EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE – NEWS FROM THE GEORG ARNHOLD PROGRAM IN 2015

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATION – THE GEORG ARNHOLD SUMMER SCHOOL 2015

Together with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), a non-profit organisation dedicated to pursuing accountability for mass atrocities and human rights abuses through transitional justice mechanisms, the GEI organised the second Georg Arnhold International Summer School. It focused on the theme of “Transitional Justice and Education: Engaging Children and Youth in Justice and Peacebuilding through Educational Media, Curricula and Outreach” and took place from 22 to 27 June 2015.

Eighteen early-career scholars and practitioners from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America joined us in Braunschweig as well as eight senior scholars and practitioners from Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, South Africa, Spain and the United States. The Summer School focused on educational media, curricula and curriculum reform, educational activities and diverse actors such as teachers, NGOs, UN bodies, communities and governments in the context of transitional justice processes and policies. Particular emphasis was placed on measures supporting a conflict-sensitive approach to coming to terms with past conflict and violence. In creating a bridge between the concepts of transitional justice and education for sustainable peace, the Summer School aimed to reflect upon lessons learned and explore innovative ways to help engage children and youth in justice and peacebuilding efforts through education, fostering their capacity for critical thinking and supporting their social and political empowerment and the social cohesion of the societies they live in. The Summer School programme consisted of five days of panel discussions, workshops, feedback rounds and a special programme day in Berlin.
Why does education matter in contexts of conflict and peace?

Education can be a driver of both conflict and peace. As we have seen in our research work in many contexts, education has been used to create divisions and fuel conflict, or as a tool to discriminate and segregate. On the other hand, education can also be used as a vehicle for peace, both by addressing the injustices experienced in a society as they relate to the education system, but also through the crafting of justice-sensitive curricula and teaching pedagogies and equipping teachers to foster democratic values and a sense of agency in the younger generations. The findings of this research project – which involved 17 commissioned studies – show that transitional justice can contribute to shaping the reconstruction of education systems in post-conflict contexts and at the same time help to facilitate the reintegration of children and youth who suffered directly from repression or conflict by increasing access to education through a reparative approach. In relation to the longer term goals of transitional justice, education can also help to increase the sustainability and impact of transitional justice across generations.

What are some of the major challenges that arise when creating educational materials and curricula that address a violent past?

The challenges when teaching the past are many and varied. Particularly in societies recovering from conflict, material, political and social conditions can create difficulties in both designing and using educational materials to teach the past. This is even more the case when there is a justice element to it. Materially, there are often a range of competing needs, weak institutions (including the education system) and a shortage of resources. Politically, there may be reluctance to look into the past, due to concerns regarding instability and the contentious nature of the material and issues to be taught. Socially, communities, including teachers and students, may still be enduring the consequences of the conflict. Because they have lived it, and been part of it, they may have a genuine fear or hesitation to revisit the past as part of school activities.
Can you briefly describe your academic and career background, and how it led to your current position?

I got into academic work in the area of international development and education after an earlier career as a teacher and development practitioner which took me to Egypt, Palestine and Colombia. During these years I developed a strong empathy and interest in the struggles of ordinary people living through conflict and authoritarian rule. In Colombia I worked for a trade union that was being violently persecuted by state and para-state forces due to its opposition to the privatisation of public services. I later wrote my doctoral thesis on their struggles and the role of popular education in raising the consciousness of workers and local communities in the midst of the ongoing civil war. Since then I have largely focused my research and teaching on the relationship between education, war and peace. On this journey I have moved from the University of Bristol, to the University of Amsterdam and then on to the University of Sussex, where I have been based since 2010.

How does your current work and research relate to the core theme of the Summer School?

The core theme of the Summer School is central to my work. I believe in peace with social justice, and that requires more than just the cessation of violence. It necessitates truth, justice and reparations for the victims – which is central to the transitional justice agenda. That is at the heart of the idea of transitional justice and education can play an important part in that process. It can educate people about their country’s difficult past, it can bring communities together and it can also offer people an alternative path from violence. It can of course also do the very opposite, so it is important that education systems are brought into the peacebuilding debate.

What are some of the major challenges and roadblocks of advocating for increased prioritisation of peace education in the international community?

I am not a big fan of mainstream peace education and I prefer the word peacebuilding education. Much peace education focuses too much on interpersonal aspects and as a result tends to avoid addressing the structural factors that underpin most conflicts, that is, the grievances that people have. Palestinians do not need peace education, they need human rights and dignity. Peacebuilding education on the other hand seeks to address the education system more holistically looking at the governance, funding, coordination of the education system as well as the curriculum and issues of pedagogy. It seeks to promote a more socially just system that can work to support the restoration of human rights and dignity of marginalised populations.
EDUCATION AND ARMED CONFLICT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA – THE ARNOLD SYMPOSIUM 2015 IN NEW YORK CITY

The GEI, the German Center for Research and Innovation and The New School for Social Research joined forces to organise the Arnhold Symposium on Education for Sustainable Peace 2015. Critical scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines working on the complex relationship between education and armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa gathered in New York City to present their research. The effects of armed conflict on education have been thoroughly documented and include the destruction of school infrastructure, forced migration and exodus of skilled people such as teachers, and diverted state funding. The effects of education on armed conflict, however, are less well understood. Rather than seeing schooling as a panacea, the Symposium focused on the meaning of education as it actually exists in various contexts to understand the complex relationships between formal education, the fragility of states and armed conflict to more clearly understand both how education may help produce and reproduce unjust or structurally violent political systems and how it may act to create more just and peaceful social and economic prospects for sub-Saharan Africa. Susan Shepler, Georg Arnhold Visiting Research Professor and Associate Professor in the School of International Relations at American University had devised the concept for the Symposium.

SERGEY RUMYANSEV – THE FOURTH GEORG ARNHOLD VISITING PROFESSOR FROM AZERBAIJAN

The GEI extends a warm welcome to Sergey Rumyansev who joins us from October 2015 to March 2016 as the next Georg Arnhold Visiting Research Professor. He is co-director of the South Caucasus Open School (Tbilisi, Georgia) and one of the founders of the Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR) in Berlin. From 2003 until 2014, he was a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (Baku). He also works as the scientific expert on the Heinrich Böll Foundation Scholarship Programme for Young Social Scientists, Lecturers and Teachers, and is the main coordinator of the NOVATOR Independent Transnational Social Research Network. He holds a PhD degree in Sociology from Baku State University. Dr Rumyansev’s main areas of research include nationalism, diaspora and migration, conflict studies and Soviet studies, with a focus on conflicts in the post-Soviet space. His research at the GEI focuses on “Myths of Historical Territories – Maps and Cartographic Discourses in the Post-Soviet Space”. According to Sergey Rumyansev, “Historical territories and essentialist cartographic discourses are constantly used by politicians, and are widely represented in the media and in history textbooks. They also play a key role in provoking and justifying conflicts in the post-Soviet space and are a means for each country to substantiate territorial claims against its neighbours. The main objectives of my research are to complete research on the deconstruction of essentialist myths of historical territories; to comparatively and critically analyse disputable cartographic discourses; and to prepare a book detailing the cumulative research”.

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The New School in New York City, co-host of the 2015 Arnhold Symposium