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## Sri Lanka: in peace or in pieces? A Critical Approach to Peace Education in Sri Lanka

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**ABSTRACT** This article seeks to explore the 'two faces of education' through a critical analysis of peace education in Sri Lanka. It aims to contribute to the wider debate on the complex role of education in situations of conflict. The article starts with an overview of what peace education is, or should be. This leads to the conclusion that peace education cannot succeed in isolation, and needs to be incorporated in a multilevel process of peacebuilding. Further analysis draws from Bush & Saltarelli's notion of the 'two faces of education', combined with Lynn Davies's notion of 'war education'. These notions help to explain to what extent (peace) education in Sri Lanka contributes to positive or negative conflict, or, in other words, which one of the two 'faces' is most prominent. The positive side of education is employed through inter-group encounters, the stimulation of self-esteem and a 'peaceful school environment'. Through dialogue and understanding, these initiatives stimulate a desegregation of a very segregated school system and society. However, these positive initiatives remain limited. Other, more structural issues, tend to work towards the negative face of education, by fostering segregation, fear and bias rather than counteracting them. These issues form pressing challenges for peace educators and policy makers in Sri Lanka. Critically informed research and evaluation should provide guidelines for well-thought through peace education initiatives, by working towards a combination of critical theory and problem-solving approaches to deliver both critical and hands-on guidelines for further peace education initiatives.

### Introduction

Sri Lanka with its luscious landscapes, white beaches, smiling graceful inhabitants ... is a paradise on earth. [It] is a place of beauty, charm, and startling paradoxes. ... It is a fractured paradise.

(Harris, 2001, p. i)

According to the internationally defined Education for All (EFA) goals, everyone has the right to good-quality and relevant education. A rise in spending on education as part of development aid in the last two decades along with the more recent focus on the importance of education in situations of conflict could lead to the assumption that education must have a positive impact in societies affected by conflict. However, there is a growing acknowledgement that the assumed-to-be positive effects of education should be questioned and the possible negative impacts that education might have should be understood. Some authors underline the fact that schools might contribute to violence and conflict within society (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. vii; Smith & Vaux and Harber in Davies, 2005, p. 61). This thematic issue is a direct result of this debate.

When counting the number of peace education initiatives employed worldwide, one would assume that peace education provides a solution to violence and conflict and prevents negative

impacts of education. But, can and does peace education really make a difference? In the unstable and violent case of Sri Lanka, does peace education indeed help to build peace, or does it further enhance social breakdown? This article seeks to explore the 'two faces of education' (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) through a critical analysis of peace education in Sri Lanka. It aims to contribute to the wider debate on the complex role of education in conflict situations. It draws on current literature on peace education, as well as on earlier fieldwork (2006) on the state of peace education in Sri Lanka.[1] While exploring the case of Sri Lanka, both the perceptions and actions of various actors – being ministry officials, international donors, local non-governmental organization (NGO) staff and teachers – are included in the analysis. Finally, a critical approach towards peace education research is used to highlight new research directions for this field.

### **Sri Lanka's Context**

At the time of writing, the situation in Sri Lanka is very unstable and at any time could change for the better or worse. Since the formal ceasefire in 2002, different warring parties have been accused of breaking this agreement. Often only two warring parties are portrayed in media coverage of the conflict – the Government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) – if the ongoing conflict receives international media attention at all. In reality a range of actors is involved.[2]

Ongoing violence and conflict have a major impact on Sri Lanka's politics, economy, society and education system. Sri Lanka is a relatively poor country, with unequal opportunities for its multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious population. The Sinhalese – principally Buddhist – majority represents 74% of the population and lives mostly in the south. Tamils – primarily Hindu – account for 18% of the population, and primarily inhabit the north and east of the island (Perera, 2000).

Since independence in 1948, education is top of the priority list for the Government of Sri Lanka (Perera, 2000, p. 1). Education is free up to the post-secondary level and is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 13. In 2004 an enrolment rate of 97% was estimated at the primary education level (Education International Barometer, 2004), yet more recent statistical data is lacking. Educational provision in the northern and eastern parts of the country is less successful due the conflict and its associated refugee and security issues. This situation was worsened by the tsunami in 2004. Provinces directly situated next to unstable regions have problems with providing schooling to refugee children (Perera, 2000, p. 1). Unequal distribution of teachers and educational material exacerbate regional disparities (Education International Barometer, 2007).

### **What is Peace Education?**

Peace education is not a new phenomenon. In the last century, the event of both World Wars and the Cold War highlighted the need to teach about non-violence. The first forms of peace education were often designed based on the notion of a 'negative peace' – the absence of war (Simpson, 2004, pp. 1-4).[3] Bar-Tal (2002, p. 28) and Burns & Aspeslagh (1996) report that peace education initiatives have developed greatly since, particularly over the last three decades. In the 1970s Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's thought had a strong influence on peace educators. Freire linked education to liberation from oppression, through cultural action and 'conscientisation' (Shor, 1993; Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996, p. 10). In the 1980s peace education gained a wider societal concern and focused on the issue of human coexistence instead of mere personal peace (Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996, p. 10). In the 1990s a somewhat more humanistic view of peace education developed, focusing on civil, domestic, cultural and ethnic forms of violence, and the need for a notion of peace accompanied by social justice. These contemporary peace education approaches are often based on a structural and holistic notion of 'positive peace', aiming at the development of a culture of peace and at the eradication of poverty and injustice (see, for instance, Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996, p. 10, Ardizzone, 2001, p. 7; Harris, 2002, pp. 20-21; Salomon & Nevo, 2002, pp. xi, 5; Perkins, 2002, p. 38; Bretherton et al, 2003, p. 12; Simpson, 2004, p. 3-4).

