



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

In November 2005, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), with assistance from the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs (CCEIA), hosted a three-day conference, “Unite or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict.” Participants included 28 teachers, education ministry officials, academic historians, transitional justice experts, and social scientists from around the world; approximately one-third are current or former Institute grantees. The conference explored how divided societies recovering from violent conflict can teach the conflict’s history, so as not to re-ignite it or contribute to future cycles of violence and to participate in a larger process of social reconstruction and reconciliation. Organizers included Judy Barsalou (vice president of USIP’s Grant and Fellowship Program) and Elizabeth A. Cole (assistant director of TeachAsia at the Asia Society and former director of the History and the Politics of Reconciliation Program at CCEIA).

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

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JUNE 2006

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*Elizabeth A. Cole and Judy Barsalou*

## Unite or Divide?

### The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict

#### Summary

- In deeply divided societies, contending groups’ historical narratives—especially the official versions presented most often in state-run schools—are intimately connected to the groups’ identities and sense of victimization. Such narratives are often contradictory and controversial. History taught in schools is highly susceptible to simplified and biased presentations, and this is even more likely after conflicts, such as the war in Bosnia, that end through international intervention. How schools navigate and promote historical narratives through history education partly determines the roles they and those who control the schools play in promoting conflict or social reconstruction.
- Immediately after widespread violent conflict, some societies suspend the teaching of history because they cannot achieve consensus on how and what to teach. Instead they may concentrate on improving civics or human rights education. It may take a decade or more to reform history curricula, and the assistance of “outsiders” can be vital in such efforts.
- Pedagogy—the way teachers teach—is critically important to reform efforts. Approaches that emphasize students’ critical thinking skills and expose them to multiple historical narratives can reinforce democratic and peaceful tendencies in transitional societies emerging from violent conflict. Often pedagogy is inseparable from content in history education reform, but pedagogy sometimes receives less attention than curriculum. Especially in resource-poor settings, helping history teachers promote critical inquiry may be more urgent than reforming history textbooks.
- Structural issues in the education system—such as funding, ethnic segregation, issues of access and equity, the choice of languages to teach in ethnically divided societies, the system of national examinations, and the relative value accorded history education compared to other subjects—are crucial in determining education’s role in post-conflict social reconstruction.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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- History education after violent conflict is burdened with many expectations, including political and social goals articulated by various stakeholders but rarely examined for factual contradictions or tested against reality. Outside reformers often unrealistically expect history teachers to serve as social change agents, despite overwhelming pressure for them to conform to existing social and political norms. Politics frequently determines how and what history is taught.
- Outsiders of many kinds—such as peacekeepers, international organizations, and NGOs—play an increasingly large role in post-conflict reconstruction related to education, but their attention to and impact on education reform vary.
- History education should be understood as an integral but underutilized part of transitional justice and social reconstruction. It can support *or* undermine the goals of tribunals, truth commissions and memorials, and other transitional justice mechanisms.

## Introduction

In societies recovering from violent conflict, questions of how to deal with the past are acute, especially when the past involves memories of victimization, death, and destruction so widespread that a high percentage of the population is affected. Immediately after violence, political leaders and others often seem to prefer social amnesia as they try to “move on” and promote stability. In some countries, such as Bosnia and Rwanda, teaching about the country's immediate past has been partly or wholly suspended in public schools because of unwillingness or inability to devise acceptable approaches to teaching this controversial subject. In other countries, such as Guatemala, attempts to reform history teaching focus on introducing new curricula on civics or citizenship instead of revising history education.

Transitional justice processes, such as the establishment of truth commissions and legal tribunals, may be implemented to help a country try to construct new historical narratives. Those who establish these processes, however, generally pay little or no attention to whether or how history is being taught in schools. Nor do they plan to allot sufficient resources to implementing curricular and pedagogical reforms when these new historical narratives are formulated and need to be publicized. Re-establishment of security, constitutional reform, elections, and transformation of judicial and political institutions tend to take precedence. Transitional justice processes, such as the establishment of truth commissions and legal tribunals, may be implemented—often to help a country construct new historical narratives. But usually they show little or no regard to whether or how history is actually taught in schools or to devoting significant resources to implement curricular and pedagogical reforms.

To explore these issues, the Institute's conference focused on the following questions:

- **History, Identity, and Education:** What is the relationship between education, historical memories of violence, and the formation of cultural and national identity? What can and should history education try to achieve in deeply damaged societies to foster moral and civic development in young people and transformation of attitudes toward former enemies? Can the teaching of history help transitional societies become more democratic? In societies in which some groups were targeted for marginalization and disenfranchisement, can it contribute to development of empathy for, or even social cohesion among, former enemies? Can history teaching reinforce other transitional justice processes, such as truth telling and legal accountability for crimes committed? Can it promote belief in the rule of law, resistance to a culture of impunity, and greater trust in public institutions, including schools themselves?

