History Education Reform, Transitional Justice and
Transformation of Identities

Elizabeth A. Cole and Karen Murphy

“The prospect of a theory of education is a glorious idea, and it matters little if we are not able to realize it at once...we must not look upon the ideas as chimerical, nor decry it as a beautiful dream, notwithstanding the difficulties that stand in the way of its realization.”
--Immanuel Kant¹

Introduction: History Education and Transitional Justice

History education in common schools, as a part of an officially sanctioned institution, can play an important role in the transformation of historical narratives that are associated with many processes of justice (restorative rather than criminal) and moral repair. These include public apology, broadly understood to include acknowledgement and the presentation of a narrative comprehensible to the victims,² recognition of victims and their narratives, hitherto often silenced or distorted through prejudice and stereotyping; public deliberation over the meaning of the past;³ a message of political and social non-repetition; and reparations, when schools are founded or reformed to provide new socio-economic opportunities for formerly marginalized and impoverished groups. Changes in historical narratives, in the ways that groups are portrayed in history textbooks and classrooms, can be a part of creating hope for a future that departs from the

past, a distinct dimension of moral repair. They are also, through representation and inclusion, a part of the transformation of identities.

In addition to contributing to these abstract goals, history education can also serve as a specific means to support, continue and deepen the work of other official transitional justice mechanisms, the ones that are more typically thought of as the pillars of transitional justice, especially truth or truth and reconciliation commissions, reparative measures and memorialization or commemoration. While other subjects within secondary schools could bring some of these materials into their work, especially art and literature but possibly also religious classes, history, strongly connected to civic education in most countries, is the most likely subject for this work to take place. There are still few published studies of how schools are making use of materials and findings from truth commissions to teach recent history, Elizabeth Oglesby’s study of Guatemala being one (others are in process). There is also still little evidence of any direct links between the work of official transitional justice institutions and the history classroom, but schools offer a way out of two of the main impasses institutions such as truth commissions face, which is how to get their work to reach beyond an intellectual, usually urban elite, and how to give their work life beyond the sitting of the commission. Schools not only offer ways to effect “bottom-up” justice and reconciliation to accompany the more common

---

4 Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Relations After Wrongdoing* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 2, “Hope’s Value.” The symbolic importance of schools as a potential locus of acknowledgement and repair is attested, as noted by Rubio-Marín, in her article in this collection, by the fact that Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended, as a form of symbolic reparations, “the renaming of schools with names of social leaders and civil authorities” of indigenous communities. [will need to add page number after whole project is put together—are you still using Rubio-Marín’s article? YES]

“top-down” processes, but they involve a wide variety of actors, teachers, students, parents and school officials at the local, provincial and national levels.

In the transitional phase after violence and massive human rights abuses, problems with history education are (as with any other subject) difficult to separate from the rest of the school system. While this article will focus on history reform, it implies as well the importance of targeting the institution of education as a whole for reform—since it is, in many ways, as important as other institutions addressed by post-conflict experts in justice. Despite being a truism, it bears repeating that children and youth are the future of society. In places psychologically, economically, politically and socially damaged by war and/or violently unjust systems, the young, especially the rising generation that was not directly involved in the conflict, may represent the only hope for a new postwar reality. Youth are also disproportionately likely to be those involved in violence, including the post-formal-conflict violence that continues as economic or other forms of criminality, and are thus very important to target via education. Schools before and after conflict can be sites of injustice, mirroring the inequities in the rest of society that often underpin violence. They are frequently targeted in war for destruction or hideous misuse precisely because they, like places of worship, even if imperfect and unequal, represent communities’ experiences and expectations of normalcy, safety, peace, collective learning, trust and hope—precisely what people transformed into agents of violence wish to pervert and destroy in order to shock others into flight, terror, or even acts of vengeance so that a cycle is set in motion in which no group will be free of violence.

However, it should be borne in mind that the education systems in which history education is embedded are crucial to social reconstruction and reconciliation, building
democracy and economic recovery, but are highly resistant to change. They tend in
general to be conservative and, despite the great hopes placed on them, are rarely
institutions that spearhead social change.\(^6\) Within education, history may be the discipline
that is most inherently conservative, as it has traditionally been the place in which group
cohesion and patriotism have been inculcated. Thus, reform of history education to serve
the goals of justice, no matter how urgent those goals are, is extremely challenging.

