

The Role of Education in Reconciliation: The Cases of Bosnia and Northern Ireland

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Introduction:

Many conflicts arise in different countries of the world at different times. As a result, population suffer; they are displaced, killed and damaged are caused for infrastructure and services. Some conflicts prolonged for decades others for years.

This paper will attempt to focus on the role of educational intervention programs to reconcile and attempt to establish peace and normalize relationships between people in inflected areas by conflict and war.

One might ask why education should contribute in the reconciliation process. It is should be stated first that reconciliation is a complex task and no society's sector could face it alone. Political, social, psychological and religious efforts from all sectors of the society have to be integrated in order to achieve a better harmony among people in the country. However, it is a worthwhile endeavor to give a special attention to education for several reasons. First, focusing on children education means that we are planning for better peaceful future of the society. Second, it's easier to foster in children the values of justice, equality, respect, tolerance and healthy interaction among their friends regardless of their cultural differences. Third, educating children has long lasting effects on their behavior.

Before we discuss the role of education in reconciliation in conflict areas, it should be stated that we will focus more on the cases of Bosnia and Northern Ireland. Also, some relevant issues to conflict and reconciliation will be clarified on the bases of reviewing relevant literature particularly form cases of Bosnia and Northern Irelands as follows:

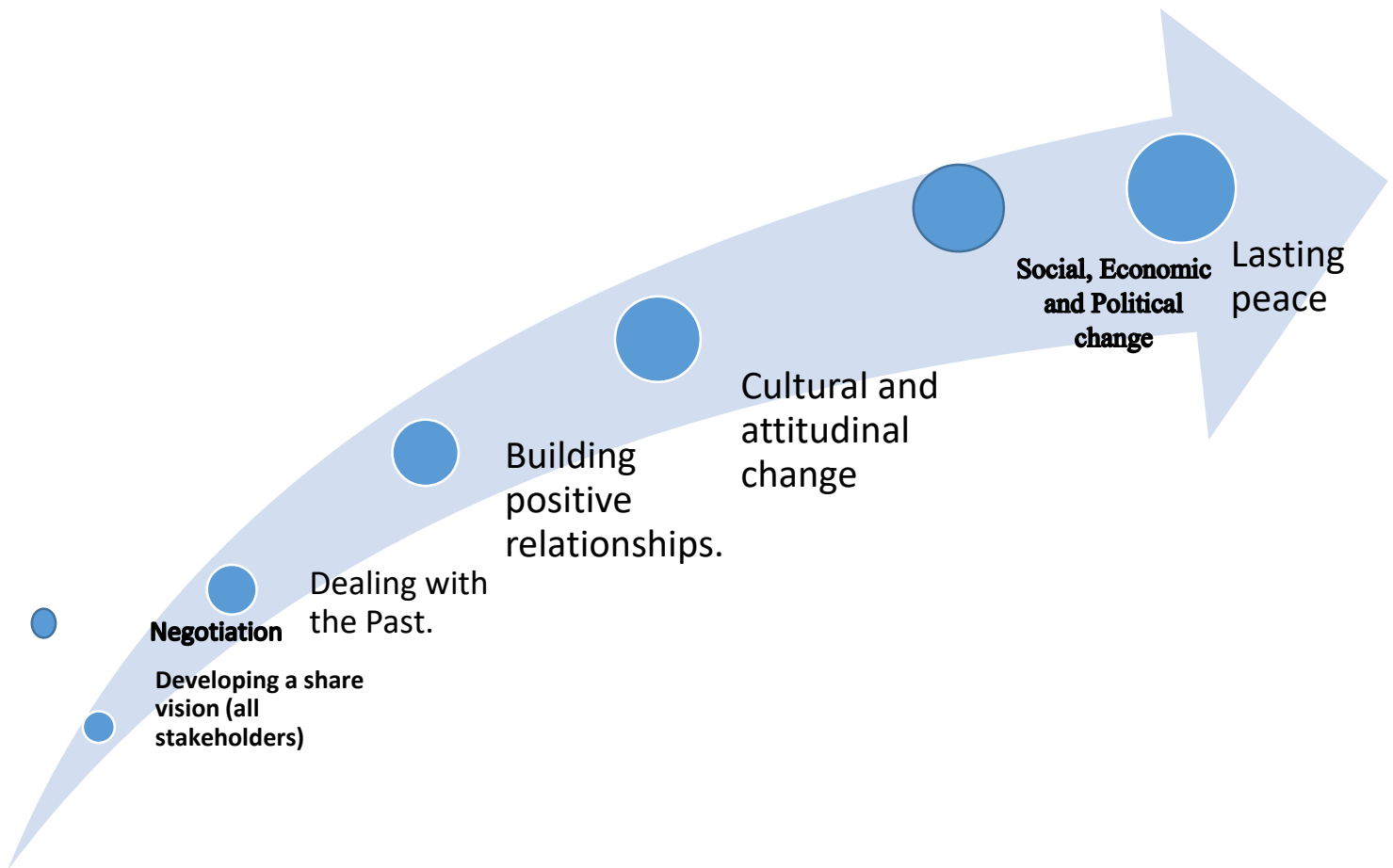
- Conflict and reconciliation are unique owing to culture, political system, ethnicity, aspiration and contexts.
- Commitment to openness is a pre-requisite for reconciliation particularly from politicians.