- **Post-Conflict Reconstruction and History Education:** Where does the reform of history and civics curricula intersect with the work of those planning reconstruction and reform of the larger educational system, including nationwide exams or financing of public education? How has integrating segregated schools or classrooms been handled, and to what effect? How should officials make decisions about whose languages are used in school systems? What relationship, if any, exists between educational reform and other transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions, tribunals, lustration, and commemoration? What is the optimal timing and sequencing of different transitional justice processes and educational reform?
- **The Content of Post-Conflict History Education:** What problems arise in developing and adopting new history curricula? Among those who experienced the violence directly (generally during the first two decades after major violence ends), who decides what version(s) of history will be taught? What impact do those choices have on promoting stable, cohesive, and tolerant societies? What is the relationship between the (re)writing of history by academic historians and the development of secondary-school history textbooks? What impact do transitional justice processes have on the development of new secondary-school history textbooks and the way history is actually taught in schools?
- **Pedagogic Challenges:** What challenges do teachers face in the classroom when addressing controversial historical subjects, and what are some of the different approaches they use? How can teachers be trained or prepared to address these subjects, and how can they be supported and protected in environments where disagreements over history might give rise to violence? Given limited resources, should teacher training take priority over curricular reform?
- **Evaluation:** What is the best way to evaluate the impact of curricular reform and history teaching on individual students and the broader society? Which forces other than formal education—such as the media, religious institutions, popular culture, and stories conveyed through families and local communities—influence how schoolchildren think about themselves and their country’s history? How do we account for *context*—the immense differences between types of conflicts, the cultural settings in which they took place, and the methods by which conflict was reduced—while recognizing the practical and ethical need to assess what methods work and how best to use scarce resources? What do we currently know about what “works” in history education and what approaches might even be harmful?

In addition to the above themes, we posed the following crosscutting questions: What are the appropriate roles of “insiders” (locals) and “outsiders” (people from outside the country)? What are the specific ethical and practical pitfalls facing outsiders? How do insiders and outsiders negotiate the process of establishing and sustaining relationships? How can outsiders help introduce changes that insiders otherwise find difficult or impossible to make on their own? What are the limits to and constraints on the involvement of outsiders?

## The Role of History Education: Areas of Consensus

The proper goals of history education proved to be among the hardest issues for the conference to address. On the following points there was general agreement:

**Schools as Social Transmitters:** Schools are among the primary social institutions that transmit national narratives about the past; they also constitute the site of many past and present inequities. Educational systems have both overt and hidden agendas by which groups (such as the Tutsi in pre-genocide Rwanda) can be marginalized or included. Schools can both reflect and reinforce social divisions. In exclusionary education systems, for example, history education develops and protects narrowly defined

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*How can outsiders help introduce changes that insiders otherwise find difficult or impossible to make on their own?*

*After violent conflict ends, educational systems, which generally are very slow to change, often reflect or preserve the memory of older unjust systems.*

*History education should have two aims: to support democracy and mutual respect for the “other” and to include the histories of the formerly marginalized.*

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ethnic, religious, and cultural identities that can be used to legitimate violence against marginalized groups. After violent conflict ends, educational systems, which generally are very slow to change, often reflect or preserve the memory of older unjust systems, such as Apartheid.

**Promoting Active Citizenship:** Teachers and students in societies emerging from violent conflict often display fear, passivity, fatalism, and pessimism. Teaching history can help students become engaged, responsible citizens, even in societies where ethnic divisions, poverty, mistrust, and low-level violence remain endemic. History should be taught in a way that inspires young people to believe in their own ability to effect positive changes in society and contribute to a more peaceful and just future.

**Making History Real:** Through history education, students can see how they, their families, their ethnic groups, and their communities fit into depictions of their country's history. Teaching should encourage students to explore the variegated experiences of different groups affected by the violence. In this conception, students focus on the everyday experience of historical actors and the choices individuals can and must make to affect historical outcomes.

**Promoting Positive Values:** History education should avoid marginalizing and demonizing particular groups. Learning from the experience of post-Apartheid South Africa and other countries, history education should have two aims: to support democracy and mutual respect for the “other” and to include the histories of the formerly marginalized.

## Areas of Disagreement

Despite consensus on the above issues, conference participants disagreed about the following points:

**The Nature of Truth:** The relationship between transitional justice, educational reform, and teaching history was the focus of considerable discussion and critical analysis. Of particular interest was the question of how reports produced by truth and reconciliation commissions could be used in teaching history. Participants differed philosophically, however, about how one defines the truth and whether it is appropriate or feasible to construct a single, “true” historical narrative. Some participants noted that the records of trials and truth commissions can establish certain facts that the public then accepts as reasonable truth. In conflicts in which many parties committed acts of violence, commissions can prove not only that many have blood on their hands, but also that some bear relatively greater responsibility for causing death and destruction. They also can demonstrate how certain institutions were deeply implicated in promoting injustice, so that the violence cannot be explained away as the work of a few “bad apples.” The most successful truth commissions and history education programs underscore the complexity of truth telling.

**Tempering Truth:** Participants debated whether certain truths must be tempered in the interest of promoting reconciliation and inclusion. Even when one party to the conflict clearly is more responsible for promoting or creating the structural conditions that led to violence, history education can make a positive contribution by acknowledging that all the parties participated in the violence and pointing out the relative roles of the different groups. Doing this could lay the groundwork for a common identity, desire for repentance, and vigilance against future violence. This is the approach taken by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its champions believe that a narrative that strays too far in the direction of “angels and maggots,” to use the phrase of Polish political activist Adam Michnik, is not most useful for a post-violence society. Although the narrative should not be distorted, it can and should be molded to suit the needs of a society engaged in creating or recreating the most basic levels of social trust.

