

## Chapter Eleven

# Ways Forward: The International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children

This book has presented the stories of a range of people working with young children and caregivers in areas affected by conflict. Through their experiences and perspectives we have found that, while each situation is unique, there are still a number of underlying issues and lessons to be drawn that are common to all contexts to varying degrees. These key lessons were drawn out in the last chapter. The purpose of this final chapter is to explore possible ways forward. In particular, the chapter describes the development, current work, and future plans of the International Working Group on Peace

Building with Young Children. It tells the story of how a loosely connected group of individuals who were working with young children and their families in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict turned into a force reaching beyond local, regional, and national boundaries. The chapter identifies the key process steps that underpinned the successful formation of the International Working Group and then describes the current aims and objectives of the International Working Group and its future plans to support the early childhood sector and address the key lessons identified in the last chapter.

## Vías para Avanzar: El Grupo Internacional de Trabajo en Pacificación con Niños Pequeños

Este libro ha presentado historias de una variedad de personas que trabajan con niños y niñas pequeños en áreas afectadas por el conflicto. A través de sus experiencias y perspectivas hemos encontrado que, aun cuando cada situación es única, hay un número de asuntos subyacentes y de lecciones que pueden extraerse como comunes a todos los contextos, aun cuando en diferentes grados.

Estas lecciones se describen en este capítulo final. El propósito del capítulo es explorar caminos posibles. En particular, se describe el desarrollo, trabajo actual, y los planes futuros del Grupo Internacional de Trabajo sobre Construcción de Paz con la Temprana Infancia. En este capítulo se cuenta la historia de cómo un grupo de individuos conectados muy someramente, quienes estaban trabajando con niños pequeños y sus familias en regiones que experimentan conflicto emergente, se ha convertido en una fuerza con mayor alcance, mas allá de las fronteras locales, nacionales o regionales. El capítulo identifica los pasos claves en el proceso, que subyacen a la conformación exitosa del Grupo de Trabajo, y sus planes futuros para apoyar el sector de la temprana infancia y para responder a los asuntos centrales identificados.

## Early childhood professionals working together

The formation and work of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children is the story of how a loosely connected group of individuals, whose common issues may not have been immediately apparent, turned into a force reaching beyond local, regional, and national boundaries. The group supported and sustained each other, developed this book and have long-term plans to continue to raise awareness and to make a difference. While the idea of bringing together professionals to identify common concerns, issues, and strategies is not a particularly unusual notion, the way in which the International Working Group developed and crystallized is worth reviewing as it does reflect a relatively unique approach within the early childhood sector to addressing the needs of young children and their caregivers living in conflict-affected societies on a truly global scale.

The International Working Group represents the first of several projects conceived by the World Forum Foundation and has achieved some important and successful outcomes. Within this it is possible to identify a number of key steps in the process of its development that have helped the International Working Group achieve some of its most important goals. These steps are described below in the hope of inspiring others to develop their own approaches to developing information and support networks. The chapter concludes with an outline of the current structure and plans for the International Working Group and details of where you can find more information.

## Key process steps in establishing the working group

In 2004 The World Forum Foundation in partnership with NIPPA — The Early Years Organisation —

### Box 11.1 Comments from delegates at the Working Forum Belfast conference on “Building Bridges: Healing Communities through Early Childhood Education,” November 17-20, 2004

“Understand each other, work with each other, involve parents and communities, build on strengths, and remember what you have in common rather than what you don’t.”

“We are all from different backgrounds, cultures, and have different historical experiences, but we have one common goal: to ensure that all children’s experiences are positive and beneficial to their growth and development.”

“I see now that it is possible for troubled and divided communities to heal themselves through young children.”

organised the first “Working Forum.” The theme was “Building Bridges: Healing Communities through Early Childhood Education.” The organisers, Bonnie and Roger Neugebauer of the World Forum Foundation and Siobhan Fitzpatrick and her team at NIPPA, conceived the original idea to bring together a group of practitioners, researchers, and others who were working with young children in conflict and post-conflict areas. These participants, and a few more, became the International Working Group (see Box 11.2).

Below, we describe the steps towards the realization of our group as an effective and sustainable entity.

### **Step 1:** **Defining the goal**

For the International Working Group the aim was to create a meeting place for awareness raising, discussion, and debate around the issue of children affected by conflict. With this in mind, the initial goal of the International Working Group was to identify early childhood professionals doing important and innovative work in conflict-affected societies and to facilitate the sharing of their experiences and perspectives so that lessons could be learned regarding the nature of the issues and challenges they face and examples of good practice could be drawn out and disseminated. In bringing early childhood professionals with a common focus together in one place, it was anticipated that similarities could be

identified and explored. The outcome, it was hoped, would be an articulation of the achievements and potential for early childhood professionals to act as agents for peace and reconciliation that would, in turn, resonate with others around the globe and in this way support all those who are dealing with the devastating outcomes of children caught in conflict situations.

