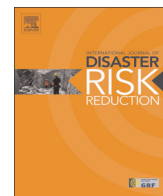




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Protecting children in a situation of ongoing conflict: Is resilience sufficient as the end product?

Ritesh Shah

School of Critical Studies in Education, The University of Auckland, Faculty of Education, Private Bag 92601, Symonds St, Auckland 1150, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Modern day conflict presents a unique challenge to the disaster response and humanitarian community. Different to many disasters, conflict manifests itself over a protracted period, with varying levels of severity and no clear beginning or end. Increasingly children are the victims of such conflict, with their basic rights threatened. Education systems are increasingly vulnerable to attack either through direct violence and intimidation inflicted on children or teachers, or indirectly through the destruction of schooling infrastructure, the loss of school personnel, or restrictions on the movement of civilians and goods. While education has historically remained the 'poor cousin' within a humanitarian response package, it is increasingly acknowledged that high demand for education exists in conflict-affected situations. In recent years, attempts have been made to merge the education in emergencies and disaster risk/response communities. As greater attention and research inquiry is made into how education can promote resilience and protection to children affected by conflict, and respond effectively to the trauma, a critical exploration of how resilience is understood and acted upon in such settings is needed. This paper, using the case study of Gaza Strip within the Occupied Palestinian Territories, suggests that while programmatic interventions focussed on supporting the resilience of children and the institutional networks of support on which these children rely may deliver short-term benefits, a restoration of the status quo or the effective adjustment of these individuals and institutions to a new state of normalcy may be ineffective and counter-productive in the medium to long-term.

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1. Introduction

In times of human created and natural disasters, education is acknowledged as playing a pivotal role in protecting individuals, communities and entire societies from the consequences of such emergencies. Resources have been directed at supporting and/or strengthening formal and informal educational programmes which are better able to respond to crises, protect children from risk, and prevent future crises from arising. Actors such as the World Bank, the International Network of Education in Emergencies (INEE) [8] and UNICEF all perceive such planning and support to be key to minimising future risks to the education system, and to it being able to maintain function during an emergency, withstand shocks, and protect children from the vulnerabilities of conflict.

Under the banner of supporting resilience, then, education is positioned as a means to support the construction of individuals, communities and societies who are able to operate in a more adaptive, responsive and flexible way in situations of instability

and crises. The dominant construction of resilience, however, is focussed on maintaining education's function in emergency situations, and ensuring that education does not hasten or worsen existing conflicts under the guise of education doing "no further harm" [4]. It is this view of resilience that is critically scrutinised in this paper, in the belief that education should and can do more.

This paper specifically explores how the concept of resilience was perceived within two education interventions in Palestine—the *Better Learning Programme* (BLP), supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the *Eye to the Future Programme* (E2F), administered by CARE International. Palestine's long standing conflict with Israel has led to increasing economic and social isolation and growing strain on the education sector's ability to deliver an accessible, equitable and quality learning experience to all. These factors are perceived to be key factors driving youth disenfranchisement and their turn towards extremism. In response, donors have focussed efforts in recent years on supporting children to be resilient (i.e. adapt) to the shocks created by the ongoing conflict, and ensure that the education system can act to support the resilience of these individuals. Through a review of the key outcomes of the programmes, familiar to the author because of his role as the external evaluator of each of them, the paper

E-mail address: r.shah@auckland.ac.nz<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2015.06.003>

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identifies the important role each programme played in supporting children to recover, cope and move on from the impact of acute periods of conflict. The paper also identifies, however, that a key shortcoming of both of these resilience-focussed interventions was that they lacked the capacity or willingness to impact on structures of inequity and injustice within and outside of education, and thus were unlikely to be sustainable in the long-term.

2. The rise of the resilience discourse in education in conflict affected contexts

Initially, studies about the concept of resilience focussed on identifying the traits and characteristics that allowed individuals to overcome adversity. The aim of such enquiry was to understand the protective mechanisms that made individuals resilient, and in particular the internal and external assets available which allowed them to succeed [7]. Such research found that traits such as having hope, purpose, social competence, problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and a sense of place and future were all critical to being resilient as an individual. While acknowledged as important, these early resilience studies were also criticized as placing too much weight and responsibility on an individual's agency and capacity to be resilient, without appropriate acknowledgement of the institutional support that may be necessary for an individual to act in a resilient manner [14].