**Avoiding Moral Relativity:** A major controversy at the conference concerned how to encourage students to explore differing narratives without straying into moral relativity (“There are no fixed standards of morality, so an act one individual or group considers

evil may not be evil to another—it all depends on one’s point of view”) or nihilism (“No moral values exist at all”). It is clear that history education at the secondary-school level should be informed by historical scholarship that widely respected researchers on both sides of a conflict have produced—if it exists.

**Nation Building:** Another controversy developed about what history education can and should try to achieve. Is it a tool in nation building or state building? To what degree should it serve the “national” project? Ambassador Robert Beecroft, the former head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggested that history in divided societies must be a tool for state building, for creating a common civic consciousness. But for history professor Amal Jayawardene of Sri Lanka, developing new, progressive approaches to teaching history in ethnically separate schools might help separate nations within a state grow and flourish. That is, they might permit the development of particular ethnic identities within a society at the same time as they promote a common national identity.

**Healing:** Should history education have therapeutic aims in a society that has experienced widespread suffering? Can it contribute to the creation of empathy and the lessening of hatred and the desire for revenge? Are history classes the place to promote moral values or critical thinking? No one in the assembled international group of experts questioned the relationship of history education to citizenship formation or championed a rote-learning approach to history; but some supported history education as a means of teaching moral values more strongly than others.

**Reconciliation:** Although those working in the field of history education agree that it should contribute somehow to the development of more thoughtful and optimistic citizens in a better society, how precisely to envision the goals of history education in post-conflict societies remains elusive. Reconciliation as a goal is problematic because of the vague nature of the term and the perceived tension between reconciliation and the achievement of justice through legal and other forms of accountability. Conference participants used other, related concepts—such as “social reconstruction,” “social cohesion,” and “deeper democracy”—without reaching full agreement.

## Timing Issues

As Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin pointed out, the idea that rancor between enemies fades as time passes is not necessarily true: Time does not heal all wounds, and returning to the contentious past occurs for many reasons and at different stages in the lives of different societies. New political developments and conflicts continuously change the meaning of earlier events. If society does not address the origins of the conflict effectively, they tend to be the bases of future instability and conflict.

Sometimes one sector—religious institutions or nongovernmental groups, for example—can deal more openly with the past conflict, while others cannot. Popular culture—film, theater, music, and literature—often leads the way in helping a society face uncomfortable truths. But educational systems often are among the slowest public institutions to make significant changes. It is crucial for those working in history education reform to take into account the problem of time, because understanding when certain interventions can and should occur is an important part of their success or failure.

Time also must pass before developments in other sectors filter down to classrooms. An example is the work of historical and history textbook commissions: Findings from the Polish-German Textbooks Commission, considered one of the best in Europe in terms of its academic quality and apolitical character, took ten years to reach Polish and German history programs and textbooks. A similar time lag usually exists between the work of academic historians and the development of secondary-school history texts based on their scholarship.

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Generational change is an important element of timing. The example of post-Franco Spain makes it obvious that the history of a conflict can be taught one way when the conflict is only recently “over” and another way when half-a-century has passed. Even five or ten years can make a difference. In the first five years after the conflict, the students, together with their teachers and parents, probably have direct experience of violence. Ten years after, students entering high school may have vague memories of the conflict in which their teachers and parents were involved; fifteen years after, students may find the conflict practically irrelevant to their own lives. This reality shapes history education programs and the extent to which they can tackle contentious events.

Another temporal problem is the perception that a conflict “ends” when certain events take place: A regime changes, a peace accord is signed, a victory by one side is acknowledged. But the reality is that conflict almost always continues at some level, and violence takes new forms. In South Africa, for example, criminal, gang, and sexual violence continues to be a major problem. Economic inequity, which may be the root of much violence, rarely changes dramatically when high-level violence ends and can threaten to undermine unstable “peace.” The search for new approaches to history education often takes place in situations where past violence that constitutes the object of historical study continues in different forms in the present. Ongoing economic injustice, ethnic segregation, and unequal access to public resources (such as funding for education that privileges one ethnic group over another) may continue to define and undermine the entire educational sector.

## **Structural Issues**

Determining which languages shall be used to instruct schoolchildren is one of many issues for post-conflict school systems and is particularly problematic in divided, multi-ethnic, and multilingual societies. Although it is important for children of a multilingual country to learn the language (and, by extension, culture) of other main groups of citizens in addition to their own mother tongue, having too many official languages in the schools can promote semiliteracy, poor performance, high repetition, and high dropout rates (as seen in many African countries). At the same time, the rising importance of English as a useful language in the global marketplace is increasingly influencing language policies.

Ethnic segregation or integration of schools also is an important structural aspect of education. When different ethnic groups are educated separately within the national education system, and especially when one ethnic (or gender) group receives more educational resources than another, such arrangements can convey important overt or hidden messages to students. Some educational systems (such as Macedonia’s) permit the use of different history texts in ethnically segregated classrooms. In this case, history instruction in Macedonia is the same for Albanians and Slavs—but only in the sense that each group separately learns a remarkably similar history of victimization by the other, and each claims the same distinctions, such as a longer presence in the region.

