



From Conflict to Peace Building: The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives – Lessons from around the World

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From Conflict to Peace Building:

The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives

Lessons from Around the World

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Introduction

The effects of conflict on young children

Over the last century the nature of war and armed conflicts around the world has changed dramatically. While civilians used to represent the innocent casualties of war, they have increasingly become its target. During the First World War, for example, civilians accounted for just 14 percent of all deaths. By the Second World War this had risen to about 50 percent and in all subsequent wars civilians have accounted for at least 80 percent of all casualties (Cairns, 1996: 2). More recently it has been estimated that this figure has now reached over 90 percent (Machel, 2000; Save the Children, 2006; UNICEF, 2006).

Within this, children have paid a heavy price. During the last decade, best estimates suggest that around two million children were killed in wars and six million were mutilated (United Nations, 2006). A further one million were orphaned, 12 million were displaced and left homeless and 10 million permanently marked by “irreparable psychological and spiritual scars” (Fulci, 1998). At any one time, around 300,000 children are being used as child soldiers (Machel, 2000). It would seem, therefore, that rather than children just being caught in the crossfire, they are increasingly becoming the targets of war and armed conflict.

For some warring groups the murder, mutilation, and violation of children is justified in terms of children

being seen as the “enemies of tomorrow” (Machel, 1996). “To kill big rats, you have to kill the little rats” was how one political commentator explained it during a radio broadcast shortly before ethnic violence erupted in Rwanda in 1994 (MacCormak, 1999). For others, this view of children as the “enemies of tomorrow” has led to strategies aimed explicitly at abducting and indoctrinating children. In relation to Uganda, for example, it has been reported that around 10,000 children were kidnapped from schools and villages and taken over to Sudan for indoctrination (Andvig, 2000). Similarly in Nepal, between the months of January and August 2005 some 11,800 children were abducted from rural schools by rebels “for political indoctrination or forced recruitment into the militia” (Save the Children, 2006: 6).

Unfortunately, and as worrying as all this is, it is actually only part of the picture. While children suffer acutely from the direct effects of war, they also tend to be disproportionately represented among the victims of its indirect effects. Armed conflicts decimate nations and ravage communities. They can often lead to the breakdown of the very fabric and infrastructure of societies and the interruption and sometimes complete loss of key services, such as the provision of education, housing and health, and the supply of food (Francis, 2006). In fact, these services are often among the first targets for those engaged in armed conflict. If children do not suffer directly at the hands of conflict, therefore, the likelihood is that they may well be affected indirectly to some degree by the breakdown of communities, the loss or

impoverishment of public services and, in the most severe cases, through poor health, malnutrition and/or starvation (Machel, 1996; MacCormak, 1999). Moreover, even when armed conflicts have ended, children still have to deal with the legacy of the deep divisions that often remain, including the hatred, fear and mistrust that are often associated with these conflicts (Marshall, 2005a).

Purpose of this book

Just what is it like working as an early years professional within contexts such as these? What are some of the problems, issues, and challenges that one has to deal with when working with young children and their carers in societies affected by conflict? Most importantly, what can early years providers actually do in situations like these? How can they effectively meet the needs of children and their carers and what role can they play within their wider communities to help build peace? These are some of the key questions that will be addressed by this book when we hear first-hand from early years professionals around the world who are working in societies affected by conflict.

While some of the stories are shocking and upsetting, they are, above all, stories of hope and encouragement and of just what early childhood practitioners can do and achieve in the face of adversity. What each of the stories from around the world shows is that it is possible to make a real difference to the lives of children and families in societies affected by conflict. Moreover, the stories illustrate the power of the early years sector, not only as a foundation stone upon which to re-build communities, but also as a vehicle for peace building, because of its ability to reach across political divides and to encourage the differing sides in conflict to develop alternative visions of the future based around the needs of children.

This book has its origins in an event held in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 2004. The event, the Working

Forum Belfast, was organised jointly by NIPPA – The Early Years Organisation and the World Forum Foundation. It brought together early years professionals and researchers from 15 different countries around the world affected by conflict and provided the opportunity for them to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives. What soon became apparent to the participants was that while each of their situations was unique, the concerns they had regarding the effects of conflict on children and their families were remarkably similar.

Following the Working Forum Belfast conference “Building Bridges: Healing Communities through Early Childhood Education” held November 17-20, 2004 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the participants have been able to continue sharing their experiences and working together and the result has been the creation of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children (see: www.peacebuildingwithyoungchildren.org). This Working Group is a global initiative by early childhood practitioners, researchers, and civil society organisations to make visible the role of early childhood development as a force for reconciliation and peace building in regions experiencing or emerging out of armed conflict. This present book represents one of the first outcomes from the International Working Group.

