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Developing the state of the **ART** in **PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION** to enable collaboration between **FORMAL** and **NON-FORMAL** EDUCATORS



Research Centre
Trust, Peace and
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WHY TRAIN PEACEBUILDERS?

Peacebuilding is now a multi-billion Euro industry with a global infrastructure, reflecting the acute need to address conflicts and growing confidence that doing so is possible. As the sector develops, there is evidence that peacebuilding can make a difference to societies in conflict, de-escalating tensions, strengthening relationships and ultimately saving lives. Success is not guaranteed, however, is much more likely with the facilitation of skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.

The increase in peacebuilding has spurred growth in education and training, as practitioners need applied skills and knowledge. However, much of the current training provision is offered piecemeal, disconnected from other relevant learning opportunities. Collaboration between learning providers is challenged by differences in pedagogical perspective, underpinning ethos and teaching methodology. Additionally, there is no clear guidance for learners on the skills and competencies they should acquire and no easy way for them to combine courses strategically.

The concept of peacebuilding is understood differently according to context and culture. At its core, it encompasses activities that aim to build peaceful relationships between people and transform the underlying issues that generate conflict. Peacebuilding is more than just the absence of violent conflict, and includes:

- the methods, activities and concrete actions taken to reduce or to prevent violent conflict.
- the education and training of those engaged in work aimed at preventative measures against violent conflict
- the existence and growth of relationships, networks and structures with the aim of supporting peacebuilding work at all levels.

Given this remit, the everyday work of designing and implementing peacebuilding initiatives is not easy. It requires knowledge of key concepts and development of analytical, technical and interpersonal skills. Learning is lifelong, with continual investment in understanding emerging theory and practice. It should also be reflective to enable people working in peacebuilding contexts to learn from their own experiences.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION

People who wish to learn about peacebuilding and develop their skills in this area can turn to a range of learning providers. These include formal educators, such as universities, and non-formal educators, such as NGOs and charities.

However, there is no fixed pathway for people to become ‘peacebuilders’, as there is with other subjects such as law or medicine. Instead, aspiring peacebuilders must discern for themselves what knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to develop and how to acquire these. This can be difficult, as educators rarely describe the value that they add in these terms. Educators can also be often disconnected from one another, with a particularly big gap between formal and non-formal education providers.

Formal education - hierarchically-structured and chronologically-graded education that stretches from primary school to university. It depends on formal institutions with a structured, continuous curricula, with results and accreditation against a qualifications framework.¹

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Abbreviated from Olcott, Dan, 2013, ‘New Pathways to Learning: Leveraging the Use of OERs to Support Non-formal Education’, Universities and Knowledge Society Journal, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 327-344.

Non-formal education - organized and semi-organized educational activities operating outside the formal system, serving a great variety of learning needs of diverse groups of people without limitation to age or abilities. Non-formal education can include assessment and certification, but the tools, philosophy and learning experience is very different to formal education.²

Through the BUILDPEACE project, a consortium of formal and non-formal educators from across Europe set out to consider why the gap between the two types of learning providers persists and what can be done about it.

Gaps may persist because:

- Working across boundaries is often not an institutional priority and can appear to be hindered by bureaucratic rigidity
- Educators often lack knowledge of other educational approaches and stick within their comfort zones
- Formal and non-formal approaches have different philosophical foundations and organizational cultures which can be difficult to bridge
- Learning timescales are often shorter and more flexible in non-formal education than in formal education e.g. modules spread in time and often interconnected by practical experiences
- Formal and non-formal learning providers have different approaches to accreditation
- Some formal educators are skeptical of the effectiveness of non-formal methods
- The size of universities can be daunting and alienating for some smaller NGOs and for those whose experiences in formal education have not been positive
- Some non-formal educators perceive an unequal power dynamic when working with formal educators
- Some non-formal educators perceive formal learning providers such as universities to be “elitist” and ‘out of touch’ with the real world

2 Abbreviated from Andresen, Lee, Boud David, and Cohen, Ruth, 1999, 'Experience-Based Learning', in Foley, G. ed. Understanding Adult Education and Training, Second Edition, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, pp. 225-239

As the project partners worked together it became clear that some of these observations are actually stereotypes that do not always apply. In reality, formal educators working in peacebuilding are often activists and campaigners who bring non-formal methods into the classroom. Non-formal educators are often linked to universities as post-graduate students or through research projects. However, the perceptions persist and in some cases they do reflect current realities.

