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Teachers as agents of peace? *Exploring teacher agency in social cohesion in Pakistan*

This paper studies an under-researched area—teachers’ role in peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts—through exploring teacher agency for social cohesion in Pakistan. Insights are sought into teachers’ perspectives on the major drivers of conflict in society and the role of education and teachers in social cohesion and mitigating inequities in education. A 4Rs framework of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation was employed to analyse data gathered from: interviews with and classroom observations of teacher educators; focus group discussions with and questionnaires completed by pre- and in-service teachers, and analysis of teacher education and school curriculum texts. While teachers expressed a nuanced understanding of the conflict drivers in society and appreciated the significance of education in peacebuilding, they subscribed to assimilationist approaches to social cohesion which were aligned with curriculum texts and promoted official nation-building agendas. Additionally, teachers saw issues of social cohesion as peripheral to the core academic curriculum. Teachers’ identity was integrally linked to their religious affiliations.

Key words: Social cohesion, teacher education, teacher agency, Pakistan, conflict

Introduction

Globally there is a rekindled interest in the role of education for the promotion of peace, tolerance and sustainable development and the potential of teachers as active agents of peacebuilding (Authors et al 2015). Such an agentic perspective of teachers is significant in conflict-affected settings where both teachers and students may bring the legacies of hurt, trauma and prejudice existing in the wider community. Such situations demand that teachers have the skills and competences as well as the necessary resources to act in ways that can challenge the historical legacies of conflict and inequality both inside and outside the classroom. For these reasons, in conflict-affected contexts programmes are launched to support teachers’ role in peacebuilding e.g., the UNICEF supported programme ‘Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy’ (Novelli, Lopez

Cardozo and Smith 2015). Nevertheless, little is known about how teachers as key actors can promote and sustain peacebuilding through social cohesion and mitigation of inequality (Author et al 2015). This paper seeks to fill this gap by undertaking an empirical enquiry of teachers' agency in social cohesion in the conflict-affected context of Pakistan.

What follows is a brief introduction to the drivers of conflict in Pakistan. It is followed by a description of the context of education in the country. The next section looks at literature in relation to teacher agency for sustainable peace and situates the study in a broad analytical framework. The two sections that follow respectively map out the empirical study and its results. The final section provides a discussion on the key issues emerging from the findings and make recommendations for policy and practice in education.

Drivers of conflict in Pakistan

In order to understand the relationship between education and peace, as well as the role of teachers in building social cohesion in Pakistan, it is important first to map out key conflict drivers in the country. In 2015, Pakistan ranked 13th on the list of fragile states prepared by the Fund for Peace (<http://fsi.fundforpeace.org>). Two factors underpinning several conflict drivers include Pakistan's identity in relation to Islam and the role of external powers. While Pakistan's creation as a nation-state was the result of a largely non-violent political movement mobilised by Muslims of united India, the sudden outburst of large scale communal violence during partition in 1947 made religion/Islam a key feature of Pakistan's identity and fear of the 'other' central to collective memory (Ahmed 2002). The centrality of Islam and antagonistic external 'others' to national identity was further supported by factors such as political instability, secessionist movements, and conflicts, as discussed below.

A discussion of Pakistan's religious composition is pertinent to understanding the relationship between religion and conflict. Majority (96%) of the estimated 189 million Pakistanis are Muslims (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics www.pbs.gov.pk), who are divided into two main sects, Sunni and Shi'a. The basis of difference between Shi'a Muslims and Sunni Muslims is quite complex and historically rooted but this discussion is beyond the scope of the paper. Although no official statistics exist and estimates vary, according to Pew Research Centre (2009) around 10-15% of Pakistani Muslims are Shi'a and the rest are Sunni. Pakistan's small religious minority (4%) includes Christians (largest group), Hindus (mostly settled in the border districts of Sindh) and the Ahmadi community who consider themselves Muslims but were declared non-Muslims by the state in 1974 (Government of Pakistan, 1998).

Islamisation as a nation building strategy began under Z. A. Bhutto after Pakistan's break-up in 1971 after a civil war against Bengalis and war with India. 'It was in this context that he [Bhutto] made a renewed effort to assert the country's Islamic identity', starting with his Islamic socialism and the promulgation of the Ahmadi clause in the 1973 constitution (Akhtar, Amirali and Raza, 2007, 387). Islamisation as a political project reached new heights under the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq who anchored the political discourse in Islam (Ispahani, 2015). The Islamisation of Pakistan also coincided with the Soviet-Afghan war and Pakistan's participation in it as a frontline state, with the US and its allies supporting the *jihad* which strengthened the hold of the religious right and created militant Islamic groups.

By officially defining what is Islamic, especially through the legislation of Islamic laws according to Sunni interpretation, the Shi'a Muslims felt excluded from the state sponsored nation-building project (Rashid 1997). In recent years, sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a has escalated in Pakistan, with 550 people killed and

1853 injured in sectarian violence just between 2013 and 2014 (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies 2014). Religious conflict also relates to inter-faith violence targeted against Pakistan's non-Muslim citizens. Despite the constitutional guarantee of the freedom to practice religion, violations of this right are widespread (Amnesty International 2015).

