

A Cross-Disciplinary Study of Early Childhood Development and Peacebuilding: New Conceptualizations of Early Childhood for Global Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The intersection between Early Childhood Development (ECD), peacebuilding, and sustainable development is a complex and newly emerging area of research in the cross-disciplinary field of early childhood and international development. This paper is important for its contribution to the developing knowledge-base in its conceptualizations of the role of young children in the promotion of social cohesion and peaceful societies. It begins by discussing the increasingly high profile of ECD in the global advocacy for building sustainable development. The discussion presents a multidimensional conceptualization of early childhood that is rooted in a wider social justice and human rights agenda and encapsulated in an ecological framework that depicts the intrinsic relationship between the child, family, community, and wider society. The findings reveal the potential linkages between ECD and young children's role in fostering peace as conceptualized in three interrelated paradigms – a rights-based, participatory, and pedagogical approach. The paper argues for the importance of advancing further research to foster greater understanding of the connections between children and peacebuilding especially in the context of fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Keywords: early childhood development, peacebuilding, sustainable development, cross-disciplinary

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Introduction

The concept of Early Childhood Development (ECD) or Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), as it is sometimes known in the international literature, is an important and complex topic of growing global importance. In most modern societies around the world, ECD has received increasing policy attention and is viewed by many governments as a way of building the foundations of young children's development and achieving broader education and social and economic goals for the good of the society and global development (The World Bank, 2017; UNESCO 2015). The terms, ECCE and ECD, are used interchangeably in this paper to define the period of development from prenatal to eight years of age and encompass the multidimensional interrelated domains which shape young children's lives within their social and cultural environments. This entails proximal contexts such as the home and family to the more distal environments such as the community and national policy milieu (UNICEF, 2012; United Nations, 2003). Informed by the ensuing research-base, this paper argues that this concept of ECD is central to the notion of "peacebuilding", a concept which originated from the field of international development and defined as the conditions or experiences that promote social cohesion and peaceful societies. The prominence of peacebuilding on the global agenda is reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16) (United Nations, 2015). This conceptualization of peacebuilding is especially pertinent in the context of fragile countries in the transition from conflict and instability to more socially cohesive and sustainable societies (Moshe, 2001). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified 56 fragile which are affected by some degree of political and social violence and face growing insecurity and instability (OECD, 2016); almost a third of fragile countries identified are in the East Asia and Asia Pacific region with a significant proportion of children and families living at risk in adverse conditions.

Against this background, the discussion draws together critical insights into the developing connections between ECD, peacebuilding, and sustainable development that

have been encapsulated by an emerging body of scholarship. The discussion presents a systematic study of extant literature commissioned by an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) to inform a future research agenda for the advocacy of young children and families. At the heart of the study was to examine the conceptual connections between ECD and peacebuilding and its implications for the East Asia and Asia Pacific region in order to enhance the knowledge-base in a relatively limited area of research. The study was framed by three overarching questions: how is early childhood and peacebuilding conceptualized in the literature?; what do we know or do not know about the role of young children's care and education in promoting peace and social cohesion?; and what lessons can be drawn from existing literature about the role of ECD in (re)building peaceful societies?

ECD for Sustainable Development

In recent years, increased advocacy and accumulative research have raised the profile of ECD or ECCE considerably as a key driver in the United Nations global sustainable development agenda (Chan, 2013; Engle et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2015). Advances in disciplines such as neuroscience, developmental science, and the social sciences have provided convincing arguments about the importance of the early childhood years as a crucial phase in the human life cycle. The early years phase is strongly advocated as critical in laying the foundations for future development and well-being (Engle et al., 2007, 2011; Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyev, 2013). A recurrent rhetoric by supranational non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is the value of education and ECCE and that "education is fundamental to development and growth" (The World Bank, 2011, p. 1). Access to comprehensive ECD across the levels is recognized as a basic human right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and an important strategy to improving human development, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. As a prime area of advocacy, ECD and

quality education are considered “strategic development investment” (The World Bank, 2011, p. 1) and essential for the benefit of wider society (The World Bank, 1995, 2017). As McGrath (2010) contends, “whether the call to action comes from international development agencies or from NGOs, the message above is a familiar one; education is central to development” (p. 537).