### **Step 2:** **Identifying the participants**

For the International Working Group, participants were identified through personal networks and the recommendations of others to reflect experiences, regional representation and a variety of perspectives.

## **Box 11.2 International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children**

This listing reflects the groups as organized for Working Forum Belfast and the creation of this book.

### **Authors**

- Paul Connolly, Northern Ireland
- Jacqueline Hayden, Australia
- Diane Levin, United States

### **Organising Team**

- Bonnie Neugebauer, World Forum Foundation, United States
- Roger Neugebauer, World Forum Foundation, United States
- Siobhan Fitzpatrick, NIPPA, Northern Ireland
- Pauline Walmsley, NIPPA, Northern Ireland

### **Rapporteurs**

- Jacqueline Hayden, Australia
- Isobel McClean, Northern Ireland
- Janet Preston, Northern Ireland
- Ena Shaw, Northern Ireland
- Lisa Ruth Shulman, United States
- Agatha Thapa, Nepal
- Kathryn Weill, United States
- Samantha Kettyle, Northern Ireland

### **Working Team Facilitators**

- Betty Burkes, United States
- Diane Levin, United States

### **Working Team Participants**

- Marta Arango, Colombia
- Paul Connolly, Northern Ireland
- N. Urbain Dembélé, Mali
- Duane C. Dennis, United States
- Andrew Ikupu, Papua New Guinea
- Ingrid Jones, Albania
- Eleanor Mearns, Northern Ireland
- Ayshe Najjar, Israel
- Félicien Ntakiyimana, Chad
- Elisa del Puerto, Philippines
- Radmila Rangelov-Jusović, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Norma Rudolph, South Africa
- Ali Shaar, Palestine
- Kishor Shrestha, Nepal
- Aleksandra Selak Zivkovic, Croatia

Each participant was to have experience in working with children, families, and/or communities from conflict-ridden, violent, and other disruptive environments. However, despite attempts to ensure geographical representation and a spread of interests, some of the nominated participants were unable to join. Other participants ended up in the group because of serendipitous reasons. Strangely, this did not seem to matter and through the way the International Working Group was organised (see Steps 3 to 6 below) it coalesced perfectly. One of the lessons learned from this process was that it is less important to have members of the International Working Group representing specific roles, as it is to ensure that processes involved can make use of, and build upon, the strengths and knowledge base that each individual has to offer.

**Step 3:**  
***Pre-meeting preparation***

Once the list of participants had been confirmed, an eList (electronic mailing list) was established and circulated to all. This allowed the participants to communicate with each other; and the facilitators began the process of introductions and team development using this medium. Each participant was invited to participate in this several months in advance. The purpose was clearly articulated with each participant sharing the experiences, major concerns, and successes related to their own situation. Guiding questions were distributed using the listserv to assist with reflection and preparation. This pre-meeting activity clarified the goals for participants and allowed them to gather information within their regions, where necessary. All of this contributed to the efficiency and effectiveness of the face-to-face meeting time, and became a facet of each subsequent meeting.

**Step 4:**  
***Including informal time and “trust building” activities from the outset***

When participants first met, they took part in a range of informal activities such as sharing meals, telling

stories, and discussing their individual goals and hopes for the meeting, before actually getting down to “business.” The informal time facilitated the development of trust, which allowed group members to discuss sensitive issues and topics. One particularly powerful activity was the “Appreciation Table.” Here each participant was asked to place an object of personal significance to themselves on the table and then given a few minutes to tell why they had chosen that object. The exercise provided an opportunity for everyone to share information about their concern for their region in a very personal way. International Working Group members immediately felt the bonds and mutual support which developed from this simple exercise.

**Step 5:**  
***Structuring the context and the processes***

Participation in the International Working Group was categorised according to three distinct roles. The first consisted of the participants themselves who represented front line workers dealing with the effects of conflict on young children and families on a daily basis. This number was kept small (12-15), and this allowed people to sit in a circle during group to ensure eye contact and ease of interaction. A second role within the group was that of rapporteur. This consisted of a small team who did not actively participate in the discussions but made notes on important points, delineated issues which needed clarification, and provided a summary at the end of each session. Rapporteurs had diverse experience in the area of children and conflict. Collectively, they represented many perspectives. This was deemed to be a significant factor in the success of this team. The rapporteurs sat in an outer circle around the participants.

The third function consisted of facilitation. Two expert facilitators — Betty Burkes and Diane Levin — developed each day’s agenda and ensured that discussions stayed focused and relevant. The facilitators also ensured that all participants had equal chances to speak. This was especially important

for the International Working Group because a number of participants were working in a second language.