Pakistan's religious 'homogeneity' stands in stark contrast to its ethno-linguistic diversity. Pakistan comprises five major ethnic groups, and several minor ethnic groups, with language considered an important marker of ethnicity. According to the 1998 census, Punjabis constitute 55%,(including 11% who speak Siraiki, a Punjabi variant) Pakhtuns 15%, Sindhis 14%, *Mohajirs*¹ 8% (these speak Urdu natively, the national language in Pakistan), Balochs 4% and others 4% (Government of Pakistan 1998). In terms of Human Development Index, Punjab (0.6699) is Pakistan's most developed province, followed by Sindh (0.6262), KP (0.6065) and Balochistan (0.5557) (Arif 2013). With more than half of Pakistan's population concentrated in Punjab, and the dominance of Punjabis in the social, economic and political landscape in Pakistan there is resentment among the smaller provinces and ethnic minorities (Cohen 2005). The ruling elite has used 'Islam to justify their coercive and authoritarian methods in dealing with ethnic, regional and economic discontent' (Khan 1999, 177).

Education and conflict have also directly intersected with serious consequences for students and teachers' participation in the education process. For example, in KP and the federally administered tribal areas, the Taliban with their extremist views about code

¹ A term that describes the Urdu speaking Muslims who migrated to Pakistan after its independence and their descendants

of conduct in life, inflicted violent attacks on schools, especially those for girls, burning or bombing a large number of them and killing hundreds of students and teachers (Khan and Seltzer 2016, 3). The 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar killed 144 people, including 132 children, and in 2016, gunmen opened fire at Bacha Khan University killing 21 people (Shahid 2016). In Balochistan attacks on education institutions have been perpetrated for three reasons. Baloch nationalists have targeted Punjabi teachers seen as symbols of the state; militant Sunni groups have attacked members of the Shia community; and armed Islamist groups have attacked in opposition to the content and process of education, particularly that of girls (Human Rights Watch 2010). In parts of Sindh, especially in Karachi, schools operate in an atmosphere of heightened ethnic, political and sectarian violence, exposing children to violence and learning about violence. In terms of lives lost, ethnically motivated political violence in Karachi is comparable to that in the war against the militants in northern Pakistan (Ghazdar 2011).

Regarding the role of education in peacebuilding many analysts have argued, perhaps erroneously, that the madrassas are the breeding ground for radicalization. However, madrassas account for only a 'tiny fraction of student enrolment and cannot pose a major security challenge as is perceived in the West' (Winthrop and Graff 2010,15). Others have argued that the national curriculum and textbooks produce 'forms of religious intolerance', exalt 'the military', and secure 'its centrality to the preservation of Pakistan in ways' that promote conflict (Author 2010, 228).

Context and background of education in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan, states that: 'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner

as maybe determined by law' (Government of Pakistan 2010). Nevertheless, 25 million children within that age bracket are out of school (Alif Ailaan 2014).

The government schools are the main providers of primary (grades I-V), middle (grades VI-VIII) and secondary (Grades IX-X) education. However, the share of private schools is increasing so that currently more than one-thirds of the population in education (37%) is enrolled in the private sector, with 36% enrolled at primary, 39% at middle and 41% at secondary level in private institutions (NEMIS-AEPAM 2015).

The medium of instruction in the government schools is mainly Urdu which is also the lingua franca. In Sindh, there is the option of using the Sindhi language as a medium of instruction. In most private schools the medium of instruction is English. The use of different medium of instruction across the government and private schools has created a two-tiered system of education that contributes to social stratification.

The government schools are segregated into those for male students with male teachers and for female students with female teachers. Typically, secondary schools in Pakistan are single sex and parents prefer to send their girls to a single sex school. Ali (2011, 46) maintains that in Sindh 'at middle school level in rural areas the male teachers are almost 3.5 times more than female teachers', implying that post-primary girls' schools in rural areas would be critically short-staffed.

In spite of the commitments to the provision of education there were persisting systemic issues in the access and quality of education provided. For example, the infrastructure of public schools especially in rural areas was in a state of disrepair with a large number of schools without toilets and/or boundary walls (NEMIS AEPAM 2015). A significant concern was that the public education largely failed to promote national harmony for a socially cohesive and peaceful society (Author 2010).

Several reform initiatives were taken to address the issues of low quality of education in the conflict-affected setting as described in the preceding section. For example, the National Curriculum was revised in 2006 as a major strategy of social transformation through integration and social cohesion. The National Curriculum 2006 in Pakistan Studies, a compulsory and assessed subject at secondary level, mentions the inculcation of ‘*awareness about the multicultural heritage of Pakistan*’ to help learners ‘*appreciate the cultural diversity and get used to the idea of unity in diversity*’ (MoE 2006, 1). However, in spite of the claim to ‘unity in diversity’ the objectives noted in the national curriculum in Pakistan Studies push towards homogeneity as discussed later in this paper.

