

Peacebuilding through Education: Innovative Ways of Dealing with Conflict

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to examine the role of innovation in education in post-conflict and fragile societies and how innovative educational strategies can be used to help create sustainable peace. Education based on scientific and humanistic thoughts has been fundamental for changing attitudes towards society, technology, environment and politics throughout history. This is due to the emphasis it places on innovation and open, data driven inquiry, which have been instrumental in fostering social progress. This article posits that societies can become more peaceful if the traditional education programs, textbooks and curricula are implemented in conjunction with other learning initiatives that genuinely engage all members of community. The argument is that innovation should be an integral part of the educational framework for sustainable peace. In order to elaborate on innovation, the article looks at the Montessori Method of education which places an emphasis on promoting humanistic values of free inquiry, trust building, and an awareness of oneself, others, and the environment. The article then proceeds to discuss art, experiential learning programs, and technology as innovative strategies for peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-stricken settings.

Zusammenfassung

Ziel dieses Beitrags ist, zu untersuchen, welche Rolle Innovation in der Bildung in Postkonfliktgesellschaften und fragilen Gesellschaften spielt und wie innovative Strategien zur Förderung nachhaltiger Friedensbewegungen genutzt werden können. Bildung / Aufklärung basierend auf humanistischem Gedankengut war seit jeher Auslöser, Einstellungen gegenüber Gesellschaft, Technologie, Umwelt und Politik zu ändern. Die Ausrichtung auf Innovation und wissenschaftlich orientierte Studien haben sozialen Fortschritt mit sich gebracht. Hier wird davon ausgegangen, dass Gesellschaften friedvoller sein können, wenn traditionelle Bildungsprogramme, Lehrbücher und Lehrpläne in Verbindung mit anderen Lernformen gebracht werden, die alle Gemeinschaftsmitglieder einbinden. Argumentiert wird, dass Innovation ein integraler Bestandteil der Förderung nachhaltigen Friedens ist.

Das Konzept der Innovation bezieht sich hier auf die Montessori-Methode der Erziehung, die sich auf humanistische Werte der freien Entfaltung, Vertrauensbildung und Reflexion über sich selbst, über andere und die eigene Umgebung beruft. Weiters werden kreative Methoden, Erfahrungslernen und Technologieeinsatz als innovative Strategien für Friedensförderung in sensiblen und konfliktgeladenen Situationen erläutert.

Keywords: Education, innovation, conflict, peacebuilding, post-conflict

1. Introduction

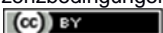
Education in post-conflict and fragile societies is a complex endeavour and an integral part of the overall peacebuilding efforts. It has a special place in these efforts since the future peace and stability depends on how the new generations are molded in educational systems and through educational initiatives outside the school system. This article

argues that societies can become more peaceful if the traditional education programs, textbooks and curricula are implemented in conjunction with other learning initiatives that genuinely engage all members of community. Innovation should be an integral part of the educational framework for sustainable peace. Innovation is needed to fight prejudice and ignorance; it is one of the key tools for the creation of baseline shared values of trust, recognition and respect. These essential values can in turn lead to an uninhibited, collaborative knowledge creation, and openness to learning about and with the Other (Enemy). Engaging communities in innovative learning processes, both inside and outside of classrooms, encourages the free exchange of opinions, building relationships and promotion of peace and humanism.

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Lizenzbedingungen:



This article looks at examples of communities who have been able to preserve their resilience to conflict through innovation and creativity. Innovative educational approaches such as cultural exchanges, intercommunal painting workshops, experiential learning exercises, reflective practices, photography, poetry, improvisational theater, dance, and music, both influence people's experience of conflict and reveal new and unique ways of addressing the challenges. Art encourages people to gain fresh perspectives about conflict, to confront pain and loss and transform them through movement, creative expression, and embodied experience. Artistic approaches are profoundly educational and innovative as they seek to increase awareness of non-verbal communication, generate fresh perspectives, and enact behavioural change in the midst of conflict, chaos, uncertainty, and rapid change.

Apart from artistic approaches, technology has a role to play in the promotion of sustainable peace. Advances and innovation in information and communication technologies have dramatically increased the ability of learners to securely access and share information over the web and gain access to specialized and even restricted information. Online tools and various applications have increasingly been used to analyse and organize vast amounts of information generated in peace processes.

The experiential learning programs are another innovative strategy in the promotion of peace and collaborative learning. The coursework in peace and conflict is too theoretical and often disconnected with what is happening on the ground (Aall et al. 2007). There is a need to address this disconnect between conflict theories and practices because one of the main goals of educating for sustainable peace is to provoke personal transformations, reflections and empathy of everyone involved. Researchers, scholars, students and practitioners in the field of peace and conflict studies cannot distance themselves from the topics they cover, but they need to constantly keep abreast with the events on the ground (Avruch & Black 1993; Lederach 1995, 1997). Experiential programs are necessary for a peace studies field as experience constantly feeds into practice and theory.

