Bosnian Education for Security and Peacebuilding?

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This article examines education as a security issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where some Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats have learned to hate each other and, at times, violently reinforce ethno-cultural differences through separate education systems. It further explores education as a poorly understood conflict-prevention, post-war reconstruction and peace-building tool mainly after the 1995 Dayton Accord. It highlights the OSCE as a significant actor in recognizing and responding to education-related security needs. And it reflects on persistent challenges and prospects for a sustainable peace aided by education. Finally the article identifies new research steps to assess reforms.

Education in modern states reflects both shared values and competing allegiances to families, communities or governments. Depending on history, constitutional structures and politics, education policy decisions rest in a variety of institutions: federal ministries, provincial or state governments, local authorities (including school boards and corporations), privatized public institutions and ethnic and religious groups. Amid such diversity, agreeing on best teaching methods, curricula or learning objectives, is contentious. Philosophies and definitions of 'education' may also differ.[1] In many states education policy and curricular debates can be reasonably managed for common public good. But educational conflicts can result in problematic, sometimes dangerous social tensions. Specific curricula, teachings and practices can reinforce ideological, racial, religious or political differences. Despite pedagogical advances and new classroom practices in response to such challenges – for example, school-based conflict resolution programmes, peace education, cooperative values and techniques for 'learning to live together'[2] – education remains a poorly understood and neglected dimension of security analysis.

For centuries scholars, school teachers and politicians have debated education's role in socialization, learning, moral development, citizenship awareness, technical training and economics. Less well analysed, though, is how and why students and citizens learn to hate different ethnic groups, religions, nationalities or countries, sometimes violently acting out their views against others. Until the late 1990s education researchers paid little attention to such concerns,[3] while international relations scholars expressed 'surprise' that education could be an important 'non-traditional' security issue.[4] But the challenge is not new. Peace education became an international community goal after the Second World War. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Charter of 1946 asserted that since wars begin 'in minds' as well as from 'ignorance of each other's ways and lives', it is through education that 'defences of peace' must be built. Cold war politics complicated and limited UNESCO's

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work, but the demise of the cold war presented different challenges as civil wars broke out and new or 'transitional' states were born.

Post-cold war interventions by the international community brought so-called 'emergency education' into peacebuilding activities.[5] New groups of researchers and practitioners – such as the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) – collaborated while development agencies offered field guides, promoted international standards, supported case study research and evaluated project results and interventions, some on peace education specifically.[6] Specialized studies examined educational roles in creating or exacerbating extremist views and violence.[7] Concerning European educational peacebuilding and security challenges in particular some academic studies and conferences broke new ground reporting on field research and debating specific education reforms.[8]

Paradoxically, the post-First World War multiethnic Yugoslavia had been held together partly by a national education system that quelled ethnic, nationalist or cultural differences. After 1943, Tito promoted a common national-ethnic identity through Yugoslav socialist political unity; and 1970s education policy is said to have produced 'a remarkable respect for ethnic individuality in education'.[9] Whether such respect was genuine or contrived, Tito's death in 1980 meant that Yugoslavia as a unifying polity soon dissolved. Education was then largely ignored as a security concern in Southeast Europe. And later the international community offered little serious diplomatic or technical support for a 1996 Serb–Albanian Education Accord. The accord's failure partly contributed to the breakdown of communal relations that led to the 1999 Kosovo conflict.[10] Subsequently, scholars debated how historical perspectives in textbooks and teaching could have reinforced negative stereotypes that contributed to social breakdown across Southeast Europe.[11]

Until as recently as 2002 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) education was not viewed as essential for conflict prevention, security or peacebuilding. But perspectives and practices are changing. Indeed, the international community, acting as de facto governor in BiH, saw a role for education in state development and peacebuilding. In BiH the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) took the lead in education reforms and began evaluating its own broader institutional efforts at using education as a conflict prevention tool.[12]

Dayton's Problematic Legacy

Most schooling infrastructure had been destroyed or severely damaged during the war, with education disrupted for hundreds of thousands of refugee children. From 1996 to 2003 international donors contributed at least $227,196,736 to the education sector.[13] Yet massive aid for physical repairs and reconstruction did little to heal deep psycho-social wounds among BiH citizens.