Page (2004) examined 'the status of peace education' and argued that there has been considerable international attention paid to the importance of peace education. The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Constitution of UNESCO (1945) and the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (1949) all contain statements emphasising the significance of peace education. Since the development of these crucial documents the value of peace education has been affirmed in official documents of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1974, 1980, 1994/95, 1996), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 1996, 1999), the United Nations General Assembly (1978, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2002) and the Hague Appeal for Peace (1999). Page (2004) identifies that there is a firm institutional commitment to peace education and UNESCO listed 580 peace research and training institutes around the world in 2000 (see Page, 2004, p. 5). More recently, the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) functions as a platform where different actors in the field can share their experiences and publications.

Despite the large number of peace education initiatives worldwide, little research and evaluation has accompanied these activities (Salomon & Nevo, 1999, p. 1; Salomon, 2002; Buckland, 2006). Nevertheless, peace education programmes – or similar programmes under different names – continue to be designed and implemented. In order to undertake a coherent evaluation of peace education programmes – that is, to understand whether and how they contribute to peacebuilding – there needs to be some consensus on what peace education is, or should be, in a certain context. This is by no means an easy task.

Peace education programmes all over the world differ considerably in terms of ideology, objectives, focus, curricula, contents and practices (Bar-Tal, 2002, p. 28). Furthermore, programmes that could fit under the heading of 'peace education' often carry different names. To list a few of them: peacebuilding education, education for conflict resolution, education for international understanding, education for human rights, education for mutual understanding, global education, education for democracy/citizenship, critical pedagogy, education for liberation, environmental education and life skills education (see, for instance, Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 23; Ardizzone, 2001, p. 1; Simpson, 2004, p. 1; Davies, 2005, p. 61). Sinclair (2004, 2005) provides a useful solution to this seemingly chaotic division of related initiatives, by using UNESCO's umbrella term 'Learning To Live Together',

While firm consensus around what a clear conceptualisation of peace education should look like is absent, there is some agreement within the literature on suitable teaching and learning methods. There is a broad consensus that peace education should stimulate reflective and critical dialogue in the classroom (Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Reardon in Ardizzone, 2001 and in Bar-Tal, 2002; Firer, 2002; Shapiro, 2002; Harris in Bar-Tal, 2002; Balasooriya et al, 2004). Moreover, peace education needs learner-centred and participatory pedagogy in order to be effective (Green, 1997; Bretherton et al, 2003; Davies, 2005). As explained by Bretherton et al (2003), in addition to practising role-plays, games and group activities, children should learn about negotiation, cooperation and working together: 'A teacher who tries to convey a peace culture without some practice, is like a moral rascal teaching ethics' (Bretherton, 2003, p. 13). Or, as Bar-Tal (2002, p. 33) argues:

Experiential learning is the key method for the acquisition of values, attitudes, perceptions, skills and behavioural tendencies, in other words, their internalization. ... Setting up experiential learning in schools is a difficult task for educators. It not only requires pedagogical expertise, ... it also demands that teachers have the skill and ability to manage the learning environment while serving as role models for the students.

It can be concluded that peace education is not only conceptually a complex phenomenon, it is also a complexity in itself to put peace education into practice in an effective manner.

### **Main Actors in the Field of Peace Education in Sri Lanka**

Many actors are involved in the creation and the implementation of peace education initiatives. In the case of Sri Lanka, four main actors in this field can be distinguished: (1) peace educators – including school principals and teachers, (2) non-state actors – including civil society organisations such as local and international NGOs, religious institutions and community organisations, (3) policy makers – including the Ministry of Education and its national and local officers, and the curriculum developing National Institute of Education (NIE), and (4) international donors. On the one hand, governments and international donors develop the policies and frameworks that largely

shape formal peace education initiatives. On the other hand, non-state actors and peace educators develop peace education programmes in non-formal settings. This can happen in cooperation with government and/or international donors, or without such overlap.

Many authors emphasise the important role of (peace) educators (among others, Harris, 2002; Bretherton et al, 2003; Baxter & Ikobwa, 2005) in influencing the success of peace education initiatives. Teachers are responsible for the practical implementation of peace education in the school. They might use the frameworks and instruments that are provided by governmental or non-governmental institutions, or they might develop their own strategies. In addition, 'the success of peace education is more dependent on the views, motivations, and abilities of teachers than traditional subjects are' (Bar-Tal, 2002, p. 33).

The Sri Lankan General Education Reforms of 1997 legislated that there had to be a new emphasis within pre-service and in-service teacher training on education for human values, human rights, national cohesion, gender rights, the environment, and language skills in all three languages (Sinhalese, Tamil and English). According to these reforms, trainee teachers are expected to develop skills of empathetic listening, democratic leadership, developing children's self-esteem and conflict resolution through role-plays (Perera, 2000, p. 1). As argued by Balasooriya et al (2004), these expectations might be too high, since the quality of teacher training colleges is sometimes weak. Moreover, successful training programmes need to overcome the resistance from in-service teachers to such reforms and new developments (Balasooriya et al, 2004, pp. 407-408).