The essential goal of education is to transform children into citizens, into adults
who can function beyond the circle of the family in society, the workplace, the polity. In
this article, we explore how reform of history education relates both to transitional
justice, and to the transformation of identities that lies at the heart of the idea of this
particular kind of justice process that, by definition, serves two ends: the *facilitation* of
political and social transition by “taking care” of the burdens—unaddressed injustices—
left over from the past, as well as the *catalyzation* of transition, or transformation, itself,
in the form of new standards of justice. Our analysis will show that many history
educators today believe that history as a discipline is inseparable from the civic
development of young people, their understanding of the society around them and how it
came to be that way, and their sense of justice and tolerance towards others in their
society; yet the goals of secondary school history education may not coincide exactly

\(^6\) On schools as cites of both injustice and potential recovery, and their resistance to change, see: Anna
Planning/UNESCO 2003); Stover and Weinstein, op cit; Kenneth Bush and Diana Saltarelli, Eds., *The Two
Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, UNICEF
Innocenti Research Centre, 2000. Violence and inequity in the Peruvian education system, from primary
school to university, and its direct role in fostering Sendera Luminosa violence was covered in the Final
Report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission; it is well-summarized and discussed in Pablo
Sandoval, *Educación, ciudadanía y violencia en el Perú: una lectura del informe de al CVR*, Documento de
Trabajo #142, Serie Antropología. IEP, 2004. On the hesitations of educators to be agents of change,
especially in post-conflict societies where inter-group tensions still run high, see Elizabeth Cole and Judy
Barsalou, “Unite or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent
with those of transitional justice. We will begin by considering what is meant by transformation of identity in the aftermath of severe human rights abuses, and then discuss the problems of history education in this aftermath period and in the process of seeking for justice. We will review both efforts to reform the content of history education—generally textbooks, and the still less common, but possibly less controversial, and more effective effort to work toward pedagogy reform via training or retraining teachers. We focus on a case study, post-apartheid South Africa, to show how pedagogy reform is being pursued in one initiative.

We would like to make two clarifications at the outset. First, while transitional justice in its original conception focused strongly on human rights, accounting for human rights abuses and justice for victims of human rights abuses via criminal justice, we take as our definition the expanded one that has become more common in recent years, which includes societal processes such as reconciliation between groups, and between citizens and the state. Rothenberg points out that

> The rising significance of reconciliation is directly linked to a move away from the classic dichotomy between total amnesties (which have often been used) and large-scale prosecutions (which rarely, if ever, occur). It is now common to consider political transitions as involving an array of possible strategies and policy options, including: truth commissions, monetary reparations, apologies, mechanisms of restorative justice, economic investment, monuments and memorialization, psycho-social healing, the opening of security archives, and other means of facing past violence in order to build the foundations of a new democratic order.\(^7\)

While we will define further how history education fits into this list of strategies, we see history education as belonging more to the part of transitional justice that serves psycho-social healing and building a new democratic society than to criminal justice and accountability for specific human rights abuses, difficult as these goals are to separate

conceptually. Second, while the human rights abuses that necessitate transitional justice processes are not always part of full-blown warfare, in the traditional understanding in which state-supported militaries are involved as at least one actor, nonetheless systematic and wide-spread human rights abuses nearly always involve conflict, whether between guerrillas or insurgents and the state, between the state and minority groups, or between citizens and the state. While this article is not about education as a part of conflict resolution per se, nonetheless it is often difficult to separate education and transitional justice from the particular needs of and for education in a post-conflict environment, and trying to separate them neatly does not make conceptual sense. We will refer to the context in which widespread abuses have taken place generally as violence, and occasionally as conflict, since much of the relevant literature on political identities and transformation takes conflict as its context.

The Legacy of Violence: Zero-Sum Identities

Identity is a very broad term; all inter-group conflicts involve identity, and identities can be created, imposed or manipulated by those in power. Identities that may precede conflicts but are certainly hardened by them can be political-ideological, ethnic, racialized, linguistic, religious, or more usually some combination of the above. It is apparent, though, that ethno-linguistic-religious identities are more resistant to transformation than ideological ones; however much they are shaped by political forces, many in fact have deep historical roots, often complicated by their intetwinement with

---

8 It could be possible even to define categories like “victim,” “perpetrator,” “beneficiary,” “bystander” as identities, as some authors in this collection do; they seem to us to be closer to social roles.
economic inequities. Because transitional justice processes have been or are being launched in so many places where these latter are salient factors and extremely resistant to change, this paper takes identity to be ethno-linguistic-religious, as in South Africa, Rwanda, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and states with indigenous populations such as Australia, Peru and Guatemala. The paper focuses as well on contexts where deeply divided groups must continue to live together in one polity, thus neglecting international conflicts and those where some groups have left, or been forced to leave, the country and are unlikely to return in anything more than very small numbers (Jews in Germany, Armenians in Turkey, and Serbs in Kosovo south of the Ibar River.) Identity may be salient in long-term reconciliation in these cases, but the greatest challenge for polarized identities is in states that will continue to be multi-ethnic or multi-cultural.9