The Dayton Accord's 1995 General Framework Agreement barely mentioned education's connection to national reconciliation needs. Dayton simply acknowledged 'the right to education' in Annex 4 of the new BiH Constitution, devolving much policy authority to three large political entities and the three ethno-cultural

groups. It further decentralized decision making, giving separate powers to govern education, science and culture to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to Republika Srpska (RS), while each of ten cantons, as well as the separate district of Brćko, all began setting their own policies and curricula.[14] Dayton created a divisive, shaky foundation with new problems for social healing, ethno-national integration and pragmatic cooperation. The agreement ignored historical–cultural and educational factors that contribute to violent conflict.

Nonetheless, over the past decade understanding of education-related dimensions of BiH peacebuilding has grown among government officials, NGOs and international aid agencies. After Dayton various studies and reports offered assessments on particular issues, from educational administration to new curricula and financing. Some reports acknowledged governance problems and the thorny issue of politicized education. Among the earliest was a 1996 UNESCO–UNDP needs assessment that helped to frame new international community donor activity and propose key projects. It made just passing reference to the former Yugoslavia's 'multicultural context', said to have been lost during the war, but lamented the emphasis on 'national subjects' and suggested that BiH education was 'moving away from multiculturalism, contrary to the trend in many modern European countries'. The report proposed 'conflict prevention, peace and multicultural education in schools'.[15] However, most international attention and resources went into meeting immediate needs and rebuilding the devastated physical infrastructure.

By the late 1990s the international community and BiH leaders gradually recognized the seriousness of education as a conflict prevention tool and security issue. Scores of government and NGO reports mentioned education as a concern for ensuring peace and security. Public awareness of, and community involvement in, education reforms increased, as did international aid for education. Given the assumption that the country's future lay in European integration, a 1999 report prepared for the World Bank stressed that education was crucial to achieve democratization and integration.[16] But analysts also noted the adverse impacts of Dayton's flawed education legacy. The first major review of national education policies acknowledging this came in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo. The Bosnian education review was part of a multi-country and comparative analysis contributing to the implementation of the new Southeast European Stability Pact.[17] In 2001 the Centre for Cooperation with Non-members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggested that the Kosovo crisis had disrupted and divided the region economically, politically and culturally. The OECD Bosnia report acknowledged that 'the decentralizing logic of Dayton has made education a hostage to latent nationalism in BiH'. It also welcomed the Office of High Representative's (OHR) intention to remove 'inflammatory content from textbooks', and pledged to monitor the situation.[18]

There is little doubt that pre-war education in BiH perpetuated the conflicting agendas of the three nationalist and ethno-religious constituencies by stereotyping and by promoting divisive political histories.[19] Post-war curricula supported a 'balance of power' among the three groups, while many post-Dayton reforms

had little to do with improving educational quality.[20] New education policies, curricula, textbooks and restricted access to schools for minority returnees underpinned the ethnic divisions and discrimination against Roma.[21] Scholars viewed the new educational system of cantons and xenophobic nationalist history teaching as particularly problematic and argued that more attention to this issue was needed to better prevent future human rights violations.[22]

Although research suggests that education is a serious problem, assessing the effectiveness of reforms is difficult without systematic empirical studies and formal evaluations. We need to know better what happens in families, churches, mosques, local communities or schools, and in the hearts and minds of individual Bosnian teachers and students. Understandably, local experts resent outside stereotyping and 'armchair theorizing' about Bosnia as a violent, ethnically divided nation and are cynical about education reforms led by well-paid international consultants, NGOs and multilateral agencies. Critics question what authority the international community should have in defining or implementing Bosnian education policies.