The goal of this article is to examine the role of innovation in education for sustainable peace. In order to elaborate on innovation, the article looks at Montessori Method of education with its revolutionary emphasis on humanistic values of free inquiry, trust building, and an awareness of oneself,

others, and the environment. Afterwards, the article will proceed to discuss art, experiential learning programs, technology and online platforms as existing and innovative strategies for peacebuilding.

2. Innovation and shared values

When humans are engaged in conflict, they are constrained in both actions and thoughts. In order to overcome the narrow-mindedness and exclusivity that emerges within the context of conflict and in its aftermath, the key goal of education should be to stimulate innovation, creativity and curiosity. It needs to encourage and empower the conflicting parties to remain curious about each other's perspectives as a means of deepening an understanding of the conflict itself. It is through this process that, insights can be generated, solutions can be suggested, and conflicts can ultimately be addressed in a manner that satisfies the needs of the concerned parties. Educational platforms need to provide a space for free and safe inquiry that enable innovation, curiosity and trust building.

In order to deepen the concept of innovation and educational spaces that enable the emergence of trust and curiosity, the Montessori Method and its implications for peacebuilding will be examined. Montessori famously said that what we teach does not matter, but it is rather how we teach that matters:

The task of teaching becomes easy, since we do not need to choose what we shall teach, but should place all before him (student) for the satisfaction of his mental appetite. He must have absolute freedom of choice, and then he requires nothing but repeated experiences which will become increasingly marked by interest and serious attention, during his acquisition of some desired knowledge.
(Montessori 2015, p. 5)

Being attentive to teaching methods when it comes to difficult topics such as conflict is as important as establishing a safe space where learners can come up with their own conclusions through free inquiry, trust building and collaboration. Trust is a precondition for positive sum thinking, the belief that compromise can be reached and all sides can gain.

Apart from teaching methods, education for sustainable peace should focus on children's emergence as autonomous spiritual beings, as beings capable of innovation and critical thinking,

which can make them agents for peace and progress. According to Montessori, children need to learn and understand the roots of the conflicts, which are often located in the traditional forms of education (Bogen 2017). She calls those traditional forms control-model education: "The child who has never learned to act alone, to direct his own actions, to govern his own will, grows into an adult who is easily led and must always lean upon others" (Montessori 1943, p. 23). Montessori suggests that blind obedience leads to everything that is wrong and evil in our society. It enables ignorance and non-informed responses to different situations, brings about the seduction of the masses by demagogues and leads people to blindly follow authority figures without questioning their words and actions.

Montessori's emphasis on freedom and her belief in human goodness as preconditions for peace, made her a radical. She openly challenges the notion of education as a way to control, and impose rules and preconceived frameworks on an individual. Education becomes a dangerous concept because it seeks the truth in contrast to obedience and seeks freedom as a means to challenge power and the status quo. Although it is critical and radical, such a concept of education is profoundly humanistic and it adds to the argument of this article that education can be an extremely powerful tool in peacebuilding.

The humanistic tradition in education has its origins in the work of Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) who urged his followers to "know themselves" (Bertland 2017). Humanistic education was then adopted by thinkers such as Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and Alfred North Whitehead who put human dignity and freedom at its core. This approach to education was further developed and expanded upon by humanistic psychologists, including Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. It is important to note that Maslow's theory of needs was a source of inspiration for John Burton, one of the fathers of the conflict resolution field, who applied Maslow's categorization of needs to analysing the roots of conflict. The humanistic approach is centered on the individual and the aim of education for humanists is to learn how to know and respect oneself, the others and the environment. Under the humanistic approach to education, the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator who enables the emergence of empathy and trust. Furthermore, the humanistic teacher cares about students by engaging their reasoning, social capacities, artistic and practical skills as well as feelings that are all important for the

development of student's self-esteem and self-actualization.

Montessori's approach to education demonstrates that when education becomes creative and innovative, it can contribute to societies' progress from the culture of conflict to the culture of peace through questioning the status quo, adhering to truth, and transferring humanistic values to the new generation. Figuring out the best approach and strategy to enable emergence of trust, self-esteem, adherence to truth, curiosity and other humanistic values, becomes a key question in the quest for sustainable peace. Let us examine some innovative educational initiatives, such as artistic initiatives, experiential learning programs, and technology-based platforms that could potentially serve as the catalysts that enable social progress and contribute to peacebuilding.