Galvanized by global advocacy, ECD for sustainable development is, therefore, perceived as vital to tackling global challenges and creating a more just and equitable society. It is notable that for the first time in the history of the sustainable development agenda, ECD is included in the 2030 global goals (Goal 4.2), marking a historic milestone and accelerating the world’s focus on the very youngest in society (United Nations, 2015). Yet, despite strident steps in research and advocacy, recent debates also recognize that knowledge gaps continue to exist in our understanding of the role and impact of ECD, particularly, in the context of fragile conflict-affected states. Advocates contend that even as the promotion of ECCE in the UN Sustainable Development Goals provided a “historic opportunity” (Britto et al., 2017, p. 91), further knowledge is required to adequately account for the highly complex and vastly diverse nature of children’s lives in societies facing the challenges of transitioning from conflict and fragility to sustainable peace. As the next section shows, the connections between ECD or ECCE and peacebuilding are fast becoming central to the global agenda for human development and intrinsic in the promotion of socially cohesive and peaceful societies (Evans, 2008; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2013).

ECD and Peacebuilding

The role of ECD and peacebuilding is a developing area of research that has been precipitated in-part by the global agenda to improve young children’s lives. The concept of “peacebuilding” has been analysed variously by academics, theorists, and policy-makers alike (Barnett, Kim, O’ Donnell, & Sitea, 2007; Galtung, 1976; Ghali, 1992; Talentino, 2004). As the term evolved over time, a current understanding of peacebuilding can be described as “those conditions that will enhance the transition from a state of conflict to coexistence and thus contribute to sustainable peace” (Moshe, 2001, p. 14). A broad

consensus is that peace or peacebuilding is more than simply an absence of conflict or adversity but the values and practices that promote the active building of positive, civil, and respectful relationships among individuals amidst difference and dissonance (Boulding, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

In the cross-disciplinary fields of early childhood and international development, the developing links between ECD and peacebuilding are underpinned by research which shows the detrimental consequences of conflict and violence on young children (Cairns, 1996; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993). There is research from conflict literature which shows that children who are casualties in hostile situations suffer disproportionately from the effects of adversity (Vestal & Jones, 2004; Watson, 2008) “in which they are not merely bystanders but targets” (Machel, 1996, p. 2). Watson (2008) argues that “in the aftermath of war, children are the group most likely to suffer the long term consequences of, among other things, inadequate health care and insufficient access to education” (p. 36). The impact of adversity on children younger than five years has been attributed to poor social and health outcomes, resulting in economic dependency and low educational outcomes (Chan, 2013; Walker et al., 2011). Scholarship in the social sciences has also informed discussions around young children, peace, and the role of education. Researchers have conceptualized education in the context of peacebuilding according to four domains or “four interrelated Rs” (Novelli, Lopes, & Smith, 2015, p. 17): recognition as in the respecting of difference and diversity; redistribution in terms of the redistribution of resources and socioeconomic opportunities; representation through policy framing and governance; and reconciliation as in reparation, forgiveness, positive relations, and social cohesion (Novelli et al., 2015). Built on the work of Fraser (1995, 2005), the central tenets of recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation are useful for analysing the contribution of education to peacebuilding in the context of conflict-affected states to peacebuilding. The application of the framework to various population groups including young children offers an opportunity to understand the political, social, and cultural environments that can support the sustainable development of societies.

There is also a corpus body of writing in the area of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) that is concerned with the promotion of anti-bias, social and cultural diversity, and building reciprocal and responsive relationships with others in society. This

resonates with the fundamental tenets of peacebuilding and builds on the discourse of children's rights for equity, peace, and human security (Somerville & Williams, 2015). The United Nations' declaration of the decade of ESD from 2005 to 2014 placed the subject firmly on the global agenda.