- Reconciliation might be approached differently by different individuals or groups of different ideologies and cultures.
- Reconciliation is a voluntary activity and cannot be imposed. It starts first with willingness from all parties/partners in order to build peace and live in harmony.
- Reconciliation is not a quick fix, but it's a deep change, a difficult task and a very long process.
- Reconciliation requires cultural change and demands creating trust, healing wounds and changing beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behavior.
- There is no specific and common roadmap model for reconciliation. In Bosnia, economic security and independence were given a priority whereas in Ireland political and religious dimensions were given more attention.

Reconciliation model:

Hamber & Kelly (2005) proposed a model of 5 stages and I have added two stages (1&7)

1. Negotiation
2. Shared vision
3. Dealing with the past
4. Positive relationships
5. Cultural and attitudinal change
6. Social, economic and political change
7. Lasting peace



Bosnian and Irish conflicts have different contexts and cultures. To cite some of the differences of the Irish conflict from the Bosnian case:

- The Northern Ireland state didn't collapse as in the case of Bosnia.
- The services for Irish population continued to be offered despite the conflict for decades.
- The conflict in Ireland took longer time than in the case of Bosnia.
- The U.K and Irish republic influences were in the benefit of reconciliation. Hence they were useful in reaching a peace agreement.
- The magnitude of the conflict was less in Ireland. Bosnia hundreds of thousands were killed and displaced internally and externally.
- The impact of conflict on schooling, food, ethnic violence, shortage water and energy were less in Ireland.

Despite the differences between the Bosnian conflict and the Irish one, yet there are several similarities where both are characterized by:

- Ethnic and political conflict.
- Human rights abuse.
- Political discrimination.
- Repression, violence and individual and collective trauma.
- Displacement and fear.
- Representing challenges for peace, social harmony and reconciliation.

The role of education in reconciliation:

Looking at the Bosnian and Irish conflict and the role of education in reconciliation resolution research, we could draw different lessons, among which:

- Reconciliation education programs development require to take into consideration the country's culture, age group and the nature of the conflict in the particular country (i.e sectarian, independence, discrimination, ...etc.)
- Have first a legal education framework agreed upon by the relevant bodies/parties and all stakeholders in the country.
- With the support of political and educational leaders, a reconciliation education curriculum framework and document has to be developed.
- Reconciliation issues should be integrated by professional educationists in relevant social science schools' courses such as language, religion, history, geography and civic education.
- Pre and in-service teacher training programs should be reviewed to include training teachers on reconciliation and how to conduct their teaching in objective and efficient manner.
- Reconciliation education programs require the development of verity of educational resources and materials for both children and teachers to enhance the teaching and learning process.

- Reconciliation awareness program should be developed and implemented to support school programs mainly for parents, media, youth workers and public at large.
- To enhance reconciliation schools' efforts, integrating formal and informal educational institutions has to be attended to.
- The past (truth seeking, storytelling) should be dealt with in an open and transparent way among children.
- More interactive teaching methodologies are to be adopted by teachers.
- Teachers are to be more involved in community relations.
- Children should be given opportunities to investigate how and why conflict, racism, sectarianism arise in the community.
- Children are also to be encouraged to investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations and reconciliation.
- Justice, democracy, equality, respect, tolerance and sacrifice are core values to be fostered in children.
- Early childhood and primary school children are to be given more attention.
- Media contribution is very significant in reconciliation programs to support schools' efforts.
- Educational authority, community leaders, NGOs (working with youth) and politicians are to work together towards the same vision.
- Continuous support, guidance and supervision of reconciliation programs are required.

Challenges to the role of Education in reconciliation:

1. Some factors might affect negatively the reconciliation process, among them are:
2. Lack of political commitment.
3. Lack of suitable educational resources and material.
4. Lack of commitment from schools and teachers.
5. Lack of monitoring and evaluation of reconciliation and transformation process.
- 6.

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