

Abstract CPE Conference

“Agents of peace or conflict?” Exploring “agency” of educators and youth in conflict-affected contexts inspired by the SRA (Strategic Relational Approach) and CCPE (Critical Cultural Political Economy)

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When it comes to the role of education in building peaceful societies, teachers and youth are often immediately mentioned as key actors. Portrayals of both teachers and youth – while consisting of very heterogeneous constituencies – range from perpetrators/victims of violence to “champions” or even “soldiers” of peace and transformation. Inspired by a Gramscian perspective, the paper recognises educators – and arguably also youth – as important reproducing or transformatory transmitters of political and cultural hegemony (Giroux, 2003; Fischman and Haas, 2009). Yet, how can we better understand the roles of these actors in relation to education’s complex, both positive and negative impact on conflict and peace? What does “agency” mean in dialectical relation to contexts of high inequalities, tense relationships and stark (often gendered) power imbalances? Building on Critical Realist thought, this paper aims to further an analytical framework to conceptualise “agency” of main education actors - teachers and youth - by combining and adapting insights from the Strategic Relational Approach (Jessop, 2005; Hay, 2002) and a Critical Cultural Political Economy lens (Sum and Jessop, 2013; Robertson and Dale, 2014). I draw on earlier conceptual and empirical research in the context of Bolivia (Lopes Cardozo, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015), Indonesia (Shah and Lopes Cardozo, 2014), Myanmar (Lopes Cardozo et al, 2015) and Sri Lanka (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks, 2014) to illustrate the complexities and selectivities of both educators’ and young people’s “agency” – their space for manoeuvre in highly conflictive contexts. The aim of this paper is to move away from an all too technical understanding of the role of teachers and youth in peacebuilding processes, or education more broadly, and to support a more nuanced and informed development of political and programmatic education responses.