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# Peace-building through Global Citizenship Education in an Irish Context: Connections Between Theory and Practice

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DSAI Autumn, 2015: Education and Violent Conflict - Lessons Learnt from  
Ireland and Africa

# Key Frameworks

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**CRQ:** What are the theoretical foundations underpinning peace-building citizenship education programmes on the island of Ireland?

**Methodology:** Qualitative – 15 semi-structured interviews with educators involved in the development of peace building programmes designed for NI and RoI

**Theoretical Framework:** *Typology of teaching about conflict* (Davies, 2005)

- Education can support negative conflict (eg. Stereotyping)
  - Education can support positive conflict (Eg. HRE)
  - Levels of action/inaction promoted may vary
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# Why this CRQ?

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- Deepen our understanding of the relationship between education and conflict (Davies, 2004; Sommers, 2001).
  - Provide empirical investigation of education programmes which seek to address conflict (Harber & Sakade, 2009).
  - Consider the relationship between the theory and practice of peacebuilding education, and in doing so offers a means of bridging the gap (Bajaj, 2004; Gill & Niens, 2014; Haavelsrud & Stenborg, 2012; Harris, 2004;. UNICEF, 2011).
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# The Local Dimension of Peacebuilding



- The local aspects of peacebuilding have received increasing focus within recent research (Mac Ginty, 2015; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013)
- This 'local turn' attributed towards the prevalence of approaches grounded in conflict transformation and focused on the empowerment of local citizens to drive peacebuilding processes (Paffenholz, 2015).
- A number of peacebuilding education programmes have undertaken more contextualised approaches (Hart, 2011).



*“It seems quite radical, whenever you talk to young people. To ask young people’s opinions or to involve them in the process or design it seems like that’s just too radical. But I think it’s not at all. It just makes sense. It’s a blind spot.”*

(Iris)

- The inclusion of young people in the process
- A perceived absence of young people’s participation within formal education and society.
- Examples of what Harber and Sakade (2009, p.184) have described as the “significant and contrasting ideologies”

# Mapping 'the local' through active learning methodologies



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*“We would look at [the young people], their situations and the other people in their lives. All the stakeholders across whatever issue it is. And you would look at the politics. Look at parents. Look at the community [the young people] were brought up in. You would map out a whole picture of things.”*  
(Deborah)

- Fundamental in providing a “safe space”
  - Participation beyond ‘voice’
  - Contextualised 'the local' dimension of citizenship (Schierenbeck, 2015).
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# The family and young people's conflict biographies



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*“There was a girl in one year whose dad had died in [a bomb explosion]. Another girl in another school whose father is [a member of a Republican organisation is] and is in prison. And there were others. There were other stories there. So it was very real, in their back yard.” (Eugene)*

- Families have important role in shaping the conflict-related learning of young people in NI (Bell, Hansson & McCaffery, 2010; Connolly, 2004; McCully, 2006; Stringer et al, 2010)
  - Examples suggest that elsewhere in the island of Ireland young people's local spaces may be shaped by the family
  - Supports inclusion of interpersonal factors (Levy, (2014))
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# Conflict and the Local Community



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*“[A group of young people] wanted to put more flags up in their estates. So then we got into the conversation about flags and what does that mean and why would you want flags? Even whenever there are issues seen as potentially sectarian it’s a good inroad into digging up some of those issues...That was quite controversial but it started to dig up some of those issues. I think you have to deal with them if you ask young people what are they concerned about and it comes up to be something sectarian and racist I think it still has to be dealt with.” (Iris)*

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# “Underlying whispers” of the border



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*“In [a school within the border counties of NI], the [Irish] conflict was far more real. I remember a number of times when the kids said “We should be focusing a little bit more on Northern Ireland here”. I said “You’re dead right, you know”. It was refreshing to hear that.” (Eugene)*

- Educational approaches dealing with violence can sometimes unearth deeper negative conflicts which may inhibit positive peace (Bickmore, 2012)
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# Inclusive peacebuilding?