In Sri Lanka there are two different types of teachers training colleges. The National Colleges of Education train teachers in three years, and students then complete an internship at a rural school for one year. Teacher Training Colleges train in-service teachers who have 'just' entered the teaching profession without a certificate. NIE works with both types of training colleges. However, my research found that not all National Colleges and Teacher Training Colleges seem to incorporate 'peace education issues' into their regular pre-service programme. Moreover, it is also not clear how many teachers received in-service training up to today, either from the NIE or the Ministry of Education (Lopes Cardozo, 2006, p. 42). This article argues that training and support should be available for all teachers, and the wider school staff in Sri Lanka, in order to stimulate effective peace education. Although several serious attempts have been undertaken at the policy level to provide pre- and in-service training, a large number of teachers and principals (especially in remote areas) have not yet received any training or guidance on implementing peace education programmes and strategies in their schools.

### **Analysing the Two Faces of Peace Education in Sri Lanka**

Structurally, schools are the best way to build peace. But, the way the system is structured now, it does the opposite. Sri Lankan education is not creating responsible citizens. It creates religious and ethnic citizens who are allowed to think in exclusive terms. (Interview with a Sri Lankan Social Scientist, 2006)

I would now like to come back to the question raised in the introduction: In the unstable and violent case of Sri Lanka, does peace education indeed help to build peace, or does it enhance further social breakdown? In other words: is peace education in Sri Lanka promoting the positive or the negative side of education?

In order to provide a nuanced answer to this question – since both sides deserve to be elaborated – the following analysis is inspired by different recently published works. These will be used to critically analyse the state of peace education in Sri Lanka, highlighting potential positive effects and a number of structural challenges, which limit the positive side of peace education (see Table I). Firstly, I draw on the work of Bush & Saltarelli on the negative and positive faces of education (2000, pp. 9-21). Secondly, I use Lynn Davies's work, specifically her 2004 chapter on 'War Education' (pp. 109-123) and the 2006 online contribution 'Understanding the Education-War Interface'. This last publication provides us with a useful typology of 'how war and peace are taught' (2006), to help understand the role of education towards positive (desired) forms of conflict and negative (undesired) conflict. It can be argued that peace education would ideally mingle the five 'modes' directed towards positive conflict, consequently combining an active/critical approach with a passive/problem-solving approach.



Figure 1. Understanding the education-war interface. Source: Davies (2006).

Table I presents an overview of recently emerging challenges with regard to peace education in Sri Lanka. It demonstrates how some of these issues promote the positive face of education – working towards a peaceful and just society – and how other issues tend to contribute to the negative face – fostering conflict or contributing to conflictual structures and attitudes.

Pressing issues for peace education in Sri Lanka	Positive face of education	Negative face of education
Educational opportunities	In terms of access, an average enrolment rate of 97% indicates that most children have access to primary schooling.	Unequal distribution of teachers and educational material creates inequality and regional disparities, resulting in a rural-urban and a 'north'-'south' divide within the country.
Segregated school system		Most children attend segregated schools; Sinhalese children most often go to Sinhala-medium schools, Tamil children to Tamil-medium schools. There are few mixed-medium schools. This can lead to inequalities, lowered self-esteem and stereotyping (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, pp. 14-16).
Inter-group encounters	Extra-curricular inter-group meetings (sport events or art/language camps) are organised by NGOs, or by schools themselves, unfortunately only on a small scale. This could stimulate 'desegregation of the mind' (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, pp. 16-17) and dialogue (Davies, 2006).	Due to high costs of many of these activities, the number of initiatives remains low. Reported resistance of parents against intercultural meetings and possible friendships, often due to a lack of participation within the school, can frustrate these initiatives.
Language	According to the 1997 Reform all children should learn both Sinhala and Tamil languages.	In reality most often only one language is taught in individual schools, creating language barriers and further segregation.

Textbooks	The Ministry of Education stimulates teachers to work with the available 'human qualities and peace values' in the textbooks – with an emphasis on the creation of national unity. Several teachers (particularly those from the majority group) argued this worked well.	However, textbooks (mostly social subjects) are criticised by academics, NGO workers and teachers (mainly of a minority background) for being culturally exclusive, which tends to lead to (negative) stereotyping (Davies, 2006). There has been no comprehensive effort to rewrite social subjects' textbooks yet.
Teaching of history		Reports of biased history textbooks, as well as an omission in classrooms to speak about (the historical roots of) conflict (Orjuela, 2003, p. 202), indicate a trend towards passive war education (Davies, 2006, see Figure 1).
Creation/destruction of self-esteem	NGO or school-based arts and sporting activities can foster self-esteem and cooperation. The emphasis on 'inner-peace' in Sri Lankan peace education initiatives can also positively influence one's self-image and attitude towards others.	The examination-oriented school system in Sri Lanka often creates fear amongst students (Davies, 2004, p. 121).
Teaching and learning methods	When (peace) education is delivered in a child-centred way (in pilot schools, for instance), this can stimulate creative and critical thinking.	Frequently education is not child centred (yet), and experiential learning is often absent.
School environment	Where peace education is implemented in schools, the school environment is often prioritised. This includes a democratic organisation, well-kept school premises, clean classrooms and friendly relationships – among students, between students and school staff and with parents and the community.	In regions directly affected by the conflict, the school environment (the building, but also tensions within the community) does not always provide a safe place for its students.
Policy environment	There is a policy commitment towards peace education, although sometimes different terms for similar initiatives are used, like education for social cohesion.	However, these policies are not effectively implemented in practice. Peace education is usually absent from teacher training programmes, and in-service teachers are not sufficiently supported to use new initiatives.
Realistic and critical societal awareness		Biased textbooks, a lack of open dialogue within society at large and a majority dominated curriculum hinder students' development of a realistic world-view or critical societal awareness.
Role of actors in the field of peace education	Many different actors have many different peace education initiatives in Sri Lanka, both in the formal and the non-formal system.	Yet, these actors do not cooperate in their efforts. There is a lack of a coherent national plan for peace education.