**Step 6:**  
***Sharing ideas and perspectives***

Participants were given a set period of time to tell about the situations and issues within their geographical regions. Some participants had prepared audio/visual presentations. Others presented with narratives and stories. While some instructions had been given, the framework was loose enough for each participant to share their story in a way that was comfortable for them. By the end of the first day, all participants agreed that despite the overarching goal of identifying similarities, it was critical that the unique characteristics of each conflict and post-conflict situation be acknowledged and respected. Beyond the search for generalized issues, the group focused upon identifying ways in which the early childhood sector can support and empower communities to address their individual (contextually relevant) strategies for peace.

**Step 7:**  
***Articulating and disseminating the outcome of group meetings***

We believe that the International Working Group has a responsibility to include broad participation and to stimulate discussion and debate as it works towards its stated goals. The incorporation of ways to interact with an appropriate “audience” will keep the group grounded and relevant. In our case the International Working Group was tied to the delivery of an early childhood conference in Belfast. Over 250 delegates had signed on for presentations and workshops on peace and reconciliation. The International Working Group had been named as the main speakers for this event. This slightly pressured need for the International Working Group to report in public had two results. First, it ensured that the team stayed focused and helped the International Working Group to articulate messages in a clear way that could

resonate with a wide audience. Second, the public presentations stimulated debate and discussions and appreciation from the delegates. This, in turn, had the result of helping the International Working Group to note the importance of their work and re-motivated them to continue to work towards their goals.

For the conference, the International Working Group broke into three panels based on three major themes. These were:

- The nature of conflicts in the world: information about the diversity of conflict situations related to children, families, and communities
- The impact of conflicts on children, families, communities and the resulting needs of children
- Reconciliation programs, approaches, and strategies within early childhood programs in response to conflict.

Following each panel presentation, conference delegates met in designated discussion groups. Discussion Group Leaders had been recruited to facilitate these meetings and draw out the learning and issues from each group. The reporting from these discussions has played a key role in influencing the development of this book.

Another way to spread the word took place during field trips to programs and projects across Northern Ireland. These trips allowed members of the International Working Group to interact with the conference delegates over long time periods. The informal discussions which took place on that day enriched the work of both participants. The trips also allowed parties to become aware of situations and issues in the host country while child care specialists within the country were given the opportunity to interact with the international participants and delegates. Some excellent sharing ensued.

**Step 8:**  
***Reaching closure and preparing for the next steps***

The first meeting of the International Working Group closed with a final opportunity to recap on the processes, the experiences, the learnings, and the new questions which were raised. The final step was to determine how to ensure that none of this was lost. A team took on a coordination role to ensure that the work would be built upon. This book is one direct outcome of the International Working Group. The group also felt that it was important to commit to meeting again in May 2005 at the World Forum for Care and Early Education in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This further meeting was important in terms of setting goals for the group, providing an opportunity for visibility within the sector, and continuing to build relations within the group.

Beyond meeting in Montreal in May 2005, the International Working Group also met in Manizales, Colombia in May 2006. A number of individuals in the group have also exchanged visits and/or assisted each other with particular projects. The meeting in Manizales was particularly important in focusing on defining the focus, mission, goals, processes, and work program for the group in line with the key lessons identified through this book. The meeting gave attention to the importance of hearing the voice of young children in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict, and participants exchanged ideas and strategies for doing so. The Manizales meeting also focused on professional development and partnerships between universities and civil society organisations to develop specific learning and development programs for early childhood professionals working in these regions. The

first of these programs, the postgraduate MSc in Social Inclusion and the Early Years will be available through Queen's University Belfast from September 2007.

## Future plans

Alongside this book, there were two other key outcomes arising from this first phase of development of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children. The first is a clear statement of purpose and objectives for the International Working Group as outlined on the following three pages. As described in this chapter, this has emerged slowly and carefully from the shared experiences and perspectives of early childhood professionals from many different societies impacted by conflict. It provides a clear focus and framework to guide the activities of the International Working Group during its next phase of development.

The second key outcome has been the establishment of a web site — [www.peacebuildingwithyoungchildren.org](http://www.peacebuildingwithyoungchildren.org) — that provides a focal point for the International Working Group. Further information on the group, including its terms of reference and current activities and events, are provided on the web site as is the opportunity to make contact with and participate in the work of the International Working Group. The International Working Group is developing quickly and it is anticipated that a number of new projects and activities will be launched during 2007 and beyond. You are, therefore, invited to log onto the web site for an update on the work of the International Working Group since preparing this book.