State and national examination systems, on which grade advancement, school graduation, or university admission depends, pose another, nearly universal challenge for history education reform. In East Asia, school systems stress rote learning and memorization to improve students’ chances on exams that reward this type of pedagogy. Such exam systems generally do not encourage innovation in history education. In many regions, including Europe and, increasingly, the United States, the pressure on teachers to “teach to the exam” makes it difficult for them to use elective and supplementary materials beyond the state-approved textbooks. While the latter may have education ministry approval and are less likely to be innovative, supplemental texts can avoid politically charged approval processes more easily and address controversial historical subjects in new ways.

Another challenge is the decreasing priority given to the teaching of history and the humanities by post-conflict societies intent on preparing their students to compete in

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the global marketplace. In much of Africa and in post-Shining Path Peru, for example, history, social studies, and the humanities are relatively low priorities in education, with more emphasis on subjects seen to have practical value, such as foreign languages, math, science, technology, and vocational training. Thus the potential for schools to promote social reconstruction through history education in post-conflict societies is not being fully realized.

A further structural issue is the importance of primary schools in developing countries. Most children in Africa, for example, do not continue their education beyond primary school, so educators considering introducing crucial material for a post-conflict society must think of how to present it on that level, not only in middle and high school. In addition, in many post-conflict settings, girls' education is consistently undervalued, especially where demobilized boys and young men are a priority. The absence of girls from school or their high dropout rates cannot help affecting the success rate of post-conflict educational programs designed to promote social reconstruction and peacebuilding.

In the most devastated societies emerging from violent conflict—including a number of African countries—war has virtually destroyed entire national school systems. In Rwanda, for example, 75 percent of schoolteachers were killed or imprisoned in connection with the genocide. Students may want to return to schools that no longer exist, or to classrooms where all the books have been destroyed. In some places—such as Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—and especially where school systems were weak even before the war started, school reform initially must take a backseat to basic school reconstruction. Despite rhetoric about the urgent need for educational reform at different levels, little or none takes place because of a paucity of financial and professional resources and competence in curriculum development.

Regardless of the setting, political resistance to change, scarce resources, and short attention spans impede structural educational reforms. The fact that educational reform, done properly, is a long-term and costly proposition deters not only local actors but also outside donors interested in promoting post-conflict reconstruction. If the political establishment does not support reform goals, or if they view them in politically charged terms, the reforms are likely to fail.

## The Work of “Outsiders”

In post-conflict countries receiving substantial foreign attention, post-conflict reconstruction increasingly tends to be transnational, although “insiders,” or locals, are the ones who will have to live with, and take responsibility for, the long-term results of reconstruction and reform work. Outsiders who work on history-education reform tend to be from nongovernmental organizations rather than transnational organizations or foreign governments; some academics from foreign universities also are becoming involved. Often, however, powerful outside actors, particularly funders, view education as a domestic issue that “insiders” are best qualified to tackle. They consider other transitional justice processes, such as trials and elections, worthier of their time and support, as well as more appropriate for outsider involvement.

Predictably, outsiders' contributions to educational reform efforts are both positive and negative. On the positive side, outsiders can get insiders engaged in reform processes that are too contentious for locals to handle on their own, bringing together groups otherwise disinclined to work together. For example, in Rwanda, where the teaching of national history was still suspended a decade after the genocide ended, outsiders played a catalytic role in encouraging the education ministry to begin reforming the history curriculum. In that case, the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkeley, worked to connect and convene stakeholders of different age groups and levels within and outside the official education hierarchy, including NGO representatives, government officials, representatives of different ethnic and linguistic groups, returned exiles, and

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internally displaced persons. The Berkeley group then worked closely with Rwandan historians, curriculum designers, teacher trainers, and officials from the education ministry to plan curricular materials outlining local understandings of history, teaching guides, and teacher workshops that focused on handling difficult discussions in the classroom. In a USIP grant report, UC Berkeley Professor Harvey Weinstein reported, “The Director of the National Curriculum Development Center thanked us for ending a ten-year drought in the teaching of history in Rwanda and giving the Ministry of Education the courage to confront difficult issues.” An American NGO called Facing History and Ourselves subsequently organized training workshops for Rwandan master teachers on how to use the new curricular materials.

Outsiders can ask questions that seem naïve or obvious to insiders but provide insiders with opportunities to reassess or challenge received wisdom. They also can help convene groups that have rarely or never worked together before. In the Rwanda project cited above, outsiders helped high-school teachers work with and challenge socially elite, university-level, academic historians and education officials in ways that would have been difficult without such encouragement.

Even in the most supportive environments, local resources may be too scarce to realize well-intentioned reform efforts. In post-Apartheid South Africa, for example, Facing History and Ourselves assisted a local education project called Shikaya in bringing together for the first time teachers assigned to teach new, multicultural civics curricula. Most of these teachers had never interacted on a professional basis with colleagues from different races or socioeconomic classes. Resources brought into the educational system by outsiders were necessary to make such meetings possible.

Outside groups also can offer resources for reform projects that local governments will not fund because they are controversial or politically risky. For example, the Georg Eckert Institute in Germany provided meeting places in Germany and Turkey for an Israeli-Palestinian group that worked unofficially to create new history materials that outlined contending Israeli and Palestinian historical narratives.

On the negative side, outsiders can inadvertently complicate educational reforms. An example of the “law of unintended consequences” resulted from the Washington and Dayton agreements, which gave impetus to replacement of Bosnia’s prewar, unitary education system. In its place, a complex, segregated system developed consisting of 13 separate education ministries with no overriding state coordination. The agreements’ negotiators did not intend to create a polarizing educational system, but constructing a Bosnian government through negotiation with warring parties made the education system truly unworkable.