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*“[Peacebuilding education] is starting to recognise other ethnic minorities ... It was always protestant/catholic. I just always feel like young people are just fed up with the protestant/catholic thing. You know, that there are other issues we could look at even together.” (Iris)*

- Who is excluded from the ‘local turn’? (Schierenbeck, 2015).
- Marginalised young people often undervalued and ignored (Bickmore, 2012).
- Danger that peacebuilding education approaches mirror s national-oriented forms of citizenship education (Tully, 2009; Scott Lawson, 2002)
- For peacebuilding education to function as a transformative form of citizenship it must recognise and young people’s cultural identities (Banks, 2008) and balance engagement with conflict and addressing other forms of social division (Niens, O’Connor & Smith, 2013).

# Local attitudes to peacebuilding

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*“In Northern Ireland, half the community distrusted many of the structures that were in place. So there was a lot of distrust, a lot of anxiety among young people..” (Nessa)*

The development of programmes for schools in both jurisdictions, which sometimes involved the participation of young people from both NI and RoI, presented certain challenges

The inclusion of an east-west dimension was a relatively minor component of some peacebuilding education programmes

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# Belfast/Good Friday Agreement



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“One of the things that was forgotten, I think, was the fact that the human rights commitments that were made in the Belfast agreement, Good Friday agreement applied just as much in the rest of UK and in the Republic as they did in the north. “ (Colin)

“The students in Northern Ireland were very aware of it, very engaged with it. Students down the south were less engaged with the peace process, less aware of it. You know they had more stereotypical views of the whole process, less aware of the whole intricacies of it ... “We’d a new peace process being put in place, but you had a very apathetic community, you know in the Republic of Ireland, you know people didn’t engage, they didn’t feel a sense of belonging. “(Nessa)

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## Local reflections on global issues



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“[Through a global focus] they develop a better understanding of what conflict really means, you know?” (Fergal)

“We weren’t honing in on Northern Ireland, the island of Ireland. We were bringing it in by default, we were sneaking it in the back door if you like ... Well focusing on the outside can help to deflect the difficulties, or the discomfort.  
(Eugene)

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# A global issue, or a local one?

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*“I’ll never forget the girl, a Belfast girl, when I showed the two flags. ‘Have you seen these flags before?’ And the girl said ‘My Da has that [Israeli flag] on the roof of the house. I don’t even know what’s it’s about.’” (Eugene)*

- Negative allegiance as an outcome of educational programmes which address conflict has been recognised (Davies, 2005; Davies, Harber, Schweisfurth, 2002).
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# Local Spaces for Peacebuilding?



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“We changed the course of our programme by listening to the kids there. ‘Listen, if you go out in the street’, the Northern Irish protestant kids said .... ‘You’re going to look like another band of do-gooders on the street’. We were going to do a performance theatre type of sketch, or drama. We didn’t do it because we were listening to them on the ground. “(Eugene)

- Local perceptions of peacebuilding may influence the means by which sustainable peace can be developed (Schierenbeck, 2015).

# Some conclusions

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- Young people participate in citizenship practices in both voluntary and compulsory spaces (for example, families, peers, communities etc.) where interconnected and sometime conflicting experiences can occur (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). In this case, negative and positive conflict.
  - Examining this local dimension through a critical lens can move beyond the simplified conceptualisations of 'the local' as a territory where negative conflict and peacebuilding may take place. Here it can be seen as fluctuating and dynamic networks of relationships and actions (Mac Ginty, 2015)
  - Exploring young people's participation in these practices can deepen understanding of how their lives are connected to broader societal issues (Biesta, Lawy and Kelly, 2009)
  - It is imperative to consider who is excluded from 'the local' (Schierenbeck, 2015).
  - This focus on the 'local turn' also offers the opportunity to position young people's experiences at the centre of the peacebuilding process, and supports exploration of theory without driving the subject further away from young people (Hammond and Looney, 2000).
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