Later, research began to identify and acknowledge the important role that external assets such as protective social support networks provided by kin and social service agencies played in building individual resilience [21,25,36]. This second wave of resilience research served to do two things: (1) acknowledge that resilience was a process of interaction between an individual and his or her environment; and (2) is built through concurrent and mutually reinforcing strengthening of an individuals' internal and external assets [12]. For conflict-affected contexts, it is now well understood and agreed that the protective networks and institutions that surround an individual child must be able to respond to, and build on and support the internal assets of the individual. This ecological view of resilience, particularly in the educational sphere, draws on in part on the idea that "fostering an individual's resilience, requires institutional support and social services" [24, p. 15]. Concretely this has meant taking the time, within a humanitarian response, to not only provide immediate social protection to those affected by the crises, but also to explore and leverage off 'pockets' of existing protective networks and strengthen them—at the family, community and state levels.

The belief is that by doing so, resilience-focussed activities can support recovery and 'future proof' against ongoing risks. USAID [35, p. 5] for example, defines resilience as "the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth." Similarly, UNDP [31] identifies resilience in its activities as supporting the ability of a state or a component of the state system to enable recovery and prevent future crises from arising. Aligned with the often now common language of building or bouncing back better, that cuts across contemporary stabilization, humanitarian and development work, there is a sense that supporting the construction of resilient systems serves to establish self-sustaining communities that are able to adapt, function in a state of flux, and address certain and uncertain risks which they may face in the future. Underpinning this logic is the notion that adverse conditions are a new normal and that strengthening the resilience of individuals and the protective networks surrounding them provides a way of sustaining 'normal' function within such circumstances [12,16].

Rightful concern, however, has been raised that limiting resilience activity to supporting individuals and communities to adapt and maintain function in the face of adversity may be short-sighted. Concepts such as recovery, protection and adaption within the resilience discourse tend to conceive of a system as having clearly defined borders. This system faces threats/risks from 'outside', and has internally established mechanisms of resilience 'within'. It ignores the fact that systems can face internal threats, and concurrently, that vulnerabilities and resilience are constructed in society by vertical and horizontal structures of power that the system, internal to itself, may have little ability to change. Additionally, a focus on adapting to and normalizing a new context of vulnerability may serve to erase or ignore underlying structural injustices and struggles against oppression [23]. Chronic and intractable issues such as inequality, unbalanced power relations, marginalization and exclusion may remain untouched within a resilience approach focussed solely on adaptation to a changed context.

3. Education in emergencies: incorporating the resilience discourse

There is ample recognition that after the family unit, schools are one of the most influential institutions in a child's development, values formation and skills acquisition. In situations of adversity, they are seen as a critical place in which students can make sense of the challenges they are facing, find purpose and support and strengthen skills such as problem solving and emotional regulation that are critical to individual resilience [12]. Adult relationships with children founded on empathy, attention, trust, respect, high expectations and virtue are found in the research to be critical components to supporting such resilience [14]. When this happens, schools become, "a social resource that fosters a sense of normalcy and purpose in the midst of chaos, and have the power to serve as a 'protective shield' for all students and a beacon of light for youth from troubled homes and impoverished communities" [24, p. 13].

Supporting children's resilience in education is also seen to reduce future conflicts from arising. If children have the necessary self-regulation and coping skills which a protective education experience can provide, there is a belief that they are less likely to externalise these feelings through violence, "form[ing] the foundations of a peaceful society" [2, p. 2]. Approaches such as UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools (CFS) model have been actively promoted in recognition of the peacemaking and peacekeeping role schools can play. As part of the CFS model, teachers and caregivers are supported to recognise children's emotional distress and help them through it, and simultaneously are taught new pedagogical approaches that help to build the trusting, nurturing relationship that is often lacking in many educational settings [33]. Within CFS, strong focus is also placed on strengthening ties between the school and the community, in the belief that this serves to improve "mutual support and commitment to learning, protection, and well-being among students, school staff, and families" [24, p. 15].