A degree of pessimism pervades the sector, indicating little progress on post-war education issues. For example, the World Bank financed English language and computer texts for the Muslim–Croat Federation, but some Croats would not use them. In Stolac a Croat principal would not accept donated computers saying 'he would rather deprive Croat pupils of computer education than allow them to be shared with Muslims'.[23] Another report claimed more generally that:

> Hate is passed down from parents to children, teachers to students. And the lessons start at an early age ... The Muslim kids learn that Serbs joined Croats in a 'great aggression.' The Serb kids are taught to blame Serb-hating 'criminals' and 'terrorists'. The Croat kids are told of the 'evil people' who overran them ... Every group stakes its own claim to history's laurels: victimhood, valor, virtue. 'These are myths of history for children,' said Fahrudin Rizvanbegović, education minister in the Muslim-Croat section of partitioned Bosnia. 'But myths are fiction and can cause problems.'[24]

Not every Bosnian shared such views but there is still little doubt about the seriousness of the problems. For example, the Serb education minister's car was bombed after a joint accord signing on textbook reform. As a senior education adviser to Bosnia's international administrator stressed, 'the war is not over in the minds', and politicians use prejudice in textbooks, pitting Bosnia's three education systems against each other.[25] Meanwhile youth unemployment in 2003 was officially at least 40 per cent,[26] while limited opportunities for graduates fuel their desire to leave. Those educated with high ideals but having few decent job prospects are also a serious problem, which may exacerbate underlying tensions and lead to violence. Moreover, Bosnian teachers are often poorly paid and have gone for months without salary due to inept or corrupt local authorities.[27] Significant reforms in response to such challenges were sporadic and slow to arrive until mid-2002.

Educational Reforms

After Dayton, domestic circumstances, insufficient attention by the international community and aid agency politics all inhibited major education reforms until the OHR transferred education-related authority to the OSCE in 2002. In March education ministers of the Federation and RS signed an agreement to remove objectionable material in textbooks, to cooperate on improving conditions and to prevent discrimination against returnee children and teachers.[28] A few months later the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, publicly acknowledged that education would have to be frankly and systematically addressed as a security issue:

> The current state of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a serious obstacle to stability, security, reconciliation, institution-building, sustainable refugee returns and economic recovery ... The OSCE has the necessary expertise, political clout and respect among government authorities and parliaments at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be able to lead and work with all partner organisations to provide the field dimension and political support.[29]

With a new mandate in July 2002 the OSCE established an education department which was a significant (and largely positive) bureaucratic structural initiative. Its intention was to help mitigate education's potential for creating political and ethnic violence while facilitating policy and administrative reforms.[30] A combination of political leadership, budgetary and circumstantial reasons made the OSCE, rather than a specialized education organization such as UNESCO or UNICEF, the principal multilateral agency for spearheading and monitoring education reform.[31] The OSCE's restructuring and aid to local initiatives and bureaucratic capacity has been dramatic. New international experts in the Sarajevo office were assigned to the education portfolio with local BiH employees to supervise activities in cantons, key cities and villages in cooperation with OHR and local authorities. The OSCE remains the lead international agency in facilitating and monitoring education reforms to complement non-governmental, multilateral or bilateral aid. Important early work included a campaign to implement a March 2002 agreement on Needs and Rights of Returnee Children, encouraging non-discrimination for all children, especially national minorities.[32] In addition, the OSCE aims to bring BiH closer to Europe, encouraging quality education and a core curriculum to meet 'Bologna Process' standards and objectives laid out by European education ministers in a 1999 declaration. Their aim was to allow for academic mobility and comparable training, credit transfers, degree comparability and equal employment prospects across a 'European Higher Education Area'.[33]

Also in 2002 the OSCE began chairing the Education Issues Set Steering Group (EISSG) to help coordinate international community reform efforts. The EISSG includes OHR, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the World Bank. The EISSG has facilitated wide stakeholder participation to develop and implement plans to improve information