Another significant reform initiative was the revision of the curriculum of education leading to the introduction of a four-year B.Ed. (Hons), a two-year Associate Degree for teachers premised on the notion of the teacher as a reflective practitioner:

[I]t is imperative to revise the current curriculum to improve the teacher development program further. [----] [E]ngaging in courses like critical thinking and reflective practice, studying contemporary issues and trends in education and involvement of prospective teachers in practical/field work would greatly reduce isolation of the teacher and will develop the habit of inquiry into practice. This breakthrough is expected to facilitate the process of multiculturalism and pluralism in our education system to bring about social transformation in the society (HEC 2010,15).

Additionally, the 18th amendment to the constitution, promulgated in 2010, devolved authority for decision-making in education to the provincial governments. This was seen as redistributing access to resources and reducing inequities, greater provincial participation in policy formulation and increase in the allocation of educational budgets. In the wake of the devolution of power, efforts were made through the National Curriculum Council to ensure that provinces continued to subscribe to the National Curriculum 2006 because the curriculum was seen as a potent strategy to

harmonise the education systems across the provinces and for the representation of core cultural and civic values in the curriculum and textbooks (Author et al, 2017).

In this educational reform context, the research reported in this paper seeks to examine how teachers in Pakistan were playing a role in peacebuilding through social cohesion as socially cohesive communities have higher levels of mutual trust and less violence and crime and are therefore more peaceful. It is part of a larger cross-country research project that looked at policies, programmes and interventions that focus on teacher agency in social cohesion. UNICEF (2014, 2) refers to social cohesion as the ‘quality of coexistence between the multiple groups that operate within a society. Groups can be distinguished in terms of ethnic and socio-cultural origin, religious and political beliefs, social class or economic sector or on the basis of interpersonal characteristics such as gender and age. [--] strengthening of social cohesion, is one of the results that emerge from an effective peacebuilding intervention’. Addressing structural, inter-personal, and inter-group domains is therefore vital to the promotion of social cohesion.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Teacher agency

Historically, the role of teachers in the classrooms was perceived as being limited to implementing the curriculum developed by external agencies and teaching was seen as transmission of knowledge with learners being passive recipients. However, over the last four decades there has been a gradual shift in the understanding of teachers’ role especially teacher agency in matters such as curriculum innovation and transformation of teaching (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2013). The notion of teachers as transformative agents of change can be traced back to the movement of

‘teacher-research’ in the UK in the context of the Humanities Curriculum Project (Stenhouse 1975). In this movement, Stenhouse saw the teacher as a researcher bringing about change in the culture of classroom by questioning traditional mores and hierarchies in the classroom (*ibid.*). At the same time in the USA, Schwab (1969, 1) elaborated that the problems in curriculum reform were essentially about practical action in specific situations and emphasized the role of teachers’ ‘practical knowledge’ as apposed to theoretical esoteric knowledge. In their seminal work on ‘Teachers as Curriculum Planners’, Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 4) emphasise that individual teachers at all levels draw on their ‘personal narratives and lived experience’ in planning curriculum and instruction. They view teachers not as implementers of knowledge drawn from external sources but view teachers’ practical knowledge at the centre of the education enterprise. Elsewhere, the proponents of the action research tradition in teacher development maintained that teacher-agency was in a dialectical relationship with action research because the cyclical process of action and reflection promotes teacher-agency in improving practice while teacher-agency is a significant element that drives the action research process towards improvement of practice (Eliot 2001; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Parsons 2013).

However, for the potential of teacher agency to be realised in the context of curriculum innovation or in improvement of practice, contextual and structural issues would need to be taken into account, as teacher agency is not enough to bring about a transformation in social settings such as schools if conditions of work remained the same (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2013). In a historical review of literature on agency, structure and teacher empowerment, Gore (1989, 22) holds that decontextualized views of agency, as the capacity to ‘act otherwise’, are easily linked to actions for which the consequence are anything but the

immediate and personal and emphasizes the significance of situating teacher agency in the broader historical and social context to drive change in the social situations. Along similar lines, in their work on teacher agency and curriculum change, Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013, 11) looked at the phenomenon of teacher agency as it manifests itself in concrete settings and maintain that 'It (agency) denotes a quality of engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts for action, not a quality of actors themselves'.

Indeed Author et al (2015, 11) note that the dualism in structure and agency reflects a historical tension in social sciences but there have been efforts to 'synthesise this binary by seeing social systems as the result of interaction between individuals (agency), who are aware of the 'rules' (structure) that influence their actions but who are also capable of bringing about structural change by influencing the 'rules' that govern social action'. In other words, teacher agency must engage with the strategic context within which their practice is located.

Besides the issue of tensions in teacher agency and social-cultural structures as noted above, another issue with the literature on teacher agency is that it mainly covers generic issues of education quality and teachers' role within it. For example, two decades of research in in-service teacher education carried out by a premier institution in Pakistan was premised on the notion of 'teachers as agents of change' where the role of teacher was seen largely in terms of improving generic quality in education such as: school improvement for improved student-learning (Anderson and Kumari 2009) and curriculum change (Author 2013). Likewise, the global literature on teacher agency has largely discussed teacher agency in relation to curriculum development and teaching practice (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2013; Stenhouse 1975).