When the international community tried to rectify the situation eight years later, its top-down approach in Bosnia further complicated the situation. The results were decidedly mixed because those who opposed reunifying the education system successfully galvanized opposition among parents and teachers against further education-system restructuring.

In other places, outsiders have played complicated or even compromising roles. In the words of George Washington University historian Daqing Yang, Americans in post-World War II Japan were “implicated outsiders,” whose efforts to promote new approaches to history education were undermined by the fact that they were part of the victorious, invading, or “liberating” army, and their neutrality was questionable. In such cases, as in Japan, the likelihood of a backlash years later is high.

Even “non-implicated” outsiders often overlook local teaching methodologies and knowledge. For example, outside interventions promoting peace education in Africa often are not based on local experience or cultural traditions, and they make little lasting impact. Outsiders who “parachute in” and “parachute out” for short-term educational reform projects may leave behind texts and equipment that are not adapted to local circumstances and that no one knows how to use. Even more serious are cases in traditional societies where outsiders teach methodologies, such as talk therapy for severely traumatized victims of violence, that may be culturally inappropriate or ineffective.

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## Curriculum Content

The revision of history textbook content is inextricably linked to larger political debates about which narratives of history are true. Secondary-school history textbooks rarely, if ever, play a pioneering role in tackling highly sensitive issues or changing historical narratives that are not widely accepted in society.

A key problem for educators is achieving agreement on historical narratives. Social consensus must be reached to ensure approval and adoption of history textbooks that break with old myths glorifying one group and demonizing others. How much consensus is necessary to change problematic history textbooks that feed the cycle of violence, and how can consensus ever be achieved? Especially in contexts where the conflict has not yet been “resolved,” some history educators believe that searching for consensus on historical truth will bring only disappointment. Educators at least can begin by aiming to persuade each group in a conflict to look—in the words of Tel Aviv University historian Eyal Naveh—at its *own* historical myths with irony. This goal precedes any attempt to help contending groups understand and accept the narratives of groups defined as current or former enemies.

The challenges of reaching consensus about past violence are immense. First, political leaders, and many citizens as well, have a vested interest in retaining simple narratives that flatter their own group and promote group unity by emphasizing sharp divergences between themselves and other groups. They are highly resistant to histories that include the presentation of the other side’s point of view.

In addition, much of history depends on the viewpoint of those writing it. Although post-conflict societies could benefit from accounts of history that play down the differences between former enemies, some truths do exist: the so-called forensic truths, the “who did what to whom” facts that human rights investigators seek to illuminate. Denying them results in dangerous moral relativism—for example, equating mass killings by a state’s military and police forces with fewer killings by guerrillas or resistance groups, as in South Africa or Guatemala. The challenge in these situations is to teach history that acknowledges these facts while finding enough common ground for former enemies to work toward a shared future.

Projects attempting to explore middle paths between extreme positions provide a basis for hope. For example, the previously mentioned, small-scale, unofficial project of which Tel Aviv University historian Eyal Naveh is the Israeli director has brought together two teams of Palestinian and Israeli teachers, each headed by a historian, to write essays on common themes. They then exchange and discuss the essays. The only rule the group made was that no incitement to violence could appear in the essays. With the aim to help everyone understand that each side has its own narrative, the project has produced supplemental materials tested not in classrooms but in informal discussion sessions with students. The project is proceeding with teacher training funded by external donors.

In the “Scholars Initiative,” Purdue University historian Charles Ingrao is working with an international consortium of some 280 academic historians and social scientists from 26 countries in the Balkans, Western Europe, and the United States to examine contentious historical narratives relating to the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s. Historians from contending groups work together on eleven research teams devoted to particular controversies. Each is cochaired by a Serb and a non-Serb scholar whose responsibility is to produce a report identifying areas of consensus, as well as unresolved issues that require additional research. The reports are then posted on a Web site for comments by the project’s other scholars. Ingrao bases his approach on the belief that academic narratives must be consistent with the historical record before secondary-school history can follow suit—and this can be achieved through serious scholarship.

Scholars are also at the heart of East Asian projects in existence since 1965. One group, composed of Japanese, Chinese, and U.S.-based scholars, is publishing in the three countries collections of scholarly articles on Sino-Japanese relations that resulted

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***Some education reformers have sought to produce new curricula based on representative personal stories rather than more traditional, academic historiography.***

***Reforming pedagogy—the way history is taught—should take priority in many contexts over curriculum revision, especially when resources are scarce.***

***Even the best curricular materials may be wasted in the hands of teachers unprepared to use them well in the classroom.***

from their joint meetings. In addition, in 2005 a group of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean historians, working outside the media spotlight that focused on Japanese textbook revisions and demonstrations against them in China and Korea, produced a supplementary high-school history reader in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese. Called *A History That Opens to the Future*, it achieved good sales during its first year of use.