Table I. Positive and negative faces of Sri Lankan peace education.

Without repeating what is revealed in Table I, I want to elaborate here on some of the issues mentioned above. Fortunately, despite the ongoing tensions and violence in Sri Lanka, several initiatives demonstrating the positive face of education can be found. First, the fact that peace education can be seen as a policy priority in Sri Lanka (at least in the 1997 General Education Reforms) in itself is a positive development, even though Table I shows that this commitment at present is expressed mostly in words and not in practice. Political rhetoric seems to indicate a positive development in terms of commitment to peace education. However, a clear political will and effort to effectively implement peace-related educational initiatives is lacking. The earlier discussed lack of pre-service and in-service teacher training and support is a clear sign of this.

Still, some promising initiatives are, for instance, the extra-curricular sport activities, art competitions and language camps, designed to create opportunities for children with different backgrounds and coming from different schools to 'mix and meet'.<sup>[4]</sup> Derived from Fanon's theory on the 'decolonialisation of the minds of formerly colonised peoples', Bush & Saltarelli advocate the 'de-segregation of the minds of formerly segregated peoples' (2000, p. 16). Such initiatives – still limited in number – should be further stimulated under careful guidance of trained teachers, or civil society actors (Orjuela, 2003, p. 208).

Another peace education initiative that can be classified under the 'positive face' is the development of students' self-esteem through creative classes. In addition, a sense of self-esteem is stimulated through the learning of 'inner-peace'. As explained by the Sri Lankan author and former peace education policy maker Balasooriya (2002), a person who is unable to live with himself in peace naturally becomes unable to live with others in peace. During several interviews, he explained about meditation as a practical exercise, which could help to develop mental sanity, release stress and improve creativity and insight. According to Balasooriya, meditation is not attached to a particular belief; it is an open spiritual exercise. The issue of inner-peace might seem somewhat non-academic to some; however, in my view, it can be argued that peace education – including the intra-personal dimension – is not only suitable for situations of conflict in the South but that its relevance crosses borders. The contemporary highly individualised and often multicultural societies in richer countries, such as the United States or European countries like the Netherlands, show ever increasing levels of violence and conflict within schools and societies. Such violent acts seem to originate, to a degree, from personal frustration, powerlessness and a lack of self-control of individuals, exactly those aspects addressed by the intra-personal level of peace education, which develops inner-peace. Since inner-peace is not only created with the help of teachers of primary and secondary education, it is important to include early childhood development and also the wider community and parents in peace education approaches.

Issues relating to the negative side of education obviously form the most pressing challenges for peace educators in Sri Lanka. Language is an urgent issue, as it leads to further segregation between different groups in society, and even within smaller communities. The medium of instruction in Sri Lanka is the mother tongue (Sinhala or Tamil), and English is included in the curriculum from grade three onwards as a subject. In all government schools, the two official languages should be taught to all children as part of the core curriculum. However, in reality this is often not the case, due to a lack of sufficiently trained teachers. Historically, as a consequence of the geographical location of different ethnic communities, children have been segregated by medium of instruction (Balasooriya et al, 2004, pp. 393-396, 402). Recent fieldwork indicated that the school system in Sri Lanka is still strongly segregated along ethnic and religious lines (Lopes Cardozo, 2006, pp. 70, 73, 99, 106). Several teachers argued that in order for peace education to be effective, current language barriers should be resolved. Therefore, the majority of the respondents expressed the need to start teaching the three official languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English). An English language teacher stated that 'it is very important to learn all the languages. Only then we can communicate with other races and nations'.

Another important factor contributing to the negative face of education in Sri Lanka is related to educational material. Textbooks in the 1970s and 1980s have been reported to be culturally exclusive and historically biased towards the majority population (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 13). Balasooriya et al (2004) highlight many shortcomings of the textbooks currently used: textbooks come from a particular perspective rather than being open to multiple interpretations, they fail to

represent all communities, and they avoid issues such as ethnicity and conflict. A social scientist explained that:

The problem with the textbooks is that the Government sometimes uses them as a political manifesto. Sinhalese textbooks talk about the attacks by the LTTE. The texts are often culturally exclusive. The characters are mono-cultural. Many people also do not see the exclusive textbooks as a problem. They take it for granted that they mostly teach about their own language, religion and culture.