In this drive to ensure that resilience can be actively promoted within the education sector, an inward gaze has been thrust on the skills, capabilities, and functioning of key educational actors and institutions—teachers, school leaders, parent associations, youth groups—with existing strengths leveraged upon and weaknesses redressed. This 'educationalist' approach presumes that all educational problems and dilemmas can be resolved through reforms and changes to educational processes and systems, rather than acknowledging that so much of what occurs in education is actually a product of what is occurring in society at large [3]. Such action, "masks power relations, contradictions of interest, and

inequalities” which led to the crises arising in the first place [6, p. 3]. Supporting educational resilience should instead focus on “transforming the very system that continues to perpetuate uneven distribution of power that results in unequal vulnerabilities, despite the shared context of crises” [5, p. 2]. This may be particularly true in contexts such as Palestine where a return to status quo conditions continues to perpetuate conditions leading to further conflict.

4. Education, conflict and resilience in Palestine

On one hand, the education system of Palestine is lauded for its remarkable resilience because of its “ability to cope with extraordinary circumstances,” by maintaining function and rebounding after each shock it faces [11, p. 26]. A recent World Bank report, for example, heralds the United Nation’s Works and Relief Agency (UNWRA) education system in Palestine as a key example of a resilient education system due to the fact that it has maintained effective student and teacher performance despite the ongoing shocks it faces [20].

Yet for the children attending these schools, there is growing concern for their social and emotional welfare due to the ongoing military occupation, forced evictions and severely restricted movement of people and goods in and out of Palestine. Mounting evidence exists that such conditions are affecting the well being of children living in such circumstances. Significant percentages of Palestinian children suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder and exhibit symptoms such as such as bed-wetting, general weakness, nervousness, increased aggressiveness, sleeplessness, nightmares, and headaches/stomach aches as a result of living under such conditions [10,18,22]. These psychosocial issues are noted to be affecting learners’ ability to learn and perform well in school, and children’s emotional and social needs are not being effectively addressed through the current resources and expertise available within the education system [11].

There is also acknowledgement that the resilience of the education system as a whole is being undermined by conflict related attacks against educational facilities, ongoing settler violence and harassment in West Bank of students on their way to/from school, school demolitions in East Jerusalem and West Bank, and restrictions on the movement and access for students and teachers within East Jerusalem. Educational quality has also been significantly impacted by this ongoing crisis. In Gaza Strip, most schools operate on double shifts or triple, with high student to teacher ratios, and reduced class hours. In East Jerusalem and West Bank, teaching is under-remunerated and under-resourced, leading to low levels of teacher motivation and quality. As a result, large numbers of students are underachieving, suffer poor motivation and end up dropping out of the education system earlier than they should [34].

In response, there is growing sentiment in Palestine from international donors that the education system should and could be strengthened to better withstand current and future shocks, and improve its ability to serve as a protective institution for children and young people who face the ongoing effects of conflict. The education sector is perceived to be one of the few settings which can continue to provide children with structure and routine in an otherwise destabilized environment, namely by enabling their development, fostering their confidence and self-efficacy, and promoting positive peer networks in Palestine [11]. Donors often use the high value placed on education in Palestinian society as a starting point for strengthening the resilience of the sector [1]. Additionally, the conviction and dedication of many education personnel working within the system to supporting children’s well being and future success, despite the personal adversities they face

in doing so, is seen to be point of leverage on which to build and strengthen resilience-focused responses [20].

One such programme of support, initiated by CARE International entitled *Eye to the Future* (E2F), responded to a need to provide children with psychosocial support following Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. The after/before school programme provided children ages 9–13 with: (1) regular academic enrichment support in four core subjects (English, Arabic, Science and Mathematics), acknowledging the increased strain facing teachers in schools due to a scarcity of classrooms and resources; (2) important study, problem solving and conflict-mitigation skills; and (3) positive peer relationships, acknowledging the often violent community context in which many of these children live. These objectives were to be accomplished through the programme’s approach of: (1) building vital connections and a sense of community amongst the participating children and their mentors; (2) developing a unique programme culture with specific routines and traditions that would allow children to feel safe to take risks; and (3) delivering a series of intentional programming activities that would teach, reinforce and allow children to practice problem-solving, pro-social and conflict-mitigation skills in a fun and non-threatening fashion over the six month period.