Some education reformers have sought to produce new curricula based on representative personal stories rather than more traditional, academic historiography. Drawing on victims' stories from the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission (CEH), one project created booklets designed to be inserted in regular textbooks and used as supplemental material. Despite a controversial framework that obscures the roots of the conflict and focuses on the absence of violence, rather than the struggle for justice, as a goal, the materials, largely funded by international donors, provide compelling narratives for students about Guatemala's civil war. In South Africa, the "Facing the Past, Transforming Our Future" curriculum, based on Facing History and Ourselves' methodology, uses two case studies to promote student involvement and personal agency. The case studies—on Nazism and the Holocaust and on Apartheid—were selected mainly because they provide a framework for students to understand the importance of making individual choices and taking risks to resist persecution and tyranny.

## **Pedagogy**

One of the most important insights from the conference is that reforming pedagogy—the way history is taught—should take priority in many contexts over curriculum revision, especially when resources are scarce. Pedagogy that emphasizes rote learning, uncritical thinking, and the authority of a narrowly defined, "true" narrative is unlikely to permit new understandings of former enemies and promote social reconstruction. Yet few post-conflict societies are ready to accept an approach that promotes critical thinking, since it is often perceived as flying in the face of traditions that respect expertise, seniority, and authority and promote group honor as more important than any forensic truth.

A number of conference participants stressed the importance of focusing on pedagogy. Some noted that the most devastated educational systems may lack even basic textbooks, and sufficient time and money are often unavailable to produce them quickly. In such situations, the immediate focus should be on helping teachers gain the necessary skills and confidence to help their students address the past through open inquiry and critical thinking, even without new textbooks.

Given the time it takes to develop new textbooks, even when more resources are available to do so, teachers can use old texts to produce "teachable moments" by helping students understand how the texts promoted narrow historical interpretations that directly or indirectly incited violent conflict.

Conference participants also pointed out that in many societies disrupted by violent conflict, teacher training has often suffered; some teachers may have received little, no, or inappropriate instruction on *how* to teach before they entered the profession. In Rwanda, for example, teachers were trained in a rigid, passive pedagogy that still encourages them to resort to corporal punishment. Conference participants reported that secondary-school history teachers in Lebanon and South Africa often are not well-trained compared to teachers of other subjects, even though training in academic history at the university level meets much higher standards. In such situations, even the best curricular materials may be wasted in the hands of teachers unprepared to use them well in the classroom.

As a strategy, pedagogical reform is attractive because it may be less controversial or threatening than attempts immediately after conflict to change historical narratives through curriculum reform. But pedagogy reform is most effective when combined with curriculum reform. Violeta Petroska-Beska, a Macedonian educator at Sts. Cyril and Methodius University, developed one such experimental program. She is working with

teachers from the Albanian and Slav communities to design history curricular materials that present each group's historical perspectives, with similarities and differences offered for analysis and discussion. Petroska-Beska also is innovating by mixing the two ethnic groups in professional teacher-training workshops. Her goal is to open teachers' minds to accepting the presentation of different historical perspectives in the classroom, even when the teachers do not agree with the contending historical narratives.

Teachers participating in the conference noted that history teachers generally are under enormous pressure in post-conflict societies to play too many roles—from psychologist and guidance counselor to conflict resolution expert and mediator. Education reformers, particularly those from outside, also typically expect teachers to be agents of fundamental social change. Yet evidence from Northern Ireland shows that teachers are not comfortable being leading agents of social change, and they doubt that anything they teach can counter what the history students learn at home. In the most extreme cases, in highly charged political contexts where adopting new teaching approaches or texts may lead to threats to teachers' physical safety, they will be especially likely to shy away from innovation.

Those pushing for reform should understand that teachers and school administrators willing to embrace change often do so at the risk of strong public criticism, or worse. For example, a recent edition of *Balkan Insight* (No. 20, February 20, 2006) described a "storm" of controversy that has erupted over Petroska-Beska's efforts to reform the teaching of history in Macedonia. In a typical comment, Blaze Risteovski, the director of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, said, "As a scientist, I can't allow that truth can be found through this kind of 'partnership.' It just adds more petrol to the fire between the two sides." Ljupco Jordanovski, speaker of the Macedonian parliament, said not enough time had passed since the recent conflict between Macedonian Slavs and Albanians, and objectivity is impossible because "we were all either direct or indirect participants." Countering that such reforms are hard to undertake at any time, Petroska-Beska argued, "If we don't speak openly about these painful issues, we leave a space to create ethnically colored, opposing versions that will affect the definition of official history."

Teachers need strong support from parents, school administrators, and other authorities to teach new curricula and use new pedagogies. Such support must be ongoing, as teachers suffer from burnout, especially in high-stress situations. Shikaya, the nonprofit South African educational group that works on integrating the "Facing the Past, Transforming Our Future" curriculum, is pioneering ways to fill South Africa's gap in teacher training, particularly through in-service training and continuous support that includes online and personal contact to develop teaching skills, resources, and personal growth.

In supportive environments, teachers may use very different methods to achieve the common goal of encouraging their students to think critically. In teaching about her country's ongoing civil war, Colombian history teacher Carolina Valencia Varga uses news clippings and mission statements of the various parties to the conflict to pose three sets of core questions to students: (1) "Who are the 'bad guys?'" (2) "Were they born paramilitaries (or guerrillas, narcotraffickers, etc.)? Why would someone join such a group? Did they have a choice, and what would you have done in their place?" and (3) "Is there anything I can do about it?"