Teachers' perceptions on the usefulness of textbooks, and bias within them, vary greatly. Whereas some Sri Lankan teachers felt they could use the 'regular' textbooks (for English, social studies – including history, life competencies and religion) to 'teach about peace', other teachers were very dissatisfied with the texts. In particular, a lack of comparative perspective and the cultural exclusiveness of history texts were mentioned (Lopes Cardozo, 2006, pp. 40, 74, 98). In order to create commonly agreed-upon textbooks, all stakeholders should be given a voice in the revision of school texts. In Sri Lankan schools:

children have normally been taught about a Sinhalese–Tamil conflict since time immemorial, and Tamils are portrayed as 'filthy' invaders, fought by heroic Sinhalese kings. An understanding of how history is politically manipulated, an exploration of recent roots of conflicts and mistakes made by all involved parties, could help to combat fears and ungrounded rationales for the demonization of 'the other'. (Orjuela, 2003, p. 202)

Balasoorya et al (2004) mention that currently most stakeholders in Sri Lanka argue for a separate subject focusing on history, since it is currently included in social studies. This new subject would have to overcome the present shortcomings of the textbooks (being from a particular perspective rather than open to multiple interpretations, failing to present all communities, avoiding issues such as ethnicity and conflict). A 'critical historiography' – including competing sets of facts and multiple interpretations of historical events (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2005) – would stimulate students to understand, through peace education, historical impacts on the current (conflict) situation. For instance, Sri Lankan children would develop understandings of the colonial 'divide and rule' principle, which resulted in favouritism towards the Tamil minority. As a result of 'divide and rule', university admissions and administrative posts were provided unequally, leading to social inequalities and tensions before independence, and to a shift towards a Sinhalese majority-dominated education system after independence (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 10; Orjuela, 2003, p. 198). In addition, a Sri Lankan academic stated that 'It would be better to teach about religion and the history of religions in a comparative way. Also the history of conflict and co-existence should be taught in a comparative way'.

The examination-oriented system in Sri Lanka would, according to Davies's criteria for 'war education', also contribute to the negative face of education. Extreme competition can stimulate corruption, and consequently cooperation is thwarted rather than encouraged by a sense of rivalry and fear (Davies, 2004, pp. 121-123). In such a competitive environment, a culture of fear and mistrust is created within the school. Both students and teachers in Sri Lanka indicated that the pressure of examinations create a sense of fear and lowered self-esteem. These feelings of insecurity and frustration could eventually lead to tensions or even forms of violence within the school. Furthermore, in a situation where teachers feel pressure to just live up to the examination standards, without time and space for other – peace-related – activities, there tends to be a lack of reflective and critical dialogue in the classroom. Both teachers and principals complained that the examination-oriented system does not leave enough room for the integration of peace education into the regular subjects. A principal at a rural Sinhala-medium, mixed religion school used the words:

The parents also just want their children to pass the exams. The system is like that, parents are very much exam oriented. The teachers have to go with the demands of the parents, and also with those of the department [Ministry of Education]. They evaluate the schools on the outcomes of the tests. Not on anything else. The teachers tend to go with this. Just to make the students pass the test.

In addition, a very serious challenge might be the fact that peace education in Sri Lanka, especially in the formal system, has a tendency to neglect discussion and critical awareness of the actual situation of the country. Hence, 'difficult issues' are often deliberately not discussed by teachers. This was expressed by a Tamil language teacher at an urban school:

We don't really talk about politics. Peace is also a sensitive issue. We can't talk! That is why this society is so polarised, even this staff is polarised. Peace and politics, you just can't separate. People can't open their mouths. The freedom of speech is seriously under threat.

In such a learning environment, students are left without a realistic view of their society and the conflicts around them. An NGO worker explained this to me in another way. He argued that due to the influence of the majority-dominated Government:

peace education is not quite radical in nature. In the [formal] government system peace education is more standardised. It is also less direct. It will not directly deal with the ethnic conflict.

It is thus not difficult to imagine that the majority of Sri Lankan students are not stimulated to think critically and reflect about the ongoing conflict.

Finally, there are many different stakeholders, at different levels, who play different roles in Sri Lankan peace education. A complex framework exists in which different actors provide various kinds of peace education programmes. Peace education is implemented through the formal education system by the national government in cooperation with (amongst others) UNESCO, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and formerly also with UNICEF.[5] Beyond this, in the non-formal sector several (religious and non-religious) NGOs provide their own peace education programmes, often restricted by governmental regulations and a lack of legitimacy – which makes it difficult for such programmes to engage directly with schools. There is still room for discussion on whether peace education should be implemented through formal education – the 'integrative approach' – through non-formal education – the 'additive approach' (Carlson & Lange quoted by Simpson, 2004, p. 3) or through both systems. Firstly, in the *integrative approach* peace education is included in the formal curriculum. Advocates of this approach argue that schools have the ability and the legitimacy to build a peaceful society (Bar-Tal, 2002; Bretherton et al, 2003; Davies, 2005). Secondly, in the *additive approach* peace education is separate from the existing curriculum and takes place within non-formal settings outside the school. Supporters of this approach state that non-governmental peace education programmes have more flexibility to design their programme with fewer restrictions from the Government (Ardizzone, 2001, pp. 4-6; Burns & Aspeslagh 1996, p. 122). In line with Burns & Aspeslagh (1996) and Bush & Saltarelli (2000), with regard to the case of Sri Lanka this article argues for a combination of both approaches, especially since peace education through the formal system does not reach all children (not all schools implement peace education) and NGOs working in the non-formal sector have little space to operate. Such a combined approach would need better cooperation between all actors. Thus, in order to have peace education which serves the 'interests of all' – including interests of students, (peace) educators, the local community, civil society, the Government and donors – the biggest challenge is to create a cooperative environment including a coordinating body, which enables all actors to work together, and to adjust different approaches and perspectives into a bottom-up curriculum for peace education.