Outline of the book

The book begins, in Chapter 1 with an outline of what existing research tells us about the impacts of armed conflict on young children and the key issues that this raises for early years educators working in such situations. This, in turn, provides the context for the next eight chapters that provide stories from early childhood practitioners working in regions affected by conflict. Each chapter begins by describing briefly the nature of the conflict in their region and the effects this is having on children and families. This is then followed by an outline of the work they are doing to begin addressing some of these effects, and

each chapter concludes with reflections on the lessons learned from these initiatives to date. Chapter 10 draws together these chapters and highlights the key issues emerging from these differing contexts for early childhood practitioners working in conflict-affected regions. The final chapter, Chapter 11, describes the development of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children, its current mission and goals, and how you can get involved.

How to contact us

Above all, this is a book of encouragement that we hope will provide practical support to those working in conflict-affected regions as well as inspiration to join and participate in the International Working Group. If you are moved by anything you read in this book, would like to know more about the Working Forum Belfast and/or would like to share your own experiences then we would love to hear from you. Please contact us via the International Working Group's web site at: www.peacebuildingwithyoungchildren.org.

Los efectos de los conflictos en niños pequeños

Durante el siglo pasado la naturaleza de la guerra y de los conflictos armados en el mundo cambio de manera dramática. La población civil que anteriormente era victima inocente ocasional, se ha convertido en su objetivo. Durante la primera guerra mundial, por ejemplo, la población civil representó solo del 14 porciento de todas las muertes. Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial este porcentaje se elevo al 50 porciento, y en las guerras siguientes los civiles han sido al menos el 80 porciento de las victimas. (Cairns, 1996: 2). Mas recientemente se ha estimado que esta cifra ha alcanzado el 90 porciento (Machel, 2000; Save the Children, 2006; UNICEF, 2006).

Dentro de esta población, los niños y niñas han pagado un alto precio. Durante la última década, los estimativos sugieren que alrededor de dos millones de niños/as murieron en guerras y seis millones sufrieron mutilaciones. (United Nations, 2006). Un millón mas quedaron huérfanos, 12 millones sufrieron desplazamientos y quedaron sin hogar y 10 millones fueron marcados por "heridas psicológicas y espirituales irreparables" (Fulci, 1998). Alrededor de 300,000 niños están siendo usados como soldados (Machel, 2000).

Parecería que los niños y niñas se encuentran atrapados en el fuego cruzado, y que de manera creciente se están convirtiendo en objetivos de guerra y del conflicto armado. Para algunos grupos en guerra, el asesinato, mutilación y violación de niños esta justificado debido a que se ve a la niñez como "los enemigos del mañana" (Machel, 1996). "Para matar ratas grandes, tienes que matar ratas pequeñas" fue la explicación de un comentarista político en una emisión radial poco antes de que surgiera la violencia étnica en Ruanda en 1994 (MacCormak, 1999). Para otros, esta visión de la niñez como los "enemigos del mañana" ha llevado a estrategias con el propósito específico de secuestrar o inculcar a los niños.

En relación con Uganda, por ejemplo, se ha reportado que alrededor de 10.000 niños han sido secuestrados de los colegios y las poblaciones y llevados al Sudan para endoctrinacion (Andvig, 2000). De manera similar en Nepal, entre enero y Agosto del 2005 alrededor de 11,800 niños fueron secuestrados de los colegios rurales por rebeldes para "endoctrinacion política o reclutamiento forzado a las milicias" (Save the Children, 2006: 6).

Desafortunadamente, con todo lo preocupante que es esto, solo es una parte de la situación. Aun cuando los niños sufren de manera aguda los efectos directos de la guerra también tienden a estar altamente representados entre las victimas de sus efectos indirectos.

Los conflictos armados diezman naciones y arrasan comunidades. Frecuentemente pueden llevar al rompimiento del tejido y la infraestructura de las sociedades, y a la interrupción o pérdida total de servicios claves tales como la educación, la vivienda, la atención a la salud y la provisión de alimentos. (Francis, 2006).

De hecho estos servicios están entre los primeros blancos de aquellos que están involucrados en el conflicto armado. Si los niños y niñas no sufren directamente con el conflicto, es muy probable que se afecten indirectamente por el rompimiento de sus comunidades, de los servicios públicos, y en casos más severos a través de problemas de salud, desnutrición o hambruna. (Machel, 1996; MacCormak, 1999).

Más aun, después de que los conflictos armados han terminado, los niños aun enfrentaran el legado de hondas divisiones, el odio, el miedo y la desconfianza asociados con estos. (Marshall, 2005a).

¿Con estas consideraciones, como es, para un profesional que atiende a la niñez temprana trabajar en contextos como estos? ¿Cuales son algunos de los problemas, asuntos y retos que se tiene que enfrentar trabajando con niños y niñas pequeños y con sus cuidadores, en sociedades afectadas por el conflicto? Aun mas importante, ¿que pueden hacer realmente estos trabajadores en situaciones como estas? ¿Como pueden llenar de manera efectiva las necesidades de los niños y sus cuidadores y papel pueden desempeñar en las comunidades para ayudar a construir la paz? Estas son algunas de la preguntas claves a las que se referirá este libro, en la medida en que escucharemos de primera mano de los profesionales que trabajan con la niñez temprana afectada por el conflicto alrededor del mundo. Aun cuando algunas de las historias son chocantes y entristecedoras, son por encima de todo historias de esperanza y valentía sobre lo que los profesionales

que trabajan con la niñez pueden lograr enfrentando la adversidad. Lo que muestran cada una de las historias es que es posible hacer una diferencia real en las vidas de los niños y niñas y en sus familias dentro de sociedades afectadas por el conflicto. Mas aun, las historias ilustran el poder del sector que trabaja con la temprana infancia, no solo como cimiento sobre el cual se pueden reconstruir las comunidades, sino también como vehiculo para la reconstrucción de la paz, a través de su capacidad de cruzar las divisiones políticas y estimular a los sectores en conflicto para que desarrollen visiones alternativas del futuro, con base en las necesidades de los niños y niñas.

Este libro tiene su origen en un evento llevado a cabo en Belfast, Irlanda del Norte, durante el 2004. El evento, el Foro Mundial de Belfast, fue organizado de manera conjunta por NIPPA – La Organización para la Niñez Temprana, y la Fundación Foro Mundial. Participaron profesionales e investigadores que trabajan con la niñez temprana de 15 países diferentes afectados por el conflicto, y proporciono la oportunidad para que compartieran sus experiencias, sus historias y perspectivas. Muy pronto se hizo evidente para los participantes que aun cuando cada una de sus situaciones es única, las preocupaciones relativas a los efectos del conflicto en los niños y niñas y sus familias eran muy similares.

Como seguimiento al Foro Mundial Belfast en al 2004, los participantes han podido continuar el intercambio de experiencias y trabajar juntos, como resultado se ha creado el Grupo Internacional de Trabajo en Construcción de Paz y Niñez Temprana. Este grupo de trabajo es una iniciativa global de trabajadores con la temprana infancia, investigadores, y la sociedad civil para hacer visible el rol del trabajo en desarrollo infantil temprano como una fuerza para la reconciliación y la construcción de paz en regiones emergentes del conflicto armado.

(Más detalles sobre el grupo)

El libro inicia en el capítulo 1 con un esquema sobre lo que la investigación existente nos dice acerca del impacto del conflicto armado en la temprana infancia y las asuntos claves que emergen para los educadores que trabajan en tales situaciones.

Esto provee el contexto para los siguientes ocho capítulos que presentan las historias de los trabajadores por la temprana infancia en diferentes regiones afectadas por el conflicto.

Cada capítulo inicia describiendo brevemente la naturaleza del conflicto en su región y los efectos que esto tiene en los niños, niñas y sus familias. Continúa por una descripción esquemática de su trabajo para iniciar la referencia a algunos de los efectos, cada capítulo concluye con las reflexiones sobre las lecciones aprendidas a partir de estas iniciativas hasta la fecha. En el Capítulo 10, a partir

de los capítulos anteriores, se relevan los aspectos claves que emergen para los trabajadores con la niñez temprana, a partir de las experiencias en estos diferentes contextos en áreas afectadas por el conflicto.

El Capítulo final, el Capítulo 11, describe el desarrollo del Grupo Internacional de Trabajo en Construcción de Paz y Niñez Temprana, su misión y objetivos, y como usted puede involucrarse. Ante todo este libro pretende ser un estímulo que esperamos pueda proporcionar apoyo práctico a aquellos que trabajan en regiones afectadas por el conflicto, así como inspiración para unirse y participar en el grupo de trabajo. Si usted queda motivado al leer este libro y/o quiere compartir sus experiencias nos encantaría escuchar de usted y nos gustaría que conociera más acerca del grupo de trabajo:

www.peacebuildingwithyoungchildren.org.