The discussion of teaching methods revealed an important disagreement among teachers about using graphic or heart-wrenching photographs, documentary films, and firsthand accounts in classrooms, particularly with younger students. The group Facing History and Ourselves has pioneered careful use of such materials in classrooms, but some participants feared they might backfire, especially with young children and boys, and would not produce empathy. Moreover, the reception of such materials may be culturally conditioned. Overall, we do not know enough yet about commemoration among children and adolescents, nor how best to achieve a balance of "head and heart," based on intellectual and affective cognition, among students.

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## History Education and Transitional Justice

***Without meaningful educational reform, the work of other transitional justice mechanisms is likely to be “top-down” and have limited impact.***

The connections between transitional justice and educational reform, especially of history education, have been underexplored and underutilized. Conference participants agreed that education should be considered as a major tool of transitional justice, because without meaningful educational reform, the work of other transitional justice mechanisms is likely to be “top-down” and have limited impact.

Traditional transitional-justice interventions—such as truth commissions, tribunals, and memorials—potentially offer a great deal to history educators. Because they are officially sanctioned, trials and truth commissions can provide materials that even skittish governments cannot forbid in the classroom; examples include the report by the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission and accounts of trials of Argentine generals that history teachers in those countries have used. War crimes trials have inherently dramatic qualities that hold students’ attention and can form the basis of powerful curricular materials. The strongest didactic material may lie in truth commission testimonies, as they present the voices of ordinary people with compelling stories to tell. It is crucial, however, that such materials represent a range of voices and experiences. In addition, memorials and museums are powerful sites for teaching history, both in and out of the classroom.

The potential has not been fully realized in the classroom of using materials derived from transitional justice interventions. Part of the problem is that few commissions—except for the Guatemalan and Peruvian truth commissions—have made a conscious effort to produce educational materials. Organizations such as Facing History and Ourselves that have used materials derived from truth commissions have found them to be very popular and effective.

## Other Educational Approaches

Immediately after conflict, some societies develop new courses—on civics, peace education, human rights, conflict resolution, democracy, and tolerance, rather than history—and may seek to help students develop new skills as active citizens. Although the conference did not systematically explore how to teach such courses, either alone or in conjunction with history courses, the discussion made it clear that efforts to reform history teaching may take varied and sometimes complementary forms.

Civics education often is linked closely to history teaching. For example, in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, history teachers also teach civics; and, as education scholar Carolyn Kissane found, history teachers have tried to integrate new ideas and pedagogy in their history teaching from civics workshops run by international NGOs. Although it usually does not focus on the past, peace education may model new pedagogical approaches useful for history teaching, but in a much less controversial curriculum. For example, in Lebanon, teaching about the civil war remains stalled because of lack of political will and consensus about the war’s causes, as well as inadequate teacher training and curricular materials. Although pedagogy in Lebanon remains very traditional, development of a peace education manual under the leadership of Lebanese American University Professor Irma Ghosn allowed local educators to experiment with the new pedagogical approaches it gently introduced.

Human rights education presents special challenges. Few would dispute the value of promoting knowledge of and respect for human rights in the abstract, but doing so has raised interesting problems in Guatemala and Argentina. In those countries, by avoiding discussion of marginalized groups’ political resistance and continuing economic exclusion, human rights educational materials have presented a narrative of “innocent” victims who passively endured violence instead of actively trying to end their marginalization. Efforts to introduce human rights education have been more successful in South Africa,

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where human rights is welcomed as a crucial part of citizen formation and is a crosscutting theme in many subjects.

## Evaluating Impact

Evaluating the impact of history teaching on individual students and the larger society is extremely difficult. The problem begins with a lack of clarity about what should be evaluated. Students can be tested to see what they know about a conflict and those defined as former enemies. Evaluating their attitudes about tolerance and reconciliation is more difficult; even harder is assessing what impact a particular educational course or program (as opposed to other social influences) has had on forming or changing those attitudes at the individual and social level.

Efforts to evaluate the effects of education programs often fail because of lack of a larger vision of what a society wants to become and how to get there. Is the purpose of education reform to produce social cohesion, legitimize differences, acknowledge the existence and narratives of others, foster reconciliation, or encourage commitment to democracy? If so, how does education create or reinforce such values? In short, effective education reform and evaluation require consensus on what constitutes the common good and the programs to achieve it—precisely what is lacking in many post-conflict societies.

Despite the fact that education and social reconstruction are long-term, ongoing processes, few evaluations of educational impact have a comparative framework designed to capture attitude change over significant periods. Both quantitative and qualitative methods need to be used, since quantitative methods alone may produce but not explain paradoxical findings. For example, recent surveys in Northern Ireland have revealed a widespread desire for more integration, even as reliable studies show Northern Irish society to be more segregated now than at any previous time.

In Northern Ireland, as in many school systems, education policies originally formulated in the education department often change as they pass through the curriculum council, district-level school authorities, school principals, and finally classroom teachers. What top school administrators originally intended—that the teaching of history should help students acquire a more nuanced understanding of Northern Ireland's difficult past—appears to bear little relationship to what actually is occurring in classrooms. Very little evaluation has taken place on the impact of history education in Northern Ireland, although interviews with teachers have revealed their resistance to taking on the ambitious goal of using history instruction to promote social change, as opposed to ensuring that students are well versed in British and world history. Some studies in Northern Ireland have investigated young people's construction of historical narratives and the nature of their historical understanding. According to Queens University Belfast Professor Tony Gallagher, none has tried to link young people's knowledge of history to their feelings about the conflict.