Largely, the notion of teacher agency does not focus on specific social and political issues in education that need to be addressed such as education for

peacebuilding. Here, peace is taken to be ‘positive peace’ that is not simply concerned with the absence of violence (negative peace) but looks at structural issues that could lead to social injustice, exclusion and disharmony in society leading to conflict (Galtung 1990). For example, issues of social cohesion, lack of mutual trust and respect for diversity are often found in the socio-political context within which education enterprise takes place but are not an explicit focus of change through teacher agency. Novelli and Smith (2011) maintain that teacher agency as peacebuilders is understood in relation to their capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings. It is their ability to think, feel and act in order to foster ‘values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself’ (Novelli and Smith 2011, 7). The discussion so far suggests that teacher agency for socio-political issues such as peacebuilding should be studied in a broader socio-cultural framework that would enable a situated understanding of how and if teachers promote peacebuilding.

The 4Rs framework

Nancy Fraser’s framework of three dimensions of social justice ‘redistribution, recognition and representation’ (2001, 21-22), provides a framework to understand the role of education in peacebuilding and social cohesion i.e. *redistribution* aims at addressing inequalities (largely economic) through opening access to opportunity and resources; *recognition* entails respecting difference and diversity in the social systems while *representation* aims to encourage participation (Fraser 1997, 2001,).

From the above it can be drawn that redistribution is not a simple matter of increased access to resources and opportunity for better economic progress because it is integrally linked to recognition and representation of groups marginalized on the basis of language, religion, gender or other forms of exclusion. Recognition and representation are inherently political processes as they require questioning deep-rooted

assumptions and hierarchies in the social structure contributing to marginalization and schisms in society. This framework is usually employed at the macro level, where the dynamics of reform are focused on redistributing the benefits of education through improved access to education across the socioeconomic boundaries. However, it can also be employed in classrooms where social justice issues are experienced first-hand. A practical manifestation of this framework at the classroom level would be a pedagogic process different from that of 'knowledge reproduction' with concomitant role of the teachers and learners as active participants in the pedagogic process, challenging the norms and practices related to the status of teachers, learners, curriculum and texts (Author 2016).

Novelli, Lopez Cardozo and Smith (2015, 10) build on the work of Nancy Fraser and argue that 'for conflict- affected and post- conflict contexts, there is a need for processes of *reconciliation*, so that historic and present tensions, grievances and injustices are dealt with to build a more sustainable peaceful society'. Reconciliation or dealing with injustices would entail teaching about the historical drivers of conflict and enabling a critical stance towards dominant historical narratives. Novelli, Lopez Cardozo and Smith (2015) consider that the 4Rs framework of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation allows for an exploration of transformations necessary for sustainable peace in conflict-affected societies and the role of education within it. This paper then draws on the 4Rs analytical framework while acknowledging that social structures and processes are not neatly categorised within these four analytic categories but are messy and often overlapping or in tension. There are also tensions in Fraser's 3Rs that essentialise difference through positive discrimination such as targeted redistribution of resources, while reconciliation efforts could gloss over difference in an effort to build harmony. For example, Fraser (1997)

argues that recognition can also reify culture and identity groups, therefore, matters of cultural recognition have to be addressed alongside matters of distributive justice.

The Study

The study was carried out in Sindh, the second most populous province. With 91% of its estimated 42.4 million population being Muslims, Sindh has the highest proportion of religious-minorities in Pakistan (GoS 2014). It includes some of the most poverty ridden and conflict-affected areas. Moreover, ethnicity and language are also social cohesion issues because around 60 % of the population living in Sindh is ethnic Sindhi, followed by Urdu-language speakers (21%). In rural areas, the vast majority of the population (over 92 %) is Sindhi, whereas in urban areas the ethnic makeup is far more diverse: Urdu-language speakers represent the largest demographic group in urban areas at 41.5%, compared to only 25 % Sindhi speakers (GoS, 2014). Karachi, the capital city of Sindh, reflects key conflict-drivers—ethnic, political and sectarian violence and both Karachi and interior Sindh exhibit structural violence.

Four teacher education institutions in Sindh were purposively selected from sites with a wide range in social class, ethnicity and religion. These included, a government teacher education institution from District South in Karachi as it covered some of the poorest areas of the city alongside Clifton an affluent middle class neighbourhood, reflecting a wide gap among the social classes, and a private institution in Karachi was selected. Two other government teacher education institutions in smaller towns were selected because their intake of teachers was from all the districts in Sindh including from far off rural areas some with larger non-Muslim population.

Interviews and focus group discussion were carried out with key stakeholders to provide depth of insight. Breadth of perspectives was sought through a questionnaire completed by 266 respondents, of whom 35% were pre- and 65% were in-service

teachers; 48% were males and 52% females and 98% were Muslims while 2% were non-Muslims. The questionnaire had a component of open questions on issues of social cohesion. The study draws on data from 1-3, listed in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The study also looked at key documents including the National Curriculum 2006, textbooks in Pakistan Studies a compulsory subject for driving the national narrative of social integration and national identity and the revised curriculum of initial teacher education.