### **Peace Education Cannot Succeed on Its Own**

The case of Sri Lanka shows that, as noted by Bush & Salterelli: 'complex and multidimensional problems must be matched with multifaceted responses' (2000, p. 33). A major challenge for peace education programmes is to address the structural inequalities and power relations that characterise conflict-ridden countries and contexts:

Curriculum packages that promote tolerance will have little impact if they are delivered within educational structures that are fundamentally intolerant. Peace education cannot succeed without measures to tackle the destructive educational practices that fuel hostility. (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. v)

Or in Freire's words:

Without changing the social arrangements which prevent the great majority of human beings from being fully human beings, we will never have peace with justice. And, without making education for peace part of a concrete process of socio-political action towards progressive change, we will never have education for peace and justice; we will just have a new kind of nonsense. (Freire, 1975, p. 70, in Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996, pp. 125-126)

Thus, peace education cannot succeed on its own, and needs to be incorporated in a broader multilevel process of peacebuilding that addresses structural inequalities and root causes of conflict.

According to Baxter & Ikobwa (2005, p. 28), peace education and peacebuilding are two distinct processes, but they strive for the same goal. Peace education attempts to change people's behaviour; peacebuilding incorporates social and economic justice and legal reform. Both try to make human rights a reality. As stated by Miall et al (1999), Ball (2001), Licklider (2001) and Van der Borgh (2004), peacebuilding is a complex and multidimensional process, and it can be argued that peace education should be an integral part of such a holistic process. Such a process consists of political, economic and societal transformations that aim at reducing inequalities and building peace.

In this sense, Bush & Saltarelli's (2000) 'peacebuilding education' is a comprehensive alternative to other narrowly defined conceptualisations of peace education. These authors posit a 'next step' in the development of peace education called 'peacebuilding education', which is 'a process rather than a product, long term rather than short term, relying on local rather than external inputs and resources, seeking to create opportunities rather than impose solutions' (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. v). To move towards this new direction, there is a need to focus on education in its broadest sense, including 'formal and non-formal education, content and teaching methods, arts and sciences, child- and adult-centred [education]'. Peacebuilding education cannot be restricted to the classroom, it needs community projects involving children and adolescents from across ethnic borderlines, and inter-ethnic economic development projects (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, pp. v, 23, 27).

There appears to be growing consent among practitioners that peace education is inherently linked to a multilevel process, including the international, national, regional, inter-group and interpersonal levels (Ardizzone, 2001, p. 2; Page, 2004, p. 11). Although many authors stress the importance of a multilevel approach to peace education, there is nevertheless still criticism about peace education programmes being too narrowly focused on just one or two levels (Selby, in Simpson, 2004, p. 4).

Figure 2 is an attempt to visualise how these interconnected levels form the complex context in which peace education programmes are designed and implemented. It can be argued that there is a dialectic relationship between peace education programmes and these contextual levels. On the one hand, peace education programmes – both their creation and their actual implementation – are influenced by each of the different levels. For instance, the presence of international donors might set some standards for peace education policies, or, the way a teacher perceives a country or regional situation may influence the way he/she teaches students. On the other hand, peace education programmes can influence the context. Focusing on the positive face of peace education, the creation of a critical and reflective younger generation, aware of their rights and obligations and conscious of the wider context in which they live, can help to restructure a society and possibly even influence the higher national and international levels.

However, in order to be successful in creating such a critical and conscious generation, as argued earlier, peace education needs to be included in a multilevel process of peacebuilding, as shown in Figure 2. Peacebuilding, as a central process, is situated at the heart of the model. From this centre, the two-sided-arrows to each following level show the dialectical relationship between the different levels of peace education, and wider societal processes. The dotted arrow between peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction runs through all the levels, and indicates the indirect influence of peace education initiatives at different levels contributing to the process of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction. Finally, Figure 2 shows the different transitional phases of unstable societies, conflict/emergency and post-conflict reconstruction in the outer circle, since societies often do not experience transition out of conflict as a linear process. The different phases are separated by dotted lines, to show how unstable situations and even post-conflict

reconstruction phases can still fall back to a state of conflict and emergency. This outer circle represents the context for peace education initiatives at all different levels, which cannot be ignored. As argued in more detail below, thorough analysis of this contextual level is needed in order to design and implement peace education programmes fitted for each specific situation.

Figure 2. Peace education in a multilevel context.

In addition to arguing for the necessity of a multilevel approach to implementing peace education – beyond the interpersonal and inter-group levels – and for its implementation in conjunction with broader peacebuilding initiatives, this article argues for the need for a multilevel analysis, which will be explained in the next section.



### Critical and Contextual Analysis for Peace Education

The discussion above, about positive and negative faces of peace education and the wider school system in Sri Lanka, shows that there is an urgent need for further research to grasp how the positive face of (peace) education could be fostered and its negative face discouraged (Buckland, 2006; Davies, 2006; Johnson & Van Kalmthout, 2006; Greeley & Rose, 2006; Touré, 2006). There is a burning call for critical and comprehensive analysis not only in Sri Lanka, since conflicts – in all different forms – have a major impact worldwide. Education is still seen by many as a solution towards peace and development in times of conflict or peacebuilding. Yet, in order to break with reoccurring cycles of distrust, fear, and violence, critically informed research and evaluation should provide guidelines for well-thought-out peace education initiatives.