Additionally, advancing research in the field of human development has provided strong rationale for aligning ECD with peacebuilding as a focal point in the context of global human development. The existing literature reveal various conceptual, political, and ideological perspectives related to early childhood and peace (Leckman, Panter-Brick, & Salah, 2014; Sunar et al., 2013). For example, an ecology of peace framework has prompted hypotheses linking children's immediate environment with their brain development and subsequently with violent or peaceful behavior and efforts to develop a propensity for peaceful behavior through family or community intervention (Leckman et al., 2014). There is evidence which indicates ECD interventions involving parents and families are known to build resilience in young children and have a positive impact on peacebuilding outcomes (Sagi-Schwartz, 2012; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2013). As Sagi-Schwartz (2012) suggests that "some children, youths, and adults seem to be resilient even when exposed to profound adversities, suggesting that the majority is able to cope effectively with the aftereffects of their trauma exposure, especially when supported by the family and by other facilitative factors in the community" (p. 938). There is also research which points towards the brain's plasticity, physiological capacities during childhood and even adolescence, and the impact on later life including the possibility of building human resilience and contributing to social cohesion in the reconciliation process. Researchers contend that children's experience of stress or trauma, especially during the early stages of life, occurs at a "sensitive period" when aversive experiences such as maltreatment, stress, and other chronic childhood trauma can negatively affect children's brain functions leading to anxiety disorders (Meaney, 2010). Conversely, the absence of trauma can promote children's cognitive functioning and positive disposition towards peaceful behaviors. In a rapidly expanding area of research, the emerging associations between neuroscience and early development are also being explored as determinants for peacebuilding (Leckman et al., 2014). These discussions are pertinent to understanding the connections between ECCE or ECD and peacebuilding and contributing to evolving evidence-based debates. As

McCandless and Rogan (2013) contend, “early childhood development is rarely considered a peacebuilding priority, yet there is growing evidence of the societal and inter-generational impact of early childhood development investments” (p. 4). Making a similar case for ECD in the paper (Sunar et al., 2013), the authors argue for the importance of making advances in scientific research, policy, and practice and for the significance of “considering early childhood development (ECD) and peacebuilding together rather than separately” (p. 81).

Brief Overview of the Study

Informed by the emerging research discussed in the above sections, the purpose of the study central to this paper was to conduct an in-depth review of the extent literature around ECD and peacebuilding. The study was based on a systematic review design conducted over a year in the cross-disciplinary field of early years and international development. The aim was to identify broad understandings and conceptual underpinnings that focus on the prioritisation of young children and their role in building cohesive societies to inform a future research agenda for the Asia Pacific region. Three overarching research questions framed the project: what do we know or do not know about the role of young children in peace?; what does the research say about the different conceptualizations of ECD and peacebuilding?; and how does the literature inform a future research agenda for the region? The main impetus was to explore the conceptual dimensions of the associations between young children, peacebuilding, and the potential contribution of ECD programmes in (re)building social cohesion in post-conflict societies. Given the cross-disciplinary nature of the topic, the study brought together a vast body of literature from a range of disciplines such as sociology, cultural psychology, philosophy, education, theology, child health, and political science. In doing so, the research established a nuanced understanding of early childhood and peacebuilding regarding what it entailed and how it is conceived conceptually in practice.

Research Design and Methodology

The study was framed by a systematic review design which essentially comprised a critical review of the extant literature on the subject of ECD and peacebuilding. The research was also informed by a participatory methodology where sustained consultations were undertaken at the outset of the study and throughout with a range of expert individuals such as representatives of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), academics, non-academics, and practitioners from the voluntary sector to help inform various aspects of the research design including the conceptual framework, research questions, and review protocol. A scoping review was initiated at the start of the project through in-depth discussions with the commissioners of the study, senior education advisors, and a peacebuilding expert group to shape the focus of the study. The inaugural launch of an international peace consortium was used as a platform for the scoping review to further explore stakeholders' views of the emerging issues and debates around early childhood and peacebuilding. Follow-up consultation meetings with the commissioners and group of peacebuilding experts helped to further consolidate and refine the scope of the review. Thus, at various stages of the inquiry process, key stakeholders were actively involved and consulted. The impetus for adopting a participatory approach was essentially to ensure that the study addressed a socially relevant research agenda and offered the opportunity for the voices of key informants to be heard and included.