Results

Several key findings emerge from the study. First, teachers' perspectives were sophisticated and showed a complex understanding of the issues that lead to exacerbating divisions, conflict and violence in society and the role of education within it. However, there was little critique of the nature of education that could promote or hinder social harmony. Second, teachers largely subscribed to the policy narrative of assimilation with some difference in the nuances of understanding in the various groups. Third, teachers and teacher educators made a distinction in the peripheral and core curriculum and saw matters related to social cohesion as peripheral to the core (academic) curriculum.

Teachers' perspective on key issues in social cohesion and the role of education within it

Of the 266 teachers and the 10 teacher educators responding to the question, 'What are the main issues regarding social cohesion and justice in your country?' A good 80% of the respondents listed at least two or three key issues and the most cited were: religion, ethnicity, social class, and social justice, followed by language and gender as reflected in the extracts below. In examining the responses, comparisons

were made in the responses by the different groups i.e., teachers and teacher educators, male and female, ethnicity (Sindhi, Pashtun, Mohajir), Muslims and non-Muslim, and Shi'as and Sunnis. This last comparison was limited because only 33% of the Muslim respondents noted their sect. Results showed that perspectives were overwhelmingly shared with some difference in the nuances.

[...] the biggest issue is that there is discrimination on the basis of sect, religion, ethnicity, rich and poor in the country.[--]Hatred is being spread on the basis of religion even though our beloved Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has declared all Muslims are brother to each other. (Extract 1: Teacher, Muslim (Sunni) Male)

In our society sectarianism has played the most important role and because of this we live separately from each other. After that, there are differences on the basis of language and ethnicity such as Sindhi, Mohajir, Pakhtun. Moreover, today the biggest reason of this anarchy is due to the distance from our religion Islam because of which we are faced with different issues these days (Extract 2: Teacher, Muslim Male)

There are many religion and caste related issues in our society. People from higher caste become harsh towards others, which is wrong. (Extract 3: Teacher Hindu, Female)

See the conflict which is going on in our society basically it depends on two things. Especially when you see our Karachi's environment it's mostly linguistic and [...] religious conflict, Shia, Sunni etc. We have divided ourselves in sects/ groups whereas these sects/ groups are on the basis of religion or language. (Extract 4: Teacher Educator, Muslim, Male)

Teachers noted religion as a key driver of conflict followed by other social issues. For example, in the first extract the teacher notes that hatred is being spread in the name of religion even when it goes against the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH). The second extract also notes sectarianism and 'distance from religion' as a major cause of disharmony. In extract 3, religion is noted as the major issue but from a Hindu perspective of divisions on the basis of caste. However, teachers recognize that even if religion is a major driver of conflict, it is not the only one. They note language and ethnicity also as significant contributing factors to social conflict. In Sindh, the issue of

linguistic marginalization is especially acute because there is a strong sentiment of marginalization among the Sindhi-speaking people, also reflected in the data, linked to the voice, role and status of regional/provincial language compared to Urdu or English.

In sum, teachers recognized inequalities on the basis of religion (e.g. inter-faith and intra-faith), ethnicity (e.g. Sindhi, Mohajirs and Pakhtuns), culture (language) and income (e.g. rich and poor). These inequalities framed in the political economy of education are significant contributors to conflict in society.

When asked about the role that education could play in addressing these issues there was an overwhelming similarity in the nature of responses. Teachers expressed a strong faith in the role of education in building a peaceful and socially cohesive society. While there was some critique of the education system in the country there was little questioning of the nature and purpose of an education for peacebuilding.

Education and educational institutions can play a vital role in ending these issues in society. There should be one education system for the rich and poor. (Extract 5: Teacher, Muslim (Sunni), Male)

Education can end the hatred due to religion in society. We should include such topics in the curriculum that teach about tolerance. We teachers should share good things with students apart from day to day teaching. (Extract 6: Teacher, Hindu, Sindhi, Male)

Education can play an important role in solving these issues. Islamic education including education of the Islamic law should be given. (Extract 7: Teacher Muslim, Mohajir, Female)

In our society girls are not allowed to go to school so they cannot get education. If a girl is educated then the whole family gets educated because the girl will become a mother and will teach and train her children properly. Education brings awareness and enlightenment. (Extract 8: Teacher Muslim (Sunni), Sindhi, Female)

The data extracts above show that there is some critique of the education system which is perceived to be divided at least in two streams one for the rich (private schools) and the other for the poor (public schools) (data extract 5). There is also some suggestion about the curriculum content that could promote social harmony such as in extract 6 (teach tolerance) and extract 7 (Islamic education). Of course, in using Islamic education the question arises about the space and voice of the non-Muslim minority learners in the education process and the diverse nature of Islamic thought and practice in Pakistan.