CHALLENGE 1: LOW LEVELS OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATORS

I didn't know about the methodologies and values of non-formal education before I took part in this project.

The first barrier to closing the gap between formal and non-formal peacebuilding educators is enhancing collaboration. This stems from lack of awareness of opportunities amongst educators to work across boundaries and the advantages of doing so.

To address this, we strongly advise that:

- 1.** Learning providers raise awareness among their staff, familiarising them with other types of learning approaches across the formal and non-formal sectors.
- 2.** Educational policymakers create incentives for formal and non-formal educators to work together, for instance by exchange opportunities and including cross-sector collaboration as criteria for funding and evaluation metrics.
- 3.** Learners challenge educators to articulate the ways in which their learning opportunities help to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes in a collaborative way.

CHALLENGE 2: LACK OF INTEGRATED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The second obstacle to bridging the gap between formal and non-formal peacebuilding education relates to opportunities. Whilst some opportunities for joint initiatives exist, learning providers must be intentional in seeking these out. Often, learning providers do not have institutional frameworks in place to support such endeavors and individual educators are left feeling unsupported. Meanwhile, learners struggle to find and fund integrated opportunities that meet their needs.

Where initiatives do exist, they often remain at a superficial level. For instance, often the methods of non-formal education are applied in classrooms but with little understanding of the underlying philosophy. Systemic change requires real commitment and extensive adaptation – reconsidering everything from power dynamics to the physical learning environment.

To address this, we advise the following:

1. Learning providers reflect their commitment to formal and non-formal collaboration within their institutions' strategic planning. Partnership building should be long term and embedded within institutional structures. Mechanisms such as shared supervision and mentoring within degrees, joint summer schools and staff exchanges all enable sustainable collaboration.
2. Educational policymakers support an initiative to signpost educational opportunities that bring together formal and non-formal partners, making these more visible and accessible for learners.
3. Learners source educational opportunities from a range of learning providers, enabling them to access a combination of formal and non-formal learning activities.

CHALLENGE 3: LACK OF RECOGNITION FOR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

In many societies, traditional formal education is held in high regard. It is well resourced by governments and is familiar to most citizens. The accreditation it provides often visibly increases the social status of the learner. In contrast, non-formal education is often provided by under-resourced NGOs and charities.

It is often certificated, rather than accredited. The credentials of the instructors are not always formerly recognised. Historically, non-formal education has mostly been defined in terms of its 'outsider' status.¹

Throughout the project, it became clear that non-formal educators face significantly higher barriers than formal educators in delivering their learning programmes. Activities are funding dependent and can be difficult to sustain.

To address this, NGOs and charities require solidarity from their partners to develop sustainable forms of partnership. As such, we advise:

1. Formal education providers should build partnerships that are well resourced and long term along with the active awareness and involvement of their non formal education partners. Resources should be shared equitably. Funds should be provided in advance and all costs should be factored into programming, including visa costs, for instance. To do otherwise risks pressurizing NGOs limited resources or curtailing their participation. Formal educators should also aim to increase the accessibility of their work, creating open source materials and facilitating access to knowledge for partners.

2. Non-formal educators should seek to educate others about the value of their certification and the skills that learners acquire through joining their activities. They could seek to work alongside their formal education partners in order to achieve accreditation for their course. They can also make more visible use of recognition tools such as YouthPass.

3. Employers should place greater value on NGO certificates of achievement. These demonstrate that prospective employees are cognizant of the full range of skills they will need as peacebuilders and have been proactive in securing relevant learning opportunities to enhance these.

ABOUT THE BUILDPEACE PROJECT

These recommendations have been prepared as an intellectual output of BUILDPEACE: building peace builders through integrated formal and non-formal learning approaches, a project led by Coventry University with collaborators Kadir Has Üniversitesi, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, The Coordinating Committee of International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), Wings of Hope, Xchange Scotland and Young Researchers of Serbia.

The BUILDPEACE project brings together European peacebuilding educators from the formal and non-formal sectors. It aims to better understand the state of the art within peacebuilding education and develop innovative new ways to improve learning outcomes. The project is funded by Erasmus+ through the UK's British Council.

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