The methods entailed a systematic searching and screening of the published literature. The management of the literature and information was supported by a specialist software, the Evidence for Policy, and Practice Information tool (EPPI-Reviewer-4). A systematic search of online databases was conducted using a standard screening or coding protocol was applied in the EPPI- Reviewer to screen and code the data. The review entailed key steps in searching and identifying the relevant literature for review: a database search, data extraction, research analysis, and synthesis of the findings. This structured stepped-process was essential to enhance the validity and rigour of the study. Three electronic bibliographies were searched: the British Education Index (BEI), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS). A combination of search descriptors was used including key terms that were combined by OR and AND such as peacebuilding, peace AND ECD, ECCE, Peacebuilding

AND Children, Peace, early childhood AND family, conflict resolution, and early childhood. A wide range of literature from multi-disciplinary fields in education and beyond was retrieved from the databases.

A sensitive search was conducted using a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to review the existing literature from 1990 onwards. The rationale for the timeline was two-fold. Firstly, the introduction of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) was a watershed moment for the international early childhood sector. Article 29 of the convention states that “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national, and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin” (United Nations, 1989, p. 9). It was, therefore, envisaged that literature published from this period onwards was reflective of current policy developments and highly relevant to the aims of the study. Secondly, the time period of the review from 1990 onwards coincided with increased advocacy and the scaling-up of ECD and peacebuilding initiatives globally such as the initiation of the international decade for a culture of peace by the UN General Assembly in 2001, which was seminal in recognizing the rights of all children to a just and peaceful society, followed by the formation of the first Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), created by the UN in 2005 to serve as an intergovernmental body to mobilize and consolidate peacebuilding efforts in conflict societies. The time period of the review was, therefore, crucial in response to these policy shifts and developments.

Data Analysis

The analysis was undertaken in an ongoing, iterative, and cyclical process, informed by a conceptual framework, research questions, and reviewed literature. A thematic approach was used to analyse the final list of included items which were subsequently coded under three initial or primary-level categories: conceptual, intervention, and advocacy (see Table 1). These generally referred to items which described peacebuilding as a concept, interventions in the peacebuilding process, and papers that were based on advocacy for peacebuilding. The data analysis generally adopted a narrative approach by summarizing the key themes and examining the weight of evidence against each theme.

Table 1. *Code-set*

Screen on Title and Abstract	Exclude on target Early Childhood (EC) age group (exclude items that do not pertain to children 0-8 years) Exclude on country (exclude items that are not based on East Asia and the Asia Pacific region) Exclude on date 1990 (exclude all items before 1990) Exclude on topic (the item is on an entirely unrelated topic) Include based on title and abstract
Screen on Full Article Report	Exclude on target EC age group (exclude items that do not pertain to children 0-8 years) Exclude on topic (the item is on an entirely unrelated topic) Include based on full article report Exclude on country
Conceptual	Peace Theories and Paradigms
Intervention	Programme Implementation (Literature relating to peace building at a programme level e.g. early intervention initiatives, toolkits, recommended practices etc.) Curriculum and Pedagogy (Literature relating to peacebuilding and early years classroom practices, teaching and learning; teacher training; children's learning) Children's Socialisation (Items relating to children's socialisation and peer conflict-resolution issues as a way of promoting peace and peaceful relationships. Also relating to children's socialisation within the family, community and society.)
Advocacy	Children's voices and participation (Literature focusing on children's voices and participation as a form of advocacy for peace building) Research (Items provide evidence of empirical research on peacebuilding and EC)

As part of the data analysis and synthesis, a standard coding tool illustrated by the code-set below was applied in EPPI-Reviewer to screen and code the data. Following the initial coding, the items were screened and reviewed in further detail according to secondary-level inductive codes such as “programme implementation”, “curriculum and pedagogy”, “children’s socialisation”, and “children’s voices” (see Figure 1). From these codes, the final overarching themes as highlighted in the following findings section were then formulated. This structured method of analysis was undertaken in an iterative process and closely guided by the research questions and conceptual framework.

Limitations

To the research team’s knowledge, this study was the first of the kind to examine the

literature-base which focused on the links between ECD and peacebuilding to inform a future research agenda for the East Asia and Asia-Pacific region. However, there were inevitable limitations to the research. The study was undertaken within a defined scope and limited to three primary electronic databases. As such, it does not aim to provide an exhaustive review of the topic area but rather to map some of the broad understandings of the knowledge-base. The project sought to address rather ambitiously three broad research questions related to ECD and peacebuilding. Not surprisingly, a challenge that surfaced early on was the wide range of terminology used across the different types of literature in which often a different terminology is used in a variety of context to mean the same thing. For example, descriptors used to denote the concept of peace and ECD such as conflict-resolution, resilience, and community building turned out to be more ambiguous than expected and were especially challenging when evaluating the literature. Thus, even though a systematic review protocol was used to enhance validity, the overlaps in terminology used meant that the search was not definitive. A technical limitation also meant that only literature published in the English language was reviewed.