For example, there would be benefit in research into the role of a cross-cutting theme such as 'religion' on the development and practice of peace education programmes. What has been the historical impact of religion on the current situation in a country or region? What role do religious-based international donors play in their allocation of funds for peace education purposes? And what is the role of national and local religious leadership on peace education programmes? Research that generates answers to such questions could help to understand if and how certain agendas shape the

design and allocation of peace education programmes. Thus, both research and policy making would benefit from more attention paid to the complex dynamics and conditions under which (ethnic) tensions, conflict and the need for peace education occur. It is not enough to simply control the symptoms, it is necessary to address the root causes of conflict. In order to do this, peace education programmes must be grounded in an understanding of the complex dynamics of the context in which these programmes are situated.

It becomes clear that in the field of peace education, both researchers and practitioners face a complex task. Hence, I will now turn to an elaboration of the critical approach this article employs and argues for.<sup>[6]</sup> This approach is inspired by the insights of international relations theorist Robert Cox (1996), who contrasts critical theory with problem-solving theory. According to the critical theory of Cox, we need to look beyond existing systems, to find realistic alternatives to bring about alternative orders:

Critical theory, unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. (Cox, 1996, p. 89)

This notion can be linked to Dale's explanation of 'educational policies' – a problem-solving and somewhat narrower view on educational policies directed to improve the status quo – and the more critical 'politics of education' – which comprehends education systems within a wider multilevel context (Dale, 2000, 2005).

In addition to these insights about problem solving and critical theory and their link to practice, a number of key arguments from the broader critique of mainstream educational research developed by Dale (2000, 2005) help to define four critical 'considerations'. These considerations are employed to identify a critically informed research agenda for peace education (see also Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008). Firstly, research should avoid *disciplinary parochialism*, by conducting interdisciplinary research, combining insights from different sciences (e.g. conflict studies, international relations, educational studies, etc.) Secondly, as argued above, research should focus beyond the state as a main actor, incorporating a multilevel perspective to avoid *methodological nationalism*. For instance, a narrow focus on the state as the main actor ignores other important players at the grass-roots and international levels. Thirdly, persistent *ethnocentrism* – in the dominant discourse in research and policies as well as in practice, where development programmes are often dominated by donors and other actors from outside (most often the richer countries) – should be avoided by including alternative voices in research, to prevent a Western and elitist perspective. Moreover, efforts should be made to value and support research undertaken by people themselves from situations of conflict. Relating this to practice, Bush & Salterelli (2000, p. 27) have argued that external actors should take on 'supporting and facilitating roles with which they may not be comfortable or familiar', and that sustainable peacebuilding efforts should be 'driven by those individuals and groups within war-torn, war-born, and war-threatened societies themselves'. Fourthly, we need to challenge a tendency to *ahistoricism* in research. In practice, a critical and comparative historiography should be at the basis of any education system aiming to foster its positive face.

It has been argued that history and the teaching of (comparative) history form a crucial challenge for peace education programmes (Salomon & Nevo, 1999, p. 4). Further research could explore the possibilities of a 'critical historiography', that recognises the fact that there are competing sets of facts and multiple interpretations of historical events (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2005) – especially in conflict-ridden areas. From a critical perspective, an analysis of the historical context would then include the impact of colonialism (where relevant), as well as the earlier and contemporary processes of globalisation and the reality of contemporary neo-liberal (power) structures and their interrelationship in the production and potential resolution of conflict. This would indicate that students understand, through peace education, historical impacts on the current (conflict) situation. For instance, Sri Lankan children would have to comprehend the colonial 'divide and rule' principle, which resulted in favouritism towards the Tamil minority.

### **New Directions for Peace Education**

Designers of peace education programmes face the enormous and difficult task not only of serving pressing short-term needs, but also critically examining existing power structures and looking for feasible alternatives to counteract violence in all its forms.[7] Similarly, researchers in this field have to address the challenge of being critical while providing realistic policy recommendations at the same time. Critical research is often not (seen as) applicable outside the academic world. It often fails to take into account the practical needs and the more complex processes within which programmes take place (see also Paulson & Rappleye, 2007, pp. 342, 346). Nor is research inclined to draw on the rich theoretical and practical knowledge of those working on peace education in conflict zones. Tomlinson & Benefield (2005, p. 13-17) support this view, arguing for 'practitioner-friendly research reports', which are more accessible for those outside academia.

In conflict-affected situations, a sense of urgency is often required. As argued by UNICEF, children and youth in emergency situations urgently need schools that provide a protective, healthy and safe environment as a key means of securing psychosocial support and protection (Wright, 2006). However, short-term and hastily implemented, yet well-intended programmes could lead to unintended negative outcomes (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008). Without a direct problem-solving approach, children in emergency and conflict situations would first have to wait until peace education 'providers' worked out the longer-term implications of their peace education programme. Yet, without a critical and thorough understanding of this complex context, in the long run these same children could end up with a set of irrelevant or even undesired attitudes and skills. Therefore, it can be argued that both critical and problem-solving approaches to peace education should be combined.