3. Artistic initiatives

Art is a politically and socially engaged educational tool which addresses social issues through symbols and metaphors speaking to our collective consciousness. Through the use of symbolism, story-telling, film, role-playing, acting, dancing and painting, art has the potential to send a strong message in conflict and post-conflict settings. Art can be seen as communicative action, a type of social action geared towards communication and understanding between individuals that can have a lasting effect on the spheres of politics and culture as a true emancipatory force (Habermas 1985). Furthermore, art can be used to promote democratic and humanistic values in societies shattered by conflict by disrupting and reconfiguring roles, places and patterns of communications within a community (McDonnell 2014). It can put one in other's shoes, bring people together through stories and narratives, enable catharsis and dealing with the pain, and eventually help societies imagine a peaceful future.

Art can incite strong emotions and is often utilized to demonstrate anti-war sentiments. From Picasso's *Guernica* to the documentaries such as *ANPO: Art X War*, the message sent to the society is that of human suffering and a cry against war and violence in general. In *ANPO: Art X War*, artists expressed public outrage against the passing of Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (in Japanese *anpo joyaku*, or simply ANPO), which allowed U.S. military bases to remain on Japanese soil resulting in massive protests. Within this context, protests received a symbolic and universal value through the

work of painters, photographers and film makers. Oppression and occupation was thus counteracted by symbolic non-violent action that shouted just as loud as the protestors in the streets. Its gravitas was based on the universality and ability to transcend time, preserving the strength of anti-war message.

Theater provides a space where innovation and education merge so that alternative views about war can be expressed freely. In the Balkans, theater provided a unique setting that has allowed communities to reflect, mourn, and empathize with the "other". When the war started in Yugoslavia in 1991, the members of DAH Theatre in Belgrade have become very cognizant of the power of theater as a space for reflection, mourning and empathy. The play "This Babylonian Confusion" was an anti-war performance (Dah Teatar 2017) which juxtaposed the omnipresent destruction with creativity in order to draw the public's attention to the futility and senselessness of war. From that point on, the work of Dah Teatar became focused on difficult themes of loss, victimhood, missing persons, justice and pain in times of war. These difficult themes provided an educational platform in a society whose social fabric was deeply shattered by war.

Art encourages reflexive processes and critical engagement with plurality and difference. It provides a wide canvas that can be used to convey a universal message about the values of social justice, cosmopolitanism and interconnectivity, which are all characteristics of peaceful societies.

4. Experiential learning programs

Experiential learning programs play an important role in the promotion of peace as they enhance students' global learning and development, as well as development of cultural empathy and increased understanding of the world issues and relations (Stebleton et al. 2013). Traveling to a conflict or post-conflict area can be extremely meaningful for students of international relations, conflict and peace studies. Students experience emotional and intellectual challenge as a result of direct cultural encounters, and guided reflection upon their experiences encourages engagement with their peers, educators, and selves (Engle & Engle 2004). Experiential learning programs are creative and innovative as they constantly adapt to different experiences, views and changing contexts. Given the cultural exchanges that such programs bring about, linkages and partnerships with local universities in fragile societies should be thoroughly

developed and thought through, so they are mutually beneficial and can contribute to the development of capacities and human capital in local contexts. They bring together divergent local communities to provide student travellers with different religious, political, and cultural perspectives with the goal of promoting intercultural understanding, social transformation, and positive engagement with local communities.

Experiential learning programs are also beneficial because participants create connections with local organizations and return to the "host" country for internships, job opportunities, and research projects continuing collaboration via their organizations. The added value of such programs consists of the interactions and future collaborations with local people. Given the benefits gained by participants in study abroad programs, more work should be done to ensure the reciprocity of the benefits of these programs. In other words, attention should be given to potential benefits that not only participants, but also the local community can gain from such programs. Study abroad programs need to be flexible and adaptive to be successful and to overcome challenges. Within the context of such programs, educators are innovators and facilitators of reflective practices in changing situations which are essential for learning to take place. Feedback from the local interlocutors as well as course participants is extremely important for the experience to be truly meaningful and transformative. Experiential learning programs are also important for the local communities as they have the need to interact and make their stories heard. Apart from facilitating professional and personal growth, these courses impact the participants' self-confidence, promote greater adaptability in conflict contexts, and generate the acquisition of new and different teaching methods, ideas, and philosophies among students and educators alike.

In conclusion, it can be argued that experiential learning programs facilitate innovation and collaborative learning which allows for the processes of free inquiry and an exchange of values between the visiting and host societies. This is beneficial for the emergence of sustainable peace because it enables an understanding of a wide variety of perspectives on conflict and conflict resolution practices. The experiential learning programs can also be seen as an opportunity to expand upon and engage in existing peacebuilding practices and initiatives.

5. Games, technology and digital storytelling

The movement of post-conflict societies towards sustainable positive peace can be facilitated by technology. Technology and virtual space are becoming indispensable in educating for peace as they can empower a large number of people to engage in different peacebuilding practices at their own pace and time. They do so by providing numerous tools and platforms that collect a wide variety of information and enable communication and interconnectivity regardless of space and time difference. Technology is a tool with which communities can build new innovative participatory processes, foster deeper collaboration and trust, and assume ownership for promoting peace.