Relatively few teachers pointed out gender equity as an issue for social inequities and these were largely female teachers. For example, in data extract 8 the teacher recognizes the power and potential of female education in bringing ‘awareness and enlightenment’. Teachers expressed a strong faith in the role that education could play through redistributing opportunity. However, what would be the nature of education that would enable students to go beyond awareness and become genuine participants in the education process and thereby in society is a question that the participants did not reflect upon.

Teachers, curriculum and texts

Two main issues emerged regarding the approach taken by the teachers in relation to the curriculum and texts. Teachers saw assimilation to the key messages in the national curriculum and textbooks as an approach to promoting peace and social harmony. They made a distinction between core and peripheral curriculum and issues such as peacebuilding, mitigation of conflict and social harmony were not seen as part of the core academic curriculum.

Assimilation or diversity

A significant trend in teachers' views about their role was that of assimilation of all with the dominant Muslim values and worldview of harmony and unity. In this respect teachers' perception of their role in social harmony was aligned with the messages in the curriculum and textbooks of Pakistan Studies, which also took an explicit assimilationist stance towards building a socially cohesive narrative of national identity based on Islam. It assumed all citizens to be Muslim who were to be trained, disciplined and governed in a homogenous way. The Pakistan Studies curriculum explicitly stated the following as some of the aims of teaching the subject:

Inculcate a sense of gratitude to Almighty Allah for blessing us with an independent and sovereign state.

Underscore the importance of national integration, cohesion and patriotism

Promote an ideology of Pakistan, the Muslim struggle for independence and endeavours for establishing a modern welfare state.

Lay emphasis on the rights and obligations of the citizens of an independent and sovereign state. (MoE 2006, p.1)

In concert with the curriculum, the prescribed textbooks also presented Pakistan as a state founded on Islamic ideology. For example, the textbook prescribed for use in Pakistan Studies following the national curriculum, made clear the responsibilities of the citizen of an ideological state in no uncertain terms:

'They should try to lead their lives in accordance with the teachings of Islam, which is the basis of the country. This requires enforcement of laws and regulations according to Islamic Sharia' (STBJ, 2013, p. 33).

Teachers views on the ways to deal with the social cohesion issues strongly resonated with the assimilationist agenda of the curriculum texts analysed above:

We will highlight the importance of tolerance among the students. Before religion I will teach about humanity. We will provide equal rights to everyone

and will act according to the merit system. (Extract 9: Teacher, Hindu Sindhi, Male)

As a teacher I can teach students to respect each other whether s/he is Muslim or Hindu, or belong to any caste, race, gender etc. (Extract 10: Teacher, Muslim (Shi'a), Male)

As a teacher we will teach our students about peace that Islam is a religion of peace. (Extract 11: Teacher, Muslim (Sunni), Sindhi, Male)

I can work in a manner that leads towards granting permission of education to the girls by this society. This is a society that does not allow girls to go for studies. (Extract 12: Teacher, Female, Muslim)

We will teach our children through the example of our beloved Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). (Extract 13: Student-Teacher, Female, Muslim)

In the illustrative extracts above, it is seen that teachers had weaved in religion in a number of ways to explain their role in supporting a socially cohesive society and which reflected their identity as followers of a faith. The Muslim teachers were mainly drawing upon Muslim values and worldview to bring the different groups closer.

It could be concluded that the Muslim teachers largely subscribed to the official narrative of drawing upon Islamic injunctions for social cohesion. Teachers from the minority backgrounds also appealed to the principle of assimilation but considered 'humanity' as the guiding framework in this regard as noted in data extract 9, 'Before religion I will teach about humanity'. In other words, all teachers looked for common ground such as 'humanity' or 'Islam' to bring all groups together. A question emerges about the accommodation for diversity, as without the recognition of and respect for internal diversity, social cohesion remains fragile. There did not appear to be critical engagement with the issue of voice and space for those who did not subscribe to the normative views about Islam or humanity. This was a significant question in the context especially where official narratives as driven by the textbooks constructed Hindus and

Muslims and Hinduism and Islam in binary opposition, which served to create stereotypes and distinguished Pakistanis from Indians. Indeed these findings confirm what Author (2010, 257) found that, “[T]he national curriculum uses religion (Islam) as the key boundary between the Muslim Pakistani 'self' and the antagonist non-Muslim 'other'”.

Teachers subscribing to the assimilationist views was a concern especially as they also noted several barriers to access and participation in education for marginalized groups. For example, extract 9, alludes to the prevalence of lack of transparency and disregard for merit in access to opportunity. Likewise, in extract 12 the structural and cultural barriers to girls’ participation in education are noted (Also see Authors 2016 for a discussion on teacher governance issues).

To conclude, within the 4Rs framework the largely assimilationist approach adopted by teachers, curriculum and texts could be interpreted as a step towards reconciliation but it remained in tension with the other 3Rs because it did not appear to provide space and voice to the diverse groups in the society and promoted an uncritical attitude towards the acceptance of state sponsored ideologies, especially where distribution of opportunity and access to education was not equitable.