In order to effectively coordinate peace education, I argue that it is necessary to come to some sort of negotiated curriculum. This would include, for instance, perspectives on 'minimum conditions for peace' of all stakeholders – including those who provide alternative knowledge, such as grass-roots NGOs, trade unions and oppositional movements.[8]

Moreover, on the basis of equity and social justice, there should also be space for discussion on sensitive themes, such as the recognition of 'truth' and 'reconciliation'. Working towards commonalities between different perspectives could lead to the development of criteria for 'minimum conditions for peace' and sensitive issues, which could lead to a negotiated bottom-up curriculum. Commitment to such a curriculum would necessarily be a long-term process. But, in the end, it could be far more sustainable than the mere co-existence of different peace education initiatives without cooperation and coordination, especially where it is to be integrated into a wider process of peacebuilding efforts, since, as argued above, peace education cannot succeed on its own. On a more local and practical level, the involvement of community is essential for successful peace education, making it 'firmly rooted in immediate realities, not in abstract ideas or theories' (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 27).

And finally, a single emphasis on the importance of trained and committed peace educators is not enough to ensure an effective programme of peace education. In order to understand what kind of training is needed, at what kind of teachers this training would be directed, and for what sort of peace education programme, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of peace education's aims and potentials, the complex set of national and international agents and power structures, as well as national and international economic, political and social structures.

### **Conclusion: Sri Lanka in peace or in pieces?**

Obviously, peace education's main aim is to create peace, and not 'pieces', representing the opposite. Based on the findings of this research, generally all peace education initiatives in Sri Lanka indeed aim for the creation of peace, be it in different ways. However, many of the structural challenges that foster the 'negative face' of education undermine this goal, leaving large proportions of students and the country 'in pieces'.

This article is a critical attempt to highlight the complexity and difficulty of the design and implementation of peace education, and its dual effects on peace and conflict. Peace education cannot succeed alone, and in order to succeed in fostering its 'positive face', the creation, implementation and evaluation of programmes should take into account and be located within a

complex, multilevel analysis of context. In the case of Sri Lanka, present-day peace education tends to contribute both positively and negatively to the process of building peace. An overview of these two 'faces' is shown in Table I. The positive side of education is employed through inter-group encounters, the stimulation of self-esteem and a 'peaceful school environment' (in certain pilot schools). Through dialogue and understanding, these initiatives stimulate a desegregation of a very segregated school system and society. Other, more structural issues, tend to work towards the negative face of education, by fostering segregation, fear and bias rather than counteracting them. Examples of the negative face in action are, for instance, the strongly segregated school system, the lack of bilingual education in practice, culturally exclusive teaching material, a lack of critical awareness and open dialogue and a structural lack of coordination among the different stakeholders. These issues form pressing challenges for peace educators and policy makers in Sri Lanka. In order to break with reoccurring cycles of distrust, fear and violence, critically informed research and evaluation should provide guidelines for well-thought-out peace education initiatives. Therefore, further research and practice ought to work towards a peace education based upon a combination of critical theory and problem-solving approaches to deliver both critical but also hands-on guidelines for further peace education initiatives.

### Notes

- [1] Data on the state of peace education in Sri Lanka was collected during a two and a half month fieldwork period in the first half of 2006. Interviews were held with different actors, both at the policy level and at the school level.
- [2] For more information on the different warring parties, see, for instance, Balasooriya et al, 2004, p. 388, or the website of the National Peace Council, <http://www.peace-srilanka.org/>
- [3] The Norwegian peace researcher, Galtung, defines two distinct typologies: negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the elimination of war and all forms of direct violence. Positive peace, on the other hand, focuses on the elimination of all structural and cultural obstacles to peace. Positive peace therefore addresses issues beyond the ending of only direct violence, such as structural violence (oppression, racism, poverty), justice and equity (Burns & Aspeslagh 1996, p. 10; Ardizzone, 2001, p. 7; Salomon & Nevo, 2002, p. xi, 5; Perkins, 2002, p. 38; Bretherton et al, 2003, p. 12).
- [4] According to the 'contact hypothesis' of Allport (1954; see Tal-Or et al, 2002; Kadushin & Livert 2002, p. 120), it is assumed that under specific circumstances interaction between members of opposing groups can lead to a reduction of prejudices, but that exposure alone does not necessarily show this effect.
- [5] In the early 1990s, a joint Education for Conflict Resolution programme of the Sri Lankan Government and UNICEF was implemented. According to Bush & Saltarelli, the joint ECR programme provides an example of 'how the process and content of the new curriculum packages might draw on and resonate with the cultural environment within which they are set – even when the environment is bifurcated into Hindu and Buddhist' (2000, p. 27). Although the withdrawal of UNICEF as donor resulted in the end of this programme, it can be argued that some of its 'peace education elements' still exist within the policies of the Ministry and NIE, and within UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools programme nowadays.
- [6] This critical approach, inspired by the work of Cox (1996) and Dale (2005), was developed by Mario Novelli and Mieke Lopez Cardozo for a position paper in the framework of a conference on 'Conflict, Education and the Global South, towards a Critical Research Agenda' in early 2007 at the University of Amsterdam. A revised version of this paper is now in press (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008).
- [7] Seitz (2004, p. 52) describes a useful typology of different forms of violence in educational contexts based on Salmi's work (2000).
- [8] Without generalising agents and their interests, it might be interesting to explore – in different contexts – if some agents would implement peace education aiming for a positive notion of peace, including social justice, and to see if others might strive for a somewhat more negative notion of peace (peace education for pacification).

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