Because relationships are at the very core of peacebuilding, learning how to develop collaborative and supportive relationships enables people to practice peacebuilding more effectively. Time and patience are needed to build trust and relationships. Games are an ideal tool that can be used to develop trust and relationships because their cooperative features model the behavior of participants towards acquiring the skills of problem-solving, communication, empathy and collaboration in an interactive, fun and engaging way.

Many computer and board games address the social and civic issues that are at the root of conflicts today. Organizations such as *Games for Peace* and *Games for Change* have put together a whole virtual community that creates and shares online games as a new approach to bridging the gap between people living in conflict zones (Games For Peace 2017; Games for Change 2017). Through games, youth are educated on the existing stereotypes and value of collaboration across different and adversarial communities. Values of trust, collaborative learning and creativity are supported among youth in the Middle East, Africa and other places stricken by conflict via the shared affirmative experience of game-playing.

Gaming initiatives have proven to be effective in promoting trust and collaborative and deliberative processes. PEACEapp is a global initiative promoting game applications and peace initiatives as venues for inter-cultural dialogue (UNAOC 2017). It organizes PeaceApp competitions for the games built as platforms for cultural dialogue and conflict management. Another initiative, The Toolbox for Education and Social Action (TESA) (TESA 2017) works with organizations and groups to create inspiring projects that support building democratic education and collective processes through games. Rise Up, one of their cooperative

board games, is about building people power and taking on oppressive systems to create change.

Organizations have also played a role in promoting games as a way of moving towards sustainable peace. Seeds of Peace and Peace Games are two organizations that came together to build the knowledge, skills, and relationships among young people to contribute to peaceful transformations in their communities (*The Olive Branch Teacher's Guide* 2008). Peace Games did not only organize festivals and workshops that brought together children from different schools and communities to create and play games with each other, but they also made sure to form long-term partnerships with local schools, teachers and students. They helped them co-create the curriculum, staff and volunteer workshops, support and materials, family newsletters and events that introduced the transformative change towards collaboration in the divided communities.

Apart from games, online courses have been used as a means to promote sustainable relationships that can move societies gradually towards positive peace. Online courses are offered by different educational institutions and are accessible to users around the world if they have Internet and can afford it. Some of the biggest platforms offering online courses are the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) Global Campus ("USIP Global Campus" 2017) and United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). UNITAR offers courses that run throughout the year that are free-of-charge and open to the public (UNITAR 2014). The Khan Academy, another institution well known for its online courses, produces 2600+ videos on different K-12 subjects making it a fantastic virtual space where children are given easy and accessible tools to learn by themselves (Khan Academy 2017).

Digital stories are another powerful and innovative tool for peacebuilding. The condensed format is conducive to sharing the story with others and allows for them to be easily uploaded to the Internet, opening up numerous possibilities for file sharing, repeated viewings, and audience distribution. Digital storytelling is a method of using storytelling, group work, and modern technology to facilitate the creation of two to three minute multimedia video clips that convey personal or community stories (Lal et al. 2015, p. 54). The impactful experiences that are sometimes evoked in people when viewing the digital stories of others can possibly be attributed to the integration of different art forms into one product. Combining multimedia adds layers of depth and increases the potential for

an emotional and sensorial experience for the audience. By adhering to the limited duration of the story, the storyteller is required to get to the heart of the matter in an efficient and quick manner and it is in this way that the format is effective in capturing life's defining moments or turning points (Lambert 2013).

Technological and digital platforms use innovation to enable collaborative learning processes and shared humanistic values. The use of games, online courses, and digital stories to promote peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings is gaining momentum. The technological and digital based approach to peace is efficient because it allows people of diverse backgrounds to develop peacebuilding skills at their own pace and regardless of their location. Although there is the issue of people lacking in access to the Internet or technological infrastructure, many organizations have taken a hands on approach in overcoming this challenge through innovation and by developing their own initiatives that provide people with access to technology. Overall, both educators and practitioners should build on the innovative initiatives that have already incorporated technology into their peacebuilding activities.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this article was to examine the role of innovation in education in post-conflict and fragile societies in order to help create sustainable peace. The resulting discussion and analysis presented in this article draws from the Montessori Method of education which elevates the importance of humanistic values for peacebuilding. Changes in the conflict system can be introduced through creative approaches that foster values of humility, trust and empathy and views of one's identity as equally valued and relevant as the identity of any other group or individual. Such humanistic values can gain traction and can be fostered relationally and collaboratively as exemplified in initiatives that utilize art, experiential programs, technological and digital platforms. Everyone wants a rapid change and quick results, but education takes time. Education for peace is a long term commitment aimed at systemic change which requires involvement of the whole society as well as local ownership of the process.

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