Zartman, among others, uses the term “zero-sum” to describe the group identities created in the course of intractable conflicts between groups, whether they are states, ethnic or ideological groups. Although there are incidents of widespread violence that are part of a larger pattern of recurring conflicts, in which groups within one society or state have been strongly differentiated over time, Zartman points out that highly polarized identities are more often the result of the conflict itself, its various stages, its length, and earlier failed efforts at resolution or peace-building, rather than these identities having predated the conflict and having been among its causes. By the time a particularly vicious

---

conflict has run its course or finally become amenable to resolution, and thus to such processes as transitional justice and social reconstruction, the identities of the opposing parties have been forged as conflict identities. The process of creating such identities, so deeply intertwined with fear and violence as to become very resistant to normalization, is well described by Dimitrijevic, who describes wartime identity creation as “a political, social, cultural and psychological perception of the present as a state of chaos, terror…In this new reality, no individual, social or political existence outside the framework of the imposed image of the nation [is] allowed.”

One of the greatest challenges facing a society after the formal end to violent conflict is that these hardened or polarized identities stand in the way of any efforts to rebuild a functioning polity, whether to create new intergroup relationships or resurrect older positive ones, to (re)build civic trust, or to build democracy, which requires a high degree of trust and citizen participation. Indeed, Kaufman has claimed that civil wars can harden ethnic identities to the point where they provide resistance to the creation of a common civic identity.

Kaufman sees literacy and history as crucial to the formation of conflict identities: “Even if constructivists are right that the ancient past does not matter, recent history does….literacy preserves atrocity memories and enhances their use for political mobilization. The result is that atrocity histories cannot be reconstructed; victims can sometimes be persuaded to accept exaggerated atrocity tales, but cannot be talked out of

---

real ones”—ie, Kaufman believes that atrocity histories become an intrinsic part of victim groups’ social memory, and are not amenable to the kind of forgetting, or at least softening, that Renan claimed was necessarily at the heart of nation-state formation\(^\text{12}\) (even if, unfortunately, it is possible to make people believe in atrocities that did not really occur.) Kaufman’s ensuing claim, that secession or even separation of ethnic groups may be the only solution to this post-conflict dilemma, is problematic on many fronts: memories of the Holocaust no longer dominate Israeli-German relations, for example, nor do massacres during the Spanish Civil War appear to be a salient point in relations between individual Spaniards, or regions of Spain, today. He presents in persuasive terms, however, the challenge that the reform of education, including history, faces in societies in which fears, loyalties and memories have been forged in the fires of atrocity. Kaufman does qualify his strong claim that some identities, and the inter-group relationships that they imply, are impermeable to transformation, when he observes that “it is not clear that there is a specific number of incidents or total deaths beyond which ethnic reconciliation becomes impossible.”\(^\text{13}\) Yet Kaufman’s general position on post-civil war realities should serve to remind us at the outset that not all transitional societies are amenable to all forms of repair, nor are all identities amenable to transformation after violence to the point that those in opposing camps are able to transcend their identities.

Transitional Justice and the Meaning of Identity Transformation

\(^{12}\) Chaim Kaufman, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” in *International Security*, Vol 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 136-175, p. 154; Ernest Renan, “Forgetting is a crucial element in the creation of nations.”[1990, p. 11.need whole cite]

\(^{13}\) Kaufman, p. 159.
But if the transformation (not the disappearance) of identities is possible in some, perhaps eventually all, divided societies, what does this actually mean in terms of desired outcomes? As broad and difficult to pin down as the term identity is, the idea of identity transformation is only more diffuse. How would this be described empirically, or measured? Questions about the meaning of identity transformation, what we require from it, include the following. Do we mean a shift toward renunciation of violence and a commitment to resolve conflict, including inter-group conflict, through non-violent, means, including both politics and rule of law? Is such a transformation, then, one in the direction of something often referred to as reconciliation, in its thinner manifestation (but still not easy to achieve) appearing as a willingness to co-exist in one polity, a movement away from fear and hatred towards the beginnings of social trust and the ability to cooperate across group boundaries at least for pragmatic purposes?\textsuperscript{14} Or should the transformation be towards acceptance of the basic principles of democracy, including democratic deliberation, public accountability, rule of law, with the growth of a common civic loyalty to democratic principles, as enshrined in a constitution, in place of loyalty to the group one has identified with in the time of conflict? And is the desired transformation towards a culture of human rights, the acceptance of the human rights of all, and their protection under law, as a guiding principle? Is the transformation acceptance of diversity, via Taylor’s “respect and recognition” for individuals and groups different from oneself as long as certain basic civic commitments are shared?\textsuperscript{15} 


most poetically, perhaps, in South Africa’s attempt to remake itself as a “rainbow nation”? Or is the shift rather to renouncing separate group identities to be part of one nation-state, as implied in the slogan “We are all Rwandan,” that, at its best, can inspire citizens to work together to overcome common problems and, no doubt, to protect a minority?