# International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children Position Paper

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## Who we are

International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children is a global initiative by early childhood practitioners, researchers, and civil society organisations, initiated by World Forum Foundation in collaboration with NIPPA – The Early Years Organisation to make visible the role of early childhood development as a force for reconciliation and peace building in regions

- **Healing** — creating safe places that support children and families and the adults who work with them reach across and through barriers;
- **Building capacity** — providing strategies, skills, and competencies that empower adults working with young children in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict.

## Our mission

To be a meeting place for early childhood development activists with an interest in building networks of knowledge, support, and advocacy for early childhood practice and policies in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict.

## Our goals

- **Transformation** — creating places where, and from which, action and change emanate;
- **Breaking through silences** — raising awareness, giving children and citizens a voice locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally;
- **Reconciliation** — creating places that model interactions which move beyond forgiving and encompass collaboration, partnerships, and building community;

## Our processes

The International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children is an initiative of the World Forum Foundation and is supported by an *Executive Committee* comprised of members from the World Forum Foundation, NIPPA — The Early Years Organisation (Northern Ireland), and CINDE (Centro Internacional de Educacion y Desarrollo Humano [Colombia]). The Executive Committee oversees the development of a strategic plan detailing the roles and responsibilities and sustainability strategy for the International Working Group.

The *International Working Group* reports to the Executive Committee and comprises the members who are drawn from early childhood practitioners and academics with experience of working in or supporting early childhood programs in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict.

*Ad-Hoc Committees* are formed by members of the International Working Group to take forward priority work areas including advocacy, membership,

communications and information, programmatic development, and mobilisation.

*Membership* — wider membership of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children is open to anyone who is interested in the role of early childhood education as a force for reconciliation and peace building in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict. Members will receive regular updates and will be encouraged to participate in activities and events organised by the International Working Group.

## Our works

### *Information dissemination*

To raise awareness of the impact of conflicts on children and families and strategies for addressing these.

- Disseminate information and collective experiences from the work of International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children
- Disseminate information related to the role of ECD in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict.

### *Sustained linkages*

To build the capacity of ECD organisations working in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict.

- Build on inter-personal linkages within the team and build relationships externally
- Document experiences, approaches, strategies, and lessons learned and facilitate sharing models of good practice of work with children and families

- Strengthen links with and between organisations that can provide expertise and skills in the development of conflict sensitive programs that address the needs of children and families.

### *Advocacy*

To raise awareness and support ECD sectors in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict, engage in advocacy campaigns within the sector, and seek out and become involved in campaigns collaboratively with other sectors.

- Adopt and institutionalise a rights-based approach to development
- Regional advocacy campaigns by ECD sector to highlight the nature and impact of conflict on families and children
- Regional advocacy campaigns for greater participation of civil society organisations in the ECD sector in conflict prevention and resolution
- International advocacy campaign by the ECD sector to highlight the global issues related to conflict
- Ongoing exploration of issues and dissemination of ideas at the biennial conference World Forum on Early Care and Education

### *Mobilization*

To take visible and timely action during intense conflict periods to highlight the effects of conflict on children and young families in regions experiencing armed conflict.

- Mobilise support for children and young families in regions experiencing armed conflict Undertake regional media and public policy strategies to raise awareness of the terrible effects of conflict on children and families

### *Programmatic development*

To design new programs that support innovation and evidence in the field of peace building in early childhood care and education in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict.

- Contribute to training, advice, and mentoring programs for adults (parents, teachers, and community activists) who support young children in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict
- Develop curriculum and resources for young children in regions experiencing or emerging from armed conflict
- Contribute to the research and evidence base on peace building with young children in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict

## Postscript

One of the key questions which has driven the development of this book is: “What role can we, as early years professionals, play in terms of helping to build the peace?” By Chapter Ten, we have shown irrevocably that the early years sector has an important role to play locally, nationally, and internationally in advocating for children and bringing pressure to bear for peace.

Early childhood professionals and workers from around the world do not necessarily define their field in the same way. They have wide-ranging goals, diverse methods, and ways of working. There are huge disparities in the early childhood sector in relation to access to resources. Every early childhood professional, trainer, and advocate faces distinct issues which demand vastly different approaches for success. Can we really expect early childhood professionals to work as a united front towards a goal as broad as “bringing pressure to bear for peace”?

The answer is yes.

This book is a direct outcome of the International Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children. The book evolved because of consistent and powerful leadership by the original organisers, and the commitment and mutual support felt by team members. The International Working Group will be making a series of presentations about the contents of this book and the processes that can give voice and power to working groups. The International Working Group represents a sustainable forum for all of us who care about what is happening to young children and who believe that there are windows of opportunities — even within the most drastic situations, where a difference can be made. It is our hope that many more individuals will join the group and work with us. There are many more stories to share, many more learnings to extract, and many more ways that early childhood professionals can make that difference — *together!*