flow among affected groups, particularly between the International Community and BiH ministers of education.[34] EISSG representation has ensured that over 80 per cent of working group members are BiH citizens, professionals from entity and cantonal ministries, pedagogical institutes, teachers' unions, university rectors, student groups and so on. Partly due to OSCE and EISSG work, BiH education ministers developed coordinated policy statements and commitments, including a comprehensive education reform strategy document in November 2002 presented to the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) in Brussels.[35] Many of the EISSG consultations led to legislation. In May 2003, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, the 'Draft Framework Law on Higher Education' was designed to help establish internationally recognized university degrees and programmes in accordance with the Bologna process and Lisbon Recognition Convention.[36] As part of a new 'framework law on primary and secondary education', all BiH education ministers and canton leaders in August 2003 signed the 'Agreement on the Common Core Curriculum'[37] – in principle contributing to a more unified education policy, or at least ostensibly shared objectives – though small minorities, such as Czechs, Hungarians, Macedonians, Albanians, Slovenes, Ukrainians, Jews and Roma, were mostly left out of education reform debates.

History teaching in particular was contentious,[38] and OSCE officials were concerned that some cantons were isolating themselves from broader reforms and avoiding change.[39] By September 2003, as the new school year began, observers indicated that segregation, discrimination, nationalism and a variety of related problems continued while politics still undermined education reforms. Divisive practices continued, such as separate entrances, directors and programmes for different ethnic groups. Critics argue that this reinforced bigotry, while proponents argued that segregation was necessary to preserve cultural identity and traditions. Meanwhile observers and international officials still suggested that reforms were making a significant positive difference, with moves towards a 'common curriculum' indicating multiethnic cooperation.[40] The OSCE also noted that in some areas the Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Special Needs and Rights of Returnee Children was working with 33,000 minority students and 1,100 teachers back in traditional areas.[41]

Renewed attention to textbooks and curricula accompanied the arrival of OSCE Education Director Falk Pingel in January 2003, seconded from the George Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany. He focused on how curricula adversely divided classrooms and communities, and brought together 24 BiH and international textbook specialists to consider how to purge inflammatory content from over 250 grammar texts and manuscripts, while attempting to introduce open discussion on controversial topics.[42] A textbook review commission working through Spring and Summer 2003 ensured that students starting school in September were (apparently) 'using national subject textbooks free of inappropriate material', while also calling on ministers to further harmonize history curricula. The commission developed guidelines for all authors of new history and geography textbooks and encouraged multi-perspective approaches that would give students 'a basic understanding of the history and geography of all three constituent people and

national minorities'.[43] The Coordination Board of the Interim Agreement on Returnee Children finalised 'Criteria for School Names and Symbols' in Spring 2004, with 'guidelines on appropriate, non-political, non-divisive names and symbols used in schools'.

Despite apparent progress, however, by mid-2004 critics in OHR, OSCE and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) were still concerned about divisive laws and practices in education. For example, the Bosnian Croat deputies in the BiH parliament prevented the framework law on higher education from going to a vote, saying that it was a threat to their community because it did not adequately provide for the predominant Croat university in Mostar. This move blocked World Bank funding and scuttled BiH Bologna Process pledges to become part of the European Higher Education Area and commitments to Council of Europe membership.[44] The OSCE also reported at least 52 cases of 'two schools under one roof' in BiH, inhibiting broader reforms.[45] Shortly thereafter the OHR attempted to bring at least three cantons in line with new legislation.[46] Despite deeply rooted problems, some initiatives show promise towards conflict reconciliation and social healing. Domestic leaders, the BiH government, the OSCE and OHR, as well as aid efforts by bilateral aid donors and NGOs, have all supported worthy projects and reforms, while the OSCE has made a special effort to promote its work among partners.[47]

Scores of NGOs with private and government support, and various international agencies, have fostered peace education, civics, multicultural awareness, religious sensitivity and reconciliation projects since 1995, with precise types, budgets and project numbers difficult to calculate.[48] Of particular note, however, is Education for Peace (EFP) International, a Swiss-based organization working in BiH, chaired by a psychiatrist, Hossein Danesh. He sought to break the myth perpetuated in the media that conflict and violence are 'normal' or 'inevitable', by changing institutions that create and sustain violence. EFP claims to have been effective in six pilot schools that evidence behavioural changes among students, parents and communities. Government officials asked for a nation-wide programme, and by September 2003 EFP covered some 200 schools, funded by donations of US$2 million, with further expansion anticipated.[49] Independent evaluation of the EFP programme was not publicly accessible as of autumn 2005.[50] Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests positive feedback among selected EFP project participants.[51]