Results

The results were encapsulated in a review flow diagram (see Figure 1). A total of 1,126 items were retrieved and imported to the EPPI-Reviewer database. Out of the 1,126 items obtained, 152 items were identified as duplicates where they were marked with a score of 1 and considered as an “exact match 100%”. After removing the duplicated studies, a final list of 974 items remained which were included for qualitative analysis. All 974 items were screened and coded, from which 196 items were eventually included based on their title and abstracts. A total of 122 items were coded on their full report and reviewed.

Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed the considerable breadth of scholarship on the subject area in cross-disciplinary fields. It showed an emerging body of literature around ECD and

peacebuilding that is conceptualized in three inter-related themes:

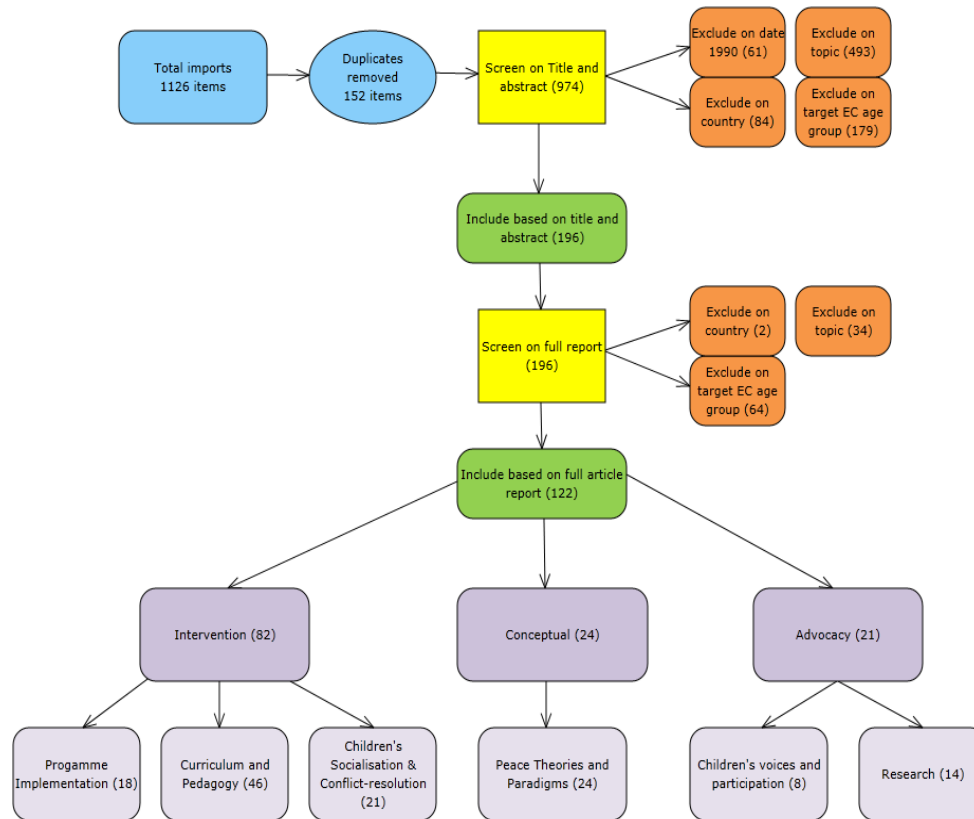


Figure 1. Review Flow Diagram

Theme 1: rights based approach. The first key theme is a rights-based approach to ECD and peacebuilding in which children’s rights are entwined with a wider agenda about human rights to live in peaceful societies as informed by the principles of the international policies such as the UN Charter Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989, 2003). Much of the literature reviewed in this theme is enshrined within the UNCRC on children’s rights to freedom, justice, and peace in “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society and in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national, and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin”

