary African warfare while political militias carried out 46.3% of total attacks on civilians across the continent. Such a scenario describes a problem which education in Africa must strive to respond to by equipping learners with peace education or peace building skills.

Teachers are the key actors in the planning and implementation of educational programmes and if education must foster peace building, teachers must understand their role in this important process. Unfortunately, there is a relative lack of consideration of teachers as agents of peace building. Teachers do not seem to be aware of the significant role they can play in peace building both within the school and within the community, as peace building is hardly a point of focus during initial and in-service teacher education programmes. Even though literature identifies conflicting roles of the teacher in peace building (UNICEF, 2015), this paper aims at highlighting and discussing the positive role of the teacher in peace building along with some key strategies to facilitate this role.

2. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of education, according to the philosophy of Social Reconstructionism, is to reconstruct society. Social Reconstructionism focuses on educating students about issues going on in their society. Its goal is to inform students, give them the skills they need to be able to take action with what they learn, encourage them to improve society, and guide them in improving society. With this philosophy, schools, teachers, and students unite with a common purpose: to eliminate social problems and tackle social challenges (Reeves, 2013). The purpose of education through Social Reconstructionism is to encourage "schools, teachers, and students to focus their studies and energies on alleviating pervasive social inequities. Since "racism, sexism, global warming and environmental pollution, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, AIDS, and violence are rooted in misinformation and thrive in ignorance" the school is an ideal place to begin alleviating these problems (Sadker & Zittleman, 2010, p. 285). Conflict has taken centre stage in Africa in the past decade so it is a societal problem which education needs to respond to through peace education, without which development in Africa may remain an illusion.

In situations where violent conflict already exists education may have a protective role, for example, by providing points of stability and daily routine for children if it is possible to keep schools functioning, by helping understand underlying causes of conflict and by strengthening messages within society about the negative impacts of violence. It is a means of educating people about other non-violent ways of responding to conflict. In situations where peace processes are underway, education may also be a means of

contributing to social transformation, for example, through reforms to the education system itself and by educating people about new arrangements for political representation, justice and policing. Education is the fundamental tool that makes institutional change in other sectors possible by educating personnel currently in post or those who will shape future institutions (Smith, 2010).

3. Peace Building

Peace building has become an overarching term for an entire range of actions designed to contribute to building a culture of peace (OECD, 2008). It is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation (Alliance for Peace building, 2013). Peace building involves a great number and variety of stakeholders – starting with the citizens of the countries themselves where peace building is underway. It is neither a purely political, security nor developmental process, but one that must bring together security, political, economic, social and human rights elements in a coherent and integrated way (UN, 2010). Smith (2004) asserts that the goal of peace building is to "encourage the development of the conditions, attitudes and behavior that foster and sustain social and economic development that is peaceful, stable and prosperous.

4. The Role of the Teacher in Peace Building within the School

The teacher's role in achieving educational goals is important whether in the definition of problems or the presentation of concrete solutions in the form of programs of studies or teaching. The teacher is often framed as capable of, when given the right support, developing their professional capacity for reflexivity, reason and judgement to build the professional teaching body that is pivotal to educational outcomes (UNICEF,2015). Therefore, without doubt, the most important person in the curriculum implementation process is the teacher. With their knowledge, experiences and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum development effort. Better teachers support better learning because they are most knowledgeable about the practice of teaching and are responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom (Alsubaie, 2016). As a key factor in curriculum development, the teacher has an important role in minimizing conflict by impacting minds with peace values.

UNICEF (2015) discusses some roles of the teacher in peace building. The teacher plays a central role in educational solutions, including peace building. The potential for teachers to participate in decision making at all levels of the education system was reflected in the report by VSO, (2002): "What Makes Teachers Tick?" Also, the teacher is perceived as a role model. Teachers model peaceful resolution to conflicts, so too will children learn how to manage the conflicts around them at interpersonal, classroom and community levels (IRC, 2006: 6).

The role of the teacher is also to create a democratic environment so that lessons and topics may be discussed, debated, and student voices will be heard. In order for students to end up changing their society, they have to believe that their voice matters and that they can make a difference in the world. It is the role of a teacher to make sure his or her students know that they can make a difference, their opinions matter, and their voices can and will be heard. Barakett, Sacca, and Freedman (2001) observed "the classroom is a community or culture in its own right" and students should feel "they are an important member of that community, and that they can freely voice their ideas and opinions, in a safe environment"

As agents of democratization, some teachers teach citizenship as a cognitive exercise and others focus on the development of attitudes. In the international discourse, Citizenship and History curricula have increasingly acquired the notions of cultivating democratic skills, shared values, the notions of human rights, respect for diversity and civic responsibilities (Davies 2004a). Teachers are expected to use subject textbooks to teach young people how to participate in peaceful questioning, critiquing injustice and arriving at peaceful solutions (Davies 2011). Teachers are expected to facilitate 'deliberative' democratic processes in the classroom (Davies, 2004a; 2011).