Evaluation of civics education reform should focus not only on acquisition of new knowledge but also on students' competence to participate in building a more stable and democratic society. Rosario Jaramillo, of the Colombian education ministry, argued strongly for measuring both, as Colombia has begun doing through national evaluation of its civics education courses. Like history reform efforts elsewhere, those courses share the goals of producing empathy and active participation in social and political life as antidotes to passivity or reliance on violence.

Large-scale evaluations of citizens' attitudes sometimes present models that, although not identical, may be useful for the evaluation of history education programs. For example, the "Peace Barometer" program of the Social Indicator Polling Unit at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo has evaluated public attitudes toward the peace process in Sri Lanka some twenty times since May 2001. Professor James Gibson of Washington

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University in St. Louis conducted a massive evaluation of the effect of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission on citizens' attitudes about reconciliation. Although such evaluations might not address the direct impact of education programs on the formation of social and political attitudes, they might indicate larger trends to which education programs have contributed.

Two things are clear: First, effective evaluation of educational practices and outcomes is an expensive, long-term proposition. Second, few scholars have definitively assessed the impact of history teaching initiatives on social reconstruction in post-conflict societies. More effort and resources clearly should be committed to evaluation.

### **Greatest Challenges to Revising History Education Programs**

- “Hidden agendas” and residual structures in schools that reproduce divisions even after violence ends;
- Insecure environments in which teachers feel unsafe to address controversial subjects;
- Ubiquitous politicization of the history curriculum;
- Negative influences outside school walls (the media, religious institutions, popular culture, parents, etc.) promoting conflict;
- Low priority of history education in contrast to focus on math and science;
- Short attention span of the international community;
- Inadequate efforts to measure long-term impact.

***Scholars should share their research findings with policymakers and practitioners actively engaged in history education reform in post-conflict societies.***

### **Recommendations**

- There is an urgent need for a meta-analysis or grand literature review of the current state of interdisciplinary knowledge about history teaching and learning. Scholars should share their research findings with policymakers and practitioners actively engaged in history education reform in post-conflict societies. In addition, further research is needed to delve into the differences and similarities among history education, social studies, civics, and other courses designed to promote democracy, human rights, and peace education—educational categories that are often confounded. Are they trying to achieve the same or similar goals, and which educational models are most effective in promoting social reconstruction?
- In societies afflicted by, or emerging from, violent conflict, teachers use a wide variety of techniques to teach history and related subjects. To identify teaching methods that are most successful in promoting empathy, moral development, social agency, and other possible goals of history education, more research should focus on what is going on in history classrooms and how teachers and their students interpret the sources of violence in their societies.
- Teachers do not receive sufficient support to address controversial subjects or deal with traumatized students. Significantly more investment is necessary to train history teachers in new ways to address difficult subjects in their classrooms, especially in countries where political tensions still run high.
- Post-conflict history education reform is frequently discussed and implemented without adequate reference to the developmental stages that affect children's intellectual and emotional development or the cultural factors that influence teaching and learning in different settings. History education reformers should take these factors into account. They also should investigate what impact personal exposure to violence has

***History education reformers should investigate how psychological trauma affects students and teachers engaging in discussions of history.***

on students and their teachers, and how psychological trauma affects students and teachers engaging in discussions of history.

- More research should focus on:
  - (1) What and how much students retain from their history classes;
  - (2) The role that other classes (such as religion) play in forming students' historical understanding;
  - (3) How schools' "hidden agendas" and structural features (such as ethnic segregation) affect student attitudes and identities; and
  - (4) What influences outside schools (such as the media, popular culture, family influences, and broader political processes) influence students' knowledge and interpretations of history.

Researchers should share their findings on these questions with practitioners and policymakers.

- Local and international scholars, policymakers, and practitioners inadequately understand and exploit the connections between teaching history and transitional justice processes. More research is needed on the design and impact of educational initiatives growing out of truth commissions. Moreover, transitional justice experts should address how future interventions might be designed to mesh more effectively with educational systems. In addition, international donors interested in promoting transitional justice should put educational reform on their funding agenda.
- Outsiders should carefully design their interventions to "do no harm." Given that learning and teaching are long-term and complex processes, outsiders should extend their project timelines and funding commitments.

***More research is needed on the design and impact of educational initiatives growing out of truth commissions.***

An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our Web site ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), together with additional information on the subject.

## Of Related Interest

To follow up the conference described in this report, the Institute's Education Program is developing an initiative on teaching history in societies emerging from violent conflict. It will illuminate the most successful curriculum ideas and classroom history programs; develop lessons learned, education strategies, and teacher training to promote successful history teaching in post-conflict societies; and engage policymakers, educators, and others to promote appreciation of the important role history education plays in societies emerging from violent conflict.

### *Recent Publications from USIP Press*

- "Addressing Conflict through Education," by Pamela Aall, Jeffrey Helsing, and Alan Tidwell, in *Peacemaking in International Conflict*, I. William Zartman, ed. (forthcoming).
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- *Macedonia: Understanding History, Preventing Future Conflict*, by Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska (Special Report, February 2004).
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For book sales and order information, call 800.868.8064 (toll-free U.S. only) or 703.661.1590 or fax 703.661.1501.

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