(United Nations, 1989, p. 9). In an early publication, for example, the author Kleinfeld (2009) perceives the association between early childhood and peacebuilding in terms of the child as an embodiment of peace as described in the caption “The Child as a Zone of Peace”. The child is constructed here as a “non-political” being with inherent rights to live in a conflict-free humanitarian zone. In an advocacy paper focusing on “kindred peace” and children’s rights, Watson (2008) makes the case that peacebuilding strategies are often justified in the promotion of human security where children’s rights are fundamental to building post-conflict reconciliation. However, Watson (2008) also contends that while peacebuilding strategies are justified in terms of the promotion of human rights and democratic values, the attainment of “peace” can, nonetheless, fail if notions of rights do not adequately take into account children’s diverse living experiences and cultural and local contexts. As such, Watson (2008) cautions against the language of rights being rooted in an institutional rather than a “human perspective” and the need to consider children’s voices and agency when adopting a rights-based approach to peacebuilding. There is also more contemporary literature which similarly emphasizes the importance of a rights-based approach to early childhood and peacebuilding. In a more contemporary publication, Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2013) stress the support of children’s rights to participation in all levels of planning and policy-making in the peacebuilding process as a way of building socially cohesive relationships at the levels of the family, community, and society. A recurrent message in the literature related to a rights-based approach is a commitment to recognizing children as “holders of rights” rather than merely victims of conflict or objects of charity. It is about acknowledging children’s rightful contribution to promoting conflict-resolution and peaceful civil societies.

Theme 2: participatory approach. A second key theme that emerged from the findings is the notion of participation. Central to this is the premise that building peace for children is not just about recognizing their human rights but involving a collective social participation. In early research, Bey and Turner (1996) contend that building peaceful communities is “everyone’s concern” (p. 101) where individuals including children and local communities are active participants in the peacebuilding process. The conceptualization of ECD and peacebuilding in a participatory paradigm is perceived in

much of the literature as a social process in building awareness among children and families of their integral roles in achieving long term sustainable peace. In the literature reviewed, the partnerships between children, family, community, and society are recognized as fundamental to the peacebuilding process. This observation is aligned with a participatory approach which empowers children with choices that enhance their capacities to influence policy development and decision-making to make a difference to their own as well as society's situation (Evans, 2008; Watson, 2004). The research argues for the central role of children in creating long term sustainable peace through influencing decisions that affect all areas of their lives and their participation in the community and society (Britto, 2012; Gervais, 2004; Moshe, 2001; Vestal & Jones, 2004). A key principle that underpins a participatory approach is the meaningful contribution of children and families to the peacebuilding agenda. As Watson (2004) suggests, long-term peaceful solutions to protracted terrorist campaigns require children to have a more central in the conflict resolution process as active agents not just as casualties of conflict.

Theme 3: pedagogical approach. A third key theme that emerged from the dataset is that of a pedagogical approach which recognized the role of education and pedagogy – defined here as the “act and discourse of teaching” (Alexander, 2004, p. 8) in contributing to building a sustainable, just, and peaceful society. There is established scholarship that is concerned with peacebuilding as an “educative process”, for instance, in the scholarship around ESD highlighted earlier and as a way of nurturing and cultivating critical aspects of social behaviors and moral development through education. This is perceived as particularly pertinent in educational settings that are concerned with the care and education of young children (Bey & Turner, 1996; Gervais, 2004; Kirkwood-Tucker, 2004). A crucial aspect of a pedagogical approach is the building of formal and informal learning communities to support children in understanding the importance of maintaining peaceful relations and working creatively with diversity and difference within their learning environment. Kirkwood-Tucker (2004) describes the importance of global education in advancing educators' knowledge and skills in managing conflict and peace building. Danesh and Clarke-Habibi (2007) offer a practical guide with suggested lesson plans for educators working at various education levels in creating a culture of peace in school

communities and supporting children to develop peace-based conflict resolution skills. The wealth of literature on pedagogical approaches in peace education covered a range of topics including the history and philosophy of peace education (Boulding, 1991; Harris & Morrison, 2003), conflict resolution education (Connolly & Hayden, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2005), and the formation of peaceful values in education (Toh, 2004; Toh & Cawagas, 1991; Tongeren, Brenk, Hellema, & Verhoeven, 2005).