Other initiatives also point to reform benefits. An education action plan for Roma and other minorities should encourage (through new financing and transportation as well as improved policies and curricula) better respect for languages and cultures and greater access to educational opportunities for minorities previously denied them. But the task is daunting. According to assessments in 2004, illiteracy rates among Roma in some areas are a staggering 80 per cent; Roma youth are thereby more disadvantaged than other Bosnians.[52]

To follow on such initiatives, the OSCE, working with other international organizations, significantly expanded technical and financial support for education in 2002–3. It supported refugee returns, de-politicization of curricula and textbooks, and social integration through education, aiming to systematically

create a multiethnic state. And by 2004, the OSCE Education Department was operating a large-scale, decentralized bureaucracy across BiH with a regular annual budget of €1,889,300 and almost another €500,000 in extra-budgetary sources for projects. In 2004 it had 63 staff: nine (six international and three local–national) were based at Sarajevo head office, and 54 (13 international and 41 local–national) based in Banja Luka, Mostar and Tuzla, working in surrounding towns and villages.[53] If such institutional support, policies and school reforms can be sustained, properly monitored and evaluated, then adjusted in response to 'lessons learned' they may enhance security while strengthening other peacebuilding efforts. By 2005, however, the international community, in reviewing education reforms, still raised serious concern about the fragmentation of the BiH education system and the failure of state authorities to meet international standards and its own national commitments.[54] With tensions surrounding the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, a Banja Luka journalist suggested that 'in people's heads the war is not over'.[55] If so (recalling UNESCO's classic mandate), how best to educate the BiH population for a sustainable peace remains a difficult challenge.

Conclusion: Provisional Assessment and Future Research Needs

It may be too early to assess education reforms as a substantive contribution to preventing future violence or sustaining civil and regional peace. But many local community and national leaders working with international agencies appear to be nurturing valuable initiatives. Cautious optimism may be justified in the light of three major pragmatic concerns and research challenges.

First, the past work by NGOs and the research by scholars has yet to be adequately surveyed or widely reported. There are, moreover, still no good syntheses of this work, which no doubt has included many case studies, qualitative analyses and quantitative assessments with empirical data from villages, local communities and many organizations.

Second, there are no easily shared criteria to measure education's contribution to local or school-based violence prevention specifically, or to national and regional peacebuilding more broadly. What is presented and understood depends on diverse perspectives within and among different ethno-cultural groups, but also on the biases and interpretative frameworks from outside researchers.

A third and related challenge is the lack of a coherent international community approach supporting a well-funded collaborative research and evaluation agenda linking curriculum, textbook and educational policy studies with security analysis. An International Bureau of Education–UNESCO project has begun useful new 'action research' on curricular change for 'social cohesion' in BiH.[56] A former OSCE official has also published a related curriculum development assessment, and other useful work is underway.[57] But collaborative, interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and policy-relevant approaches are wanting. Meanwhile international agencies do not share internal evaluations easily, and these are mostly inaccessible to education researchers. Bringing local and international

scholarship together with agency expertise to better focus on evaluation would be valuable.

To conclude, any assessment at this stage must be qualified and provisional. In BiH education has been an important security and nation-building issue, but remains complicated by three main political groups, the two entities and, in the Federation, the canton system. The UNDP *Early Warning Report* of September 2003 pointed to a significant (perhaps endemic) concern about elementary and secondary education reforms:

> The existing state of affairs in this field is undoubtedly poor and the national division of the school system is the most dangerous problem. The international community deserves full support in its efforts to change this situation. However, it has demonstrated certain weaknesses. For example, teachers, their associations, and numerous nongovernmental agencies remain mostly outside of the process and preparation time was insufficient. There are grounds to claim that the adopted changes are not satisfactory and may be obstructed because many feel they have been imposed.[58]

This was only a passing reference to education, pointing to a set of issues requiring more in-depth study. In any case the UNDP hints to a somewhat less rosy (or at least more uncertain) picture than the OSCE's, and of the broader situation in BiH, especially after major reform initiatives began in 2002.