Core or peripheral curriculum

A discernable strand in teachers’ understanding was that academic curriculum was the core and issues such as peacebuilding and social cohesion remained peripheral. For example,

Mainly we try to stick to the topic. Yes. Something out of the topic, which hurts anyone, must not be discussed in the classroom and we don't do it. Shia, Sunni, Sindhi, Balochi everyone is sitting there. When we are teaching a topic we have to take care that we should not make anyone a target. We have to talk in a neutral way so that no one feels bad. Stick to the topic. (Extract 14: Teacher Educator, Muslim, Male)

As a teacher I would try to focus fully on my subject, which I will teach to my students with full command. (Extract 15: Teacher, Muslim, Male)

This is not the responsibility of educational institutions. It is the duty of other institutions. We are only bound to our curriculum; no more responsibility be imposed on us. (Extract 16: Teacher, Muslim, Male)

I enter the classroom and observe the mood of students [--] if some bad incident has happened in the city which has disturbed the people, definitely I will engage the class in a discussion on it. Now it depends on the teacher, if any bad incident has happened, the teacher has to explain thoroughly, discussing the bad incident from all angles (Extract 17: Teacher Educator, Muslim, Male)

These excerpts show that teachers made a distinction between the core curriculum and the peripheral curriculum. For example, in the first three extracts in this section, teachers draw a boundary between the topic or subject and show their preference for sticking to the subject or topic. Here, 'topic' is taken to mean the curriculum topic of the lesson; presumably the issues of social cohesion are not seen to be within the curriculum topic. However, the reason for limiting their role to the topic is different. In the first case the teacher appears to believe that 'being neutral and not making anyone feel bad' is important for a teacher. Dealing with difficult issues is seen as breaching the neutral role of a teacher. While the next two extracts suggest teachers do not see issues such as social cohesion and conflict resolution within their remit of work. In the fourth case the teacher maintained that he would gauge the 'mood of the students' and in case of a 'bad incident in the city' he would provide space to students to talk about it and analyse it from different angles. This suggests that the teacher was aware of the potential of his agency in addressing issues as they emerge even if that meant changing the course of the lesson. However, the strategy he proposed was somewhat adhoc and

depended on the eventuality of a 'bad incident' occurring. There was little evidence of planned strategies to include in teaching contentious issues related to social harmony through providing voice and space to the diverse groups in the class. An alternate interpretation could be that given the low status of teaching profession in society, teachers did not feel empowered to see their role in the broader social context and therefore limited themselves to issues of academic nature. In addition, as extract 16 indicates, teachers may tend to see the promotion of social cohesion as yet an additional role expectation which some were unwilling to fulfil.

It is worth noting that the revised curriculum of education for pre-service teachers also focussed on general elements of quality such as 'developing reflective practitioners'. It did not contextualise the role of education and of teachers in explicitly dealing in the classroom with issues such as religious and cultural diversity, marginalization due to language of instruction, gender inequities and the widening gap in the social classes. For example, for the Associate Degree in Education (HEC 2010), the foundation course entitled 'Methods of Teaching' (p.40), provides methods of teaching in very general terms (e.g. Inquiry method, Demonstration method, Activity & Cooperative Learning methods (p.42), whereas there are specific methods of teaching that could be employed to address particular issues of participation of marginalized learners. The reading list for this course draws mainly on Euro-Western sources that may not necessarily have issues of inequity of the type or to the extent that they are prevalent in schools in Pakistan. For the same programme, the content course entitled 'Inclusive Education' (HEC 2010, p.99) could have logically provided space for issues of inclusion and exclusion. However, it is concerned with issues on differentiating special education from inclusive education. Finally, the professional course 'Contemporary Issues and Trends in Education (p.58)' does address a range of social

issues but from a perspective of creating awareness, 'Teachers need to be aware of the contemporary issues and trends in education. Issues such as population explosion, HIV/AIDs, gender and development, sustainable development require a broad based knowledge approach for teacher preparation' (p.58). Indeed an examination of the teacher educators' practice through observation and interviews, revealed that in line with the curriculum they also subscribed to a practice that focussed on academic content (e.g. extract 14). Hence, it is unsurprising that in spite of being aware, teachers also did not see social, political and cultural issues of inequity as part of the core curriculum. In sum, teachers and teacher educators exhibited a deep understanding of interplay of factors such as poverty, social class and lack of justice that divided the society into classes, or how grouping along the lines of religion, ethnicity and culture led to violence, conflict and increasing social schisms. However, in spite of an understanding and awareness of these issues, their responses demonstrated that issues to deal with inequities and divisions in society were perceived by them as peripheral to the core curriculum to be dealt with if an opportunity arose, or put aside as 'out of topic'. For teachers to play an active role in peacebuilding they would need to engage with the societal structures and reconcile the tensions in mitigating inequalities and related drivers of conflict. Teacher education curriculum and process would need to ensure that it equips the teachers to engage in this process of reconciliation within the classroom dynamics. More significantly perhaps, the status of teachers and their role in decision-making process would need to be enhanced so that they feel empowered to exercise their agency in the course of their professional activities. It is worth noting that recently there have been extensive reforms in teacher governance matters and related policies leading to among other changes an enhancement in teachers' salaries (Authors 2016).