Teachers as agents of healing and addressing psychosocial trauma play a significant part in peace building. This conceptualization is prevalent in emergency and crisis situations and is consequently linked with humanitarian situations (Harber 2004). Within this role teachers are perceived as the most important care-givers outside of the child's home, and they have the potential to help children recover from the traumas of conflict through, primarily, the return to normalcy provided through the opening of schools. Through the managed classroom environment teachers can provide learners with a safe place where they are listened to, can share and play. It is also in this setting where learners requiring additional support may become apparent, and the teacher is in a position to "screen students who may need additional care" (INEE, cited in UNICEF, 2015).

As agents of peace teachers are expected to model interpersonal relationships and teach/impart values which uphold peace including tolerance, recognition and respect and a range of skills such as critical thinking, compromise, mediation and collaboration (UNICEF, 2015). In conflict societies students suffer from emotional despair, low self-esteem, lack of cultural connectivity and a loss of values. Teacher as agents of peace building are understood in relation to their capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings. It is their ability to think, feel and act in order to foster "values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself" (Novelli and Smith, 2011).

5. Teaching Strategies that Enhance Peace Building

Education for peace focuses on skills which include collaboration, critical thinking, mediation etc; while attitudes would incorporate justice, equity, fairness, care. All of these attributes need to be taught using methods that reflect them, so authoritarian pedagogies that suppress critical thinking are replaced with participatory pedagogies. Skills such as collaboration and mediation are honed through group work. Justice and fairness are reflected in the inclusion of all learners in an equitable classroom and relevant lesson content (UNICEF, 2015). Levin and Bishai (2010) assert that research on civic education indicates that, while traditional lecture-based

teaching can effectively impart civic knowledge, active classroom techniques such as discussion and role-play are much more effective at changing student views and motivations.

Students also need room to practice the skills of citizenship, articulating their views clearly and persuasively, respectfully engaging with the views of others, working together with their fellow citizens toward a common good and accepting those with whom they disagree. Small group discussions and small group work, where possible and safe, can be most effective if students from opposed ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or other groups are placed together. Such groups can build mutual respect, working together for a common benefit and promoting group bonding.

Role-playing exercises, especially those that ask students to take on roles very different from their own, encourage mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation for the way that commonalities and differences can coexist among citizens. Also, project-based learning is important for peace building. Students take projects out of the classroom to work within their communities. Though used in many educational contexts, service-learning projects carry several potential benefits for civic education. Generally, students can see an immediate benefit from their work. This is most effective when combined with other classroom-based techniques, such as writing reflections or research papers based on student experiences, class discussions, or presentations.

6. The Role of the Teacher in Peace Building within the Community

The teacher is part of civil society. Civil society' refers to any collective, voluntary and non-profit oriented organization outside the family and the state, established for the purpose of pursuing the collective interests of its members. Participation could take the form of group or individual volunteerism through associations or organizations like NGOs. Nyirabikali (2016) asserts that with its potential to promote an inclusive dialogue among all stake holders, and to increase societal capacity for peaceful coexistence and the resolution of conflict, civil society has an important role to play in building peace. The involvement of these actors including the teacher can assist peace building, especially in terms community relations. As part of its mediation and facilitation function, civil society can ensure that citizens are informed about public policies and that public authorities are adequately informed about citizens' concerns, including the facilitation of an inclusive and participatory dialogue between the two sides. Despite the declared political will to promote inclusive and participatory mechanisms of governance, most notably through decentralization, the requisite knowledge and understanding of effective participation in such processes is lacking at various levels of society. Civil society could organize information-sharing and training activities focused on these topics. Teachers can participate in assisting with community building in order to foster social cohesion and solidarity, and to mediate intercommunity disputes.

7. Conclusion

The teacher is expected to play a significant role in peace building. Teacher agency as peace builders is understood in relation to their capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings. It is their role to think, feel and act in order to foster "values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself" (Novelli and Smith 2011: 7). While teachers can be victims or perpetrators during a conflict, it is important to see them as part of the solution when rebuilding an education system. Professional development for teachers is considered vital in supporting teachers to ensure equity, peace and social cohesion. Both initial and continuing/in-service professional development are vital to ensuring that teachers develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become active agents of peace and social cohesion in classrooms, school and communities (Global Partnership for Education, 2015).

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