From a capacity-building perspective, the programme design focused on implementing these activities through several community-based organizations (CBOs), rather than having CARE deliver activities themselves. The hope was that the CBOs would gain the skills and capacities to continue to deliver the programme after CARE’s involvement and support ended. The programme maintained low child/adult ratios to guarantee that children received sufficient guidance, attention and modeling from young adult mentors (aged 18–25). The mentors were carefully selected and thoroughly trained and supported at each site to become skilled at promoting resilience, academic tutoring, conflict mitigation and study skills with children. Parents and community leaders were integrated and involved into the programme as a way to ensure that the project’s unique messaging had wider influence and reach. Within a resilience framework, this component of the programme design aimed to create a place of increased protection for children against the backdrop of the incessant conflict of Gaza. The programme operated for over three years, and served over 5000 children over a period of three years in six-month cohort groups [28,29].

Another programme, entitled *The Better Learning Programme* (BLP) began in the Gaza Strip in 2012 with support from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). BLP was designed to be a school-based psycho-educational intervention for children who experienced severe distress as a result of conflict. The programme worked with teachers and counsellors, through a clear and structured approach, to address the needs of children experiencing symptoms of trauma such as nightmares. In a series of weekly intensive sessions with counsellors and teachers who had been trained by NRC, small groups of children would receive information about traumatic stress reactions and the causes of such symptoms, learn techniques for relaxation and calming the body and mind, and explore their own nightmares through drawing. Four individual therapy sessions with school counsellors would then follow where children would work with these individuals to reconstruct a timeline of when particular nightmares started, as a way for the children to understand that their nightmares were traceable to events of the past.

The programme acknowledged that education could play a vital role in psychologically protecting children before and after conflict, but acknowledged that school personnel were often poorly equipped with techniques to address children’s psychosocial needs [30]. In response, the protection and risk mitigation component of the programme aimed to provide a set of techniques

and approaches for teachers to use in the classroom in support of all their students' psychosocial well being on a longer-term basis. The belief underpinning this second strand of work is that teachers have a critical role to play in creating a nurturing learning environment where students have opportunities to share their feelings. The training aimed to equip teachers with a specific set of exercises and methods that they could use to help their students deal with traumatic stress, at present and into the future [27].

By working with both teachers and counsellors with children who experienced these nightmares and, in parallel, with teachers on behaviours and strategies for creating a supportive classroom, NRC sought to reach the most vulnerable, conflict-affected children within the Palestinian education system. The programme was gradually expanded to work with more than 100 schools across Gaza Strip. In 2014, it expanded to Area C of the West Bank, where children were facing or were at risk of facing psychological trauma, due to harassment from settlers, forced relocations, and frequent military incursions into schools.

5. Successes, but for how long?

Several key successes were noted across both programmes in responding to a chronic humanitarian crises and improving protective measures in place for children, communities and schools. A large proportion of children who participated in E2F had clear improvements in symptoms of PTSD. Significant reductions in anti-social risk behaviours such as being withdrawn, creating social problems, breaking rules, and being physically or emotionally aggressive were noted in pre/post testing using the Child Behaviour Checklist [28,29]. Quantitative data collected by BLP through its nightmare incidences data, as well as qualitative data collected as part of an evaluation in 2014, suggested success of the intervention in addressing the nightmare incidences of children. For example, at the completion of the first tranche of the programme within 10 Ministry of Education and 10 UNRWA schools affected by the 2012 conflict escalation in Gaza, 97% of children displayed reductions in nightmare incidences as a result of participating in the group and individual therapy sessions that were part of the programme. Often, incidences were significantly reduced to zero [30].

For the families and children most acutely affected by such symptoms, the reductions in nightmares often provided a form of needed and necessary support in a time where other alternatives remained limited. Several stories of change narrated by parents and children noted the benefits that the programmes had on their overall psychosocial wellbeing and subsequently the flow on effects it had on their academic achievement. The story below, narrated by one counsellor from the BLP, was reflective of this change:

In our school there was a 10 year-old girl who was suffering from nightmares every day for nearly two years. During the November 2012 escalation, she witnessed a scene on television of two journalists burnt after a shelling. The scene terrified her because her father was a reporter himself and she was worried that he might be the victim of such an attack. Other members of her family had also been the victims of prior attacks, so she lived in constant fear and could not sleep well at night. At school she would suffer from stomach aches, would cry all the time, lacked concentration, and was very withdrawn. At home she has little appetite. In the first week, I introduced her to techniques such as yoga, relaxation and deep breathing through the group sessions. In the first two sessions, I did not notice any changes in the girl. She would attend, but cry throughout the session. This made it difficult to engage her in what we were doing. By the third session, things began to

change. I noticed her nightmare episodes reduced to three per week, and by the fourth, two. Then I began to start individual sessions with the girl. We would discuss her nightmare in each session and practice the techniques I had taught her to cope with the stress the images in her mind caused her. I also encouraged her to list out all the negative events that had happened in her life. This helped her to reveal and discuss these things in the open, rather than keeping them bottled up inside. At first this was difficult, but eventually she began to reveal these issues and was able to communicate more effectively about her fears. By the end of the individual sessions she was not having nightmares anymore. At home, her appetite increased and she was more social with everyone living there. Her teachers commented that she was more focussed and attentive. All of this had an impact on her achievement in the class. It has been so effective that the girl is now teaching this technique to other family members, like her cousin, who do not attend this school but suffer nightmares as well [30, p. 16].

Both programmes also provided participating children with a set of enduring skills that they could use to adapt to the context of constant adversity they live in. E2F equipped children with skills that enabled participants to become what the programme labelled 'stress tolerant learners'. Specifically, participants reported feeling less anxious towards examinations, more able to ask for academic assistance, and more able to remain focused on their studies, despite the environmental conditions surrounding them. As one student noted,

After the war, I found it harder to stay at the top of my class. I had a hard time concentrating, especially during exams, and would get very worried. I would rush through the questions, hastily marking answers, because I felt the pressure of time. I would worry that I could not complete all the questions in front of me. I was making many mistakes because I was not able to focus. During E2F I learned the smart study skills....Now when I go to take exams, I can concentrate better and answer the questions that I know with more comfort. When I have questions in school I ask the teachers' help, and this is something I never used to do before [29, p. 6].

Evidence also existed of children learning to apply problem solving, confidence and communication skills acquired through their participation in the programme to resolve disputes or interact with peers and/or adults in ways that were constructive and non-violent. In particular techniques, such as reflecting on different options before taking action and learning about the four problem solving skills, were noted by children to be more frequently utilised in their daily lives. For example, one participant discussed how,

When my friends and I [used to play] football, I would get angry whenever one of my friends wanted to count a goal that I didn't think should count. I would call them a cheater and often start to punch them. Many of friends became angry with me because of this. After the programme I can now solve problems during games with my friends without shouting or hitting using words. I have learned to apologize for mistakes I make when I lose my temper [28, p. 9].

The BLP, for its part, equipped children with a set of relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to allow them to continue to cope with the ongoing trauma they would face as a result of living in Palestine. One parent, reflecting on the impact of the programme on her child stated,

Through the sessions, she learned how to talk courageously about her fears and nightmares. Slowly, her behaviour in the

home started to change. She stopped being violent, she was no longer afraid of the dark. At home, I could see her practicing the relaxation exercises with her sisters. She was also using the stress and release practices before she studied at home, to help her with her focus. Now her academic achievement is much better as well [30, p. 47].

Beyond improving the coping skills of children themselves, both programmes also strengthened the networks of support surrounding these beneficiaries. Specifically, E2F strengthened the capacity of the CBOs and parents of participating children to openly discuss and recognize the impacts of the conflict, and acknowledge the importance of not leaving these issues unresolved for children under their care. For parents of children in Gaza, who often have responsibility for large families and live under economic duress, the programme served an important function in supporting parents to interact with their children in non-violent and non-threatening ways. Stories from mentors suggest they were able to change parenting practices away from using violence as a disciplinary technique:

...I found out that the father was also trying to redirect his son, but because he was so wild and uncontrollable, the father resorted to beating him. The father and I discussed and agreed to follow procedures at home and in the centre based on positive discipline techniques rather than violence. The father learned to praise his son when he did things right and when he behaved for several days in a row he would sometimes buy him a gift as a reward [28, p. 19].