Discussion

The preceding sections raise several issues for teachers as agents in peacebuilding within the 4Rs framework. Teachers' awareness of their agency in the classroom could change the classroom dynamics through an equitable distribution of resources and voice for all students. However, mere awareness is not sufficient. For teachers to play a role as agents of change in the classroom, teachers' strategic and political action would be required. Second, there was an overwhelming similarity in the policy narrative on social cohesions and teachers' views thereby raising questions for the process of reconciliation in the event that participants did not subscribe to normative views in society. Third, separation of the core and academic curriculum suggests an orientation to education that is not rooted in the social political and cultural context of education delivery. These issues are discussed in some depth.

Teachers' awareness of drivers of conflict in Pakistan was complex and suggested that teachers understood the dynamics of political economy of education that facilitated or hindered redistribution of resources and opportunities to marginalized groups in society. While, awareness could lead to the creation of spaces in the education process for reconciliation through critique and questioning of the national narrative, the scope of these spaces appeared to be limited due to an overwhelming similarity between teachers' beliefs and the policy narrative of assimilation being the approach to social harmony. While assimilation to commonly held principles or values (whether religious or humanistic) may be necessary for promoting social cohesion and reducing conflict and tensions in society, it raises the question of representation and recognition of minority or marginalized groups. For example, in the current climate of acute tensions in society on the basis of religious difference (sectarianism and across religions) a push towards assimilation would entrench further historical injustices meted out to religious minorities. Hence exercising teacher agency for peacebuilding has to be

seen within the politics of recognition and participation of the marginalized.

Reconciliation would necessarily require opening up of spaces for debate and critique on historical forms of injustice. Novelli, Lopez Cardozo and Smith (2015) note that history education could play a positive role in dealing with the past and historical memory, truth and reparations, transitional justice processes, issues related to bringing communities together, and processes of forgiving and the broader processes of social healing. However, in the case of Pakistan Studies, the texts took a reductionist approach treating Hindus and Muslims in a binary relationship and therefore did not appear to provide space for reconciliation.

The separation of curriculum into core and peripheral is understandable in terms of prioritizing the curriculum content. However, assigning issues of social cohesion such as building mutual trust or mitigating inequities as peripheral or beyond the core responsibility of the teacher suggests that at least for some of the teachers the purpose of education was ‘academic preparation’ to the exclusion of all other purposes. Data and findings in the preceding section highlight this tension in the core and peripheral purpose(s) of education and raises questions about the value and relevance of education. What would be the value of a purely academic curriculum for a society that is fragile on the basis of tensions within internal groups? Would such an education be relevant to the needs within the current social-cultural context? Novelli, Lopez Cardozo and Smith (2015, 7) note that there are distinctive needs of conflict-affected societies requiring ‘new thinking on what a conflict-sensitive peacebuilding education might look like, and necessarily requires a context- sensitive approach that builds on the specific political economy and conflict dynamics of each country and how education might support broader peacebuilding goals’. Likewise, while dealing directly with key issues of injustices, divisions and conflict histories are difficult and requires strong skills on the

part of teachers to do so in a safe pedagogic environment, an explicit approach in tackling key conflict drivers both within school and teacher education curriculum might produce more transformatory outcomes.

There are implications for policy and provision of education in a context that is torn with inequities, social injustice and ensuing social disharmony. Education reform in Pakistan was undertaken to promote cultural pluralism but the interventions analysed were largely concerned with technical concerns such as the introduction of ‘outcomes based’ national curriculum. For education and teacher agency within it to play a potent role in social cohesion the reform initiatives must be informed by the political and social causes of conflict and disharmony in society and engage with them. Especially, in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan where Islamic faith was a significant element of individual and collective identity, it would be incumbent upon education policy interventions to be cognisant of the sensitivities of the cultural factors and engage with them.

The systemic barriers to social cohesion need to be addressed through a critical evaluation of the policies and provision of education in the country. Two major issues in this regard are the increasing share of the private sector in providing basic education and the policy of language in education. Both these educational issues act as a divisive force in society. It is a strong perception that there is one system of education for those who can afford to pay and the public system of education (also known as the Urdu medium education) is for the poor sections of society.

Finally, an exclusive focus on the academic curriculum and narrowly defined education outcomes could preclude the broader role of education in building a narrative of national cohesion. Policy initiatives in education must be rooted in the specific socio-cultural and political context. Indeed Novelli et al (2014, 4) confirm that ‘failure to

locate the implementation of educational interventions within distinctive cultural, social, religious and political contexts can undermine effectiveness in achieving aims, and may result in unintended consequences that jeopardise the capacity of education to be a vehicle for peacebuilding’.

To conclude, teachers in Pakistan have a well-developed sense of identity in relation to their religious affiliation and have a deep sense of their agency in the education process. However, their approaches to engage with the agenda of social cohesion and peacebuilding are largely non-critical of the national policy narrative and do not necessarily recognize diversity and reconcile the tensions within ‘unity in diversity’.

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