The not very satisfying answer must be that all these are implied by the concept of identity transformation, in greater or lesser measure, depending on the context. It is simply not possible to arrive at one definition, although it could be said that a common theme in all is tolerance, particularly of former enemies, the acceptance of diversity instead of zero-sum loyalties to one in-group. All of the above interrelated processes are needed to build more just and stable societies and functional states in the aftermath of serious violence and moral damage.

Thus, in exploring the relationship of history education reform—specifically, how the massive or systematic violation of human rights is addressed in common primary schools\(^\text{16}\)—to the tasks of transitional justice and identity transformation, we will draw at times on all the above possible transformations. We do so in the knowledge that transformations in group identities, and hence relationships, after violent conflict do take place, even if the transformations cannot be reduced to one clear-cut definition.

**Challenges of Transforming History Education:**

---

\(^{16}\) We use the term common school in the sense that it is used by Feinberg, Macedo and Callan, among others, and primary school as it is used by Amy Gutmann, to refer to U.S. primary, middle and high school combined. See Eamon Callan, “Common Schools for Common Education,” in *Canadian Journal of Education* 20, No. 3, 1995, cited in Steve Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
A. History and Violence

Common wisdom among both educators and scholars of conflict resolution is that history education, like historical narratives more generally, is an important component of both political violence and overcoming its legacy. It must be noted here that prevention or redress of injustices at the level of systemic human rights abuses was less a stated goal of history education reform than prevention of armed conflict prevention. The belief in the connection between history education and violence, including persecution of minority groups, in Europe dates back to efforts after World War I to address history textbooks as possible sources of the stereotypes, inaccuracies and generally negative portrayals of certain groups—other states, or groups within states—that are a factor in rallying populations to war. After a second world war that included genocide and ended with important international war crimes trials, an added sense of urgency to reform history education narratives as a part of both postwar justice and peace-building led to the founding of an institution solely devoted to this work in Braunschweig, Germany, the Georg Eckert Institute [GEI]. GEI pioneered not only assessing textbooks for negative group content but also working with officially convened bilateral historical and history textbook commissions to make recommendations for textbook reform. These activities became common practice throughout Western Europe, facilitated by the framework of a common European community; since the end of the Cold War, and with the participation of the European organization of history educators, Euroclio, in addition to GEI, they have expanded into Eastern Europe and the Balkans as well. While it is unlikely that the educators involved in these efforts ever completely dismissed the importance of history pedagogy, until recently the focus was much more on content, especially in textbooks and

17 For information on the work of GEI and Euroclio, see their websites, www.gei.de and www.euroclio.eu.
other officially approved instructional materials, which bear the imprimatur of the state and reach large numbers of students.

It is important to add here that it is also widely recognized that history education, or learning, is separate from instruction, that history is learned in many ways outside the classroom, beginning with the family and extending to other community groups, religious instruction and the media.\(^\text{18}\) While not discounting these processes, which may in fact be as powerful as classroom instruction, if not more so, history education experts have focused on instruction, since the other forms of learning are diffuse and much more difficult to target through educational policy.

But beyond the dangers of negative stereotyping or teaching blatant untruths that promote prejudice against out-groups and denial of very well-known atrocities committed by the in-group, experts do not agree at all on how history content can be changed to promote more peaceful societies and overcome the divisions that result from violence and human rights abuses. Naveh notes that “many are convinced that the inculcation of a collective, unifying historical heritage remains an essential weapon against enemies of the state and an important source of relief and healing for internal schism,”\(^\text{19}\) but this implies the challenges and dangers of history education as well as its promise. How can a narrative be developed that offers a positive collective identity without creating enemy “out-groups,” including beyond the borders of the state? And what kind of narrative, exactly, promotes “relief and healing,” and a sense of justice, after conflict within a


society, especially when the narrative of the events that have most influenced the recent or modern history of the polity is very negative, involving accounts of great harms done by one group against another and the indifference or passive support for these harms by much of the society? When, further, the narrative accounts of these events by different groups clash wildly, particularly as to which group committed more atrocities and who bears greater responsibility for