And similarly, parents came to feel comfortable through the constant interaction the programme afforded, to elicit advice and assistance from the mentors, as another father who was struggling to connect with his son after *Operation Cast Lead* described:

...I came to meet the mentors. I shared with them the many problems I was having with him. The mentors told me I should try to praise him more when he does things that are right, and speak to him in more kind ways. I started applying the things they taught me, and I could see my son responding to this. Now my son will come up to me and ask for help on his lessons at school without fear. I have learned to praise my son more and now he is closer to me. The [programme] has helped me re-connect with my child (Ibid).

For the CBOs, there was a sense that E2F helped to provide a needed injection of social capital to communities that have been divided by internal and external conflict, political divisions and economic hardship. A significant impact for CBOs was the improved relationships and greater visibility within their constituent communities that the programme afforded. It allowed them to expand their activities into a new geographic community, or with a different target population. It also established many of the CBOs as a resource for children and parents to turn to in times of an adversity, and added to the protective network available to children at such moments. The programme also built their own capacity to run programme for children facing acute trauma caused by conflict, and provided them with a clear set of approaches and materials to doing so. As one CBO leader noted, “[E2F] is a complete package that is especially targeted to vulnerable border populations” [29, p. 19]. E2F fulfilled the vision of CARE who saw these CBOs as “...becom[ing] hubs for a growing network of people whose relationships and mutual impacts endure” (Ibid).

An important contribution of BLP was to provide a set of skills and techniques to teachers and counsellors who are often the front line actors who work with children affected by conflict. In the first two years of the programme, 540 teachers and counsellors received training on addressing the needs of children affected by

conflict. Many counsellors interviewed as part of the final evaluation felt that the training and support they/their staff had received on addressing children’s nightmares had increased their confidence and motivation to address children’s psychosocial issues. According to the evaluation,

BLP offered teachers and counsellors a concrete approach to helping students identify reactions of stress, practice calming exercises, connect memories to words, empower them to take an active role in their own recovery, and develop personal routines of relaxation exercises. The multiple training sessions, support of an NRC education officer, and manuals (BLP I and BLP II) provided a foundation on which they could continue to employ such techniques after NRC’s involvement ended [30, pp. 15–16].

Additionally, the BLP provided caregivers with techniques to counsel their children at home. Facilitators and the training manual stressed the importance of parents and teachers working together to support children living in crisis. Participating schools often held meetings with parents to address and explain the intervention, the exercises, and why they are occurring within the confines of the classroom. In more than one situation, the evaluation reported that this had led to parents supporting in-school activities with follow up support in their homes.

In summary, there is clear evidence that both programmes have succeeded in helping individuals and the education system as a whole to recover from the acute effects of past periods of conflict. There is also evidence to suggest that they provided children and some of the immediate support networks surrounding them with new tools to adapt to the ongoing conditions of conflict which remain prevalent in Palestine. What is less clear, and perhaps less convincing however, is whether any form of transformation has occurred because of such interventions.

This became quite apparent, when in mid 2014, conflict escalated across the Palestine. In June of that year, three Israeli youth were killed in the West Bank, leading to an intensive military operation across the region, as well as retaliation killings and abductions of Palestinian youngsters in both West Bank and East Jerusalem. Schools were used as military outposts, students arrested or threatened by soldiers, access to schools restricted and/or limited and scores of homes invaded by military operatives. The impact of such events in Israeli administered areas of the West Bank was particularly acute with marked increases in the number of psychosocial interventions required amongst children facing increased levels of fear, insecurity, frustration, lethargy, depression, anger and hostile behaviour [18, p. 9].

In Gaza Strip, *Operation Protective Edge* (June–August 2014) led to the most significant destruction to the region since the start of the Israeli occupation in 1967. More than 500 children were killed, half a million inhabitants displaced, and scores of UNWRA and Ministry of Education schools damaged or destroyed. The ability of caregivers, schools, and community organisations to protect, shield and minimise harm to children from the impacts of such wide-scale destruction were limited. Rightfully, it was questioned how resilient individuals and the education sector could be in the aftermath of such tragedy. Caregivers surveyed have voiced concern that they are unable to support their children, who have suffered bed-wetting and separation anxiety caused by the military operation. They also worry that their children’s ability to succeed academically is being hindered by this psychological distress, and felt that forms of psychosocial support offered by various actors was insufficient to addressing issues like forced displacement, economic insecurity and the loss of family members which were a product of the conflict [18, pp. 22–23]. The relocation of a large number of families in the Gaza Strip who lost their

homes also poses challenges in terms of maintaining the social capital and networks of support that programmes such as BLP and E2F built previously. Many of the past participants are now living in temporary shelters or with extended family in other parts of the Gaza Strip, part of new, unfamiliar communities where the protective networks and bonds may not be as strong.