From the analysis, a pedagogical approach encompassed a broad spectrum of education and pedagogy including curriculum development and delivery, teacher education, and children and teacher interactions. The literature review illustrated the wide range of educational programmes developed over the years by educators and educational professionals such as global education, peace education, citizenship, and sustainable education (Bey & Turner, 1996; Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Salomon & Cairns, 2010). A pedagogical approach to early childhood and peacebuilding recognizes that schools and educational settings play a powerful role in society where they can actively promote or, in some cases, destabilize peacebuilding efforts. Bey and Turner (1996) argue strongly that educators play an instrumental role in teaching children strategies for conflict resolution and socially acceptable ways to challenge social injustices. Along a similar vein, Salomon and Cairns (2010) argue for the role of peace education as a vital form of pedagogy promoting peaceful behaviour. A common thread in this theme is the promotion of positive peer socialisation to promote peace through education.

Conceptualizing ECD and Peacebuilding

The findings showed three main paradigms or themes in the conceptualization of ECD or ECCE and peacebuilding. Significantly, the overall synthesis of the literature revealed a conceptual framework that is defined in “relational terms” in the way individuals co-exist, relate with each other, and build mutually respectful relationships (Klein, Goertz, & Diehl, 2008; Moshe, 2001). The emergent conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 illustrates an ecological model that is informed by the different environments and systems which affect children’s overall development and well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The framework encapsulated existing theoretical underpinnings of ECD and peacebuilding and the

intersecting sociocultural, familial, and societal environments that influence young children’s lives. It depicts the child being positioned at the center and enclosed within a series of layers or concentric circles that illustrate the complex web of inter-relating and overlapping systems that affect the child’s life experiences; in a conflict environment, this is characterized by deeply ingrained inequality and adversity. The child in the innermost circle stands in the crosscurrent of these cultural, political, and socio-economic conditions as they interact and evolve over time. The arrows at the bottom-end of the diagram point towards a state of fragility and the adverse conditions that children experience in conflict-affected states. The arrows at the top-end of the diagram indicate a movement towards an aspirational ideal – that of sustainable peace. Taken as a whole, the conceptual framework illustrates the conditions that interact across different systems that influence children’s lives. The concept of ECD and peacebuilding is, therefore, defined as those conditions and processes that either enable or hinder the transition from a state of fragility and adversity to the realization of sustainable peace through the intrinsic relationships between children, family, and the society in which they live (Britto, 2012; Sagi-Schwartz, 2012).

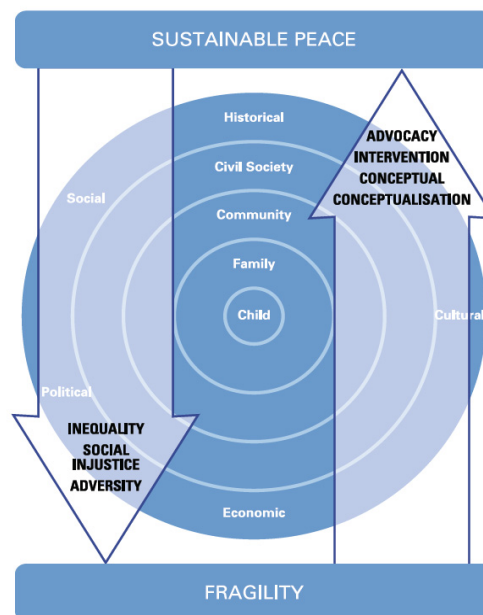


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Concluding Remarks

The findings from the study reflect an emerging and dynamic field. The research sets out to review the extant literature in order to advance understanding of the linkages between ECD and peacebuilding. The literature identified showed a wide-ranging knowledge-base of how children are positioned in relation to peace and peacebuilding. The findings also indicated that the intersections between children, early childhood, and peacebuilding are cross-cutting issues in the broader sustainable development global agenda. If ECD is to be an avenue in bringing about social transformation, then, it is important to expand the evidence base with the integration of knowledge from multi-disciplinary fields to inform a future research agenda that supports connections between ECD or ECCE and the promotion of socially cohesive societies.

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