One other factor that may play a role in further complicating or exacerbating conflict potential are non-state actors. Outside financing of private, non-governmental education institutions remain problematic, although poorly studied. In some cases international and domestic NGOs may reinforce positive values of tolerance and peace in partnership with the public education system and local communities. But ethnically-based learning centres, churches and mosques, sometimes supported by outside funding, may contribute to radicalization of adults and youth and inculcate xenophobic values and views. One should not make assumptions or rash generalizations but it would be foolish to ignore the potential impacts of religious or ideological extremism on BiH education and learning, whether from Christian, Islamic or other groups.

Particularly following the September 11 attacks in the US, various reports implicated BiH as an incubator or potential safe haven for international 'terrorism',[59] partly because it feeds off internal divisions within the country. The formal education system and non-formal learning communities may reinforce this. At the same time the 'terrorist' label could be an excuse for further oppression of moderate or secular Muslims. The educational dimensions of terrorism and political violence in BiH and the Balkans generally are under-researched issues that require careful analysis.[60]

A long-term challenge is how best to sustain positive education reforms. Future research might study trends more carefully, building on work already initiated by Bosnian and external scholars, including more work on student outcomes and professional placements to strengthen our understanding of links between post-conflict education and economic development.[61] But more local case studies at school, village, canton and national levels are also needed.

Quantitative as well as qualitative empirical work should study effectiveness and impacts of peace education programmes specifically. Yet identifying simple cause–effect relationships or generalizing education's value as a peacebuilding tool is not as simple as some researchers might suggest.[62] Aside from education reforms already taking place, collaborative studies and joint projects between Bosnian and international scholars could facilitate capacity-building in the education sector to strengthen long-term reconstruction and peacebuilding. Financial aid and technical assistance to the Bosnian academic community for engaging in cooperative research among Serb, Croat and Bosnian academics in international contexts would be helpful. It would also greatly add to a growing body of new scholarship attempting to better understand empirically educational sources of violence while doing something pragmatic and concrete to help diffuse tensions, prevent further conflict in BiH and help long-term regional stabilization.

Finally, more collaborative research among agencies (especially OSCE, UNESCO, UNHCR and others with education mandates) and international scholars working with local BiH, universities, education faculties, research centres and teacher-training institutes would be especially useful. New work should include monitoring or interpreting specific changes while developing tools to measure progress for preventing further violence to achieve clear human security objectives and sustain regional peace. The World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) could be an important catalyst among education specialists collaborating with the OSCE, the OHR and BiH academics. The organizers of the 2007 WCCES world congress in Sarajevo highlight this as an 'especially appropriate location', noting that the congress theme 'Living Together, Education and Intercultural Understanding' is partly a response to 'a society with recent memories of strife', but also celebrating a 'meeting ground of Islamic, Christian and Jewish cultures'.[63] Of particular value would be more critical pedagogy studies emphasizing non-military theoretical and applied approaches to security analysis and conflict prevention. Related new education research and reforms may be more effective, sustainable and cheaper than costly military interventions resulting in expensive post-war 'peacebuilding' missions. They may help find alternatives to creating such divisive legacies as the Dayton Accord, and have application elsewhere.

NOTES

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13. UNDP, *International Assistance to BiH, 1996–2002: A Tentative Analysis of Who is Doing What, Where*, Sarajevo, n.d., p.39, accessed at www.undp.ba/publications. This is state-to-state aid and does not necessarily include NGO or private sector funding, or technical assistance for various projects which may not be accounted for in official statistics. The breakdown for the four main entities is: BiH – US$275,422; FBiH – $187,801,251; RS – $36,224,327; District of Brćko – $2,895,736.
14. For background see 'Education under the Dayton Accords', in Council of Europe, *Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Governance, Finance and Administration*, Strasbourg: Legislative Reform Programme for Higher Education and Research, Council of Europe, 10 Nov. 1999, pp.8–20.
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