In light of these recent events, it is important to ask, what is enduring or sustainable about the resilience that these programmes built, and equally important, is the restoration of normalcy in a site of cyclical violence appropriate? [13] questions whether the focus of these programmes, like those of many other humanitarian actors working in Palestine, serves to depoliticize the context in which the conflict is occurring, transforming the ongoing occupation into a series of symptoms to be treated and/or overcome. He contends that many of the interventions perceive these children as “at risk” populations for radicalization and that many programmes work to protect *against* Palestinian children, rather than protect the children themselves.

To truly transform the situation for these children, the focus of humanitarian intervention would instead acknowledge the structural injustices against which conflict arises, and work to rectify such injustices from the outset of programmatic activity. Programming would need to promote what Johan Galtung (1975, in Smith, McCandless, Paulson, and Wheaton, 2011, pp. 12–13) calls a positive peace—specifically, “the absence of structural violence, the presence of social justice and the conditions to eliminate the causes of violence”—rather than the restoration of a status quo (i.e. a negative peace) that may be unsustainable and unjust to those living within it. While there may be a place for humanitarian responses such as E2F and BLP in supporting the immediate psychosocial needs and welfare of children, stopping action at that point is wholly insufficient within a context where conflict is constantly reoccurring. Moreover, it may be unrealistic for educational actors and institutions to be continuously resilient in the face of frequent attacks, and when conditions of teaching and learning are being eroded by the consequences of the intractable conflict raging outside the walls of schools across the territory. As recently argued by [9], the international response to the ongoing educational crises in Palestine has been “totally inadequate and ineffective,” and a resilience focussed discourse does nothing to change this.

6. Conclusion

The OECD-DAC [19] Standards for Donor Engagement in Fragile States make clear that donors should work to address the root causes of state fragility. A discourse of resilience, when focussed on helping individuals and the networks of support around them to adapt to a changed set of conditions, would seem to fail in such an endeavour. The focus on risk minimisation, recovery and adaptation which stands at the core of such an approach appears to accept inequities and injustices that are the root causes of grievances in human-inflicted disasters as the status quo, and work around, rather than question the acceptability of such forces. In a context such as Palestine, it results in interventions that remain temporary solutions to deeply entrenched problems that endure beyond the life of the programme. While little harm, and some short-term benefits may be enjoyed as a result of such work, these apolitical educationalist approaches are insufficient to the actual needs of locales such as Palestine. For a resilience discourse to take on the transformative dimensions that some scholars argue is possible within such approaches, a stronger advocacy and political focus to such interventions may need to be undertaken.

The danger is that at present, with the disaster risk reduction, humanitarian, securitization and development fields entering a

period of consolidation under the banner of resilience, the space for questioning and problematizing how the concept is understood and acted upon is narrowing. As [37, p. 32] note, resilience, “benefits from a positive connotation and is likely to be politically acceptable,” and may help to unite humanitarian, development and disaster risk reduction activities under a common language. Lacking, however, is a critical questioning of whom resilience seeks to benefit and what the outcomes of such resilience are or should be. In conflict-affected environments, a different language and understanding may be necessary—potentially one that incorporates the language of peacebuilding. [17, p. 7] Contend how, “peacebuilding is essentially about supporting the transformative processes any post-conflict society needs to go through, and how”, “education can contribute to peacebuilding more effectively if interventions and reforms are conducted at the sector level and by contributing to political, economic and social transformations in post-conflict societies” (Ibid, p. 12). By explicitly focussing resilience programming around a discourse of peacebuilding, actors working in such spaces are compelled to move beyond short-term ‘problem-solving’ approaches to longer-term structural improvements of the education sector. It forces humanitarian, development, securitisation, and disaster-risk reduction actors to move beyond the language of returning to normalcy or adapting to a new status quo, and instead locates their work within a broader social change agenda.

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