

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Children, Education and Reconciliation**  
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The starting point for this paper are the few examples (Guatemala, Peru, South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, East Timor) where Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have made reference to a longer-term role for education in coming to terms with the past and contributing towards future reconciliation. Some have involved strategies for children's participation and made recommendations for inclusion in the formal school curriculum. However, recommendations regarding a role for education have usually been very general in nature, with little specification of what is expected of educators in practical terms and little follow through by education authorities. This paper identifies a number of challenges if education is to have a role in truth and reconciliation; some potential areas for educational development and recommendations for future actions.

**Challenges for education having a role in truth and reconciliation**

- **Identifying why education is so important for post-conflict reconciliation.** The main challenge is to identify sound educational rationales that reach across the discourses between educators and those with a technical involvement in TRCs. Important rationales include: *raising awareness and dealing with the past; promoting understanding; contributing to institutional reform; social reintegration; contributing to protection and prevention; economic regeneration.*
- **Taking account of context and securing legitimacy for the task.** The post-conflict political, social and economic context (and how this has come about), has a formative influence on what is possible (and permissible) through education. It is crucial that schools, teachers and other educators are not expected to engage with these issues in an isolated and unsupported way, no matter how committed to the task individuals may be. Political commitment and institutional support may be difficult to secure, but is an essential prerequisite. Any educational strategies also need to take account of culturally specific practices in terms of attitudes to 'truth recovery', including any tensions between local customs and practices and international human rights standards.
- **Being aware of resistance and the sensitivities of victims and survivors.** It may not be in everyone's interest for certain truths to emerge and any educational initiatives are likely to take place within a broader social debate about whether the past should be forgotten or whether it needs to be addressed. Perpetrators, victims, survivors and the unaffected are likely to have diverse positions on this and it is unlikely that there will be universal support for education taking any one approach. A particular concern is likely to arise around the concept of a 'hierarchy of victims' (where some casualties are seen as more justified than others), particularly where the State has been a party to the conflict, and educators will be challenged about this.
- **Being realistic about the timescale involved.** This involves the interaction of three main factors: making best use of opportunities for change that arise in the immediate aftermath of conflict; respecting the time needed to recover from hurt and damage; and avoiding 'avoidance' of issues that need to be addressed. It is striking that in post-conflict societies that have not had formal TRCs, few have included truth and reconciliation in the curriculum more than ten years after a transition or agreement. Reconciliation is a process rather than an event, so it may be useful to consider actions to address truth and reconciliation through education in terms of 'early opportunities', 'medium term goals' and 'long term aspirations'.

## Potential areas for educational development

Because of the need to create a receptive climate for development and engage the educational community, initial approaches are likely to begin through less formal education, raising awareness through the use of media and community-based approaches. In terms of inclusion within formal education, three broad approaches are debated amongst educationalists. Those who advocate an explicit approach with dedicated texts, resources and time (knowledge-based); those who see the process as the most important (skills-based); and those who advocate a more nuanced approaches based on human rights education, peace education (concepts and values-based). Despite the difficulties and complexity of the area, it is argued that the problematic nature of the concepts associated with truth and reconciliation makes them an ideal focus for educational enquiry. It is not just a matter of transmission of accepted knowledge, but the interrogation of concepts and creation of new knowledge from a variety of sources, including the experiences of learners themselves.

**Educational ‘entry points’.** For inclusion within formal education a systemic approach needs to be adopted involving simultaneous work at various levels - political, policy, administrative, curriculum (content, skills, values), pedagogy (multiple perspectives, narrative approaches, inter-generational learning), resources (witnesses, texts, NGOs, museums, media), teacher education, parent and community involvement. There are a number of under-developed areas that merit particular attention:

- **Epistemology.** Critical engagement about the nature of ‘truth’. Is there an ‘objective’, single version of the truth of historical events? Is truth ‘relative’ with different versions and perspectives given equal weight? Is truth ‘inter-subjective’ with multiple versions, interpretations and perspectives that can be judged according to their authenticity or validity? Whilst this may be regarded as somewhat philosophical, these are not simply abstract debates, because each of these positions will lead to very different formulation of curriculum, use of resources and educational practice.
- **Concepts.** Engagement with the lack of definition around ‘reconciliation’ and associated concepts such as ‘apology’, ‘amnesty’, ‘reparations’, ‘justice’, ‘revenge’, ‘forgiveness’. The process of enquiry, grounded in relevant examples, is as important as the outcome.
- **Resources.** The use of multiple resources, rather than a single text, is likely to be more successful. Careful attention needs to be given to the collection and creation of age appropriate resources; the strengths and weaknesses of various types of resource, and guidance on the use of people, places and commemorative events as resources.
- **Gender analysis.** Within any specific context, violence and conflict will have a gender dimension. This may be in terms of the differential perceptions of conflict held by women, men, girls and boys; distinctive aspects of their involvement in conflict and the impact it has had on them. Specific resources and attention need to be given to make these experiences and perspectives explicit. There are also pedagogic considerations about the way in which boys and girls engage with truth and reconciliation, in terms of the context in which they feel safe to express opinions and whether there are situations in which they need to engage with these issues separately or jointly.
- **Teacher education and development.** Teachers themselves are part of the culture and in that sense are not value-free. Few, if any will have had specific training on how to deal with these issues. There is an emotional issue which often goes beyond the traditional technical experience of teachers. It also requires knowledge and understanding of child rights, expertise in pedagogy and facilitation of controversial issues.
- **Ethics and child protection.** There are **ethical** issues that educators need to be fully aware of – ground rules, sensitivity to the diverse life experiences that learners may have, students who may not wish to participate. There are **protection** issues, for example, related to confidentiality, related to disclosure, legal age of responsibility. There is a need for a specific resources, guidance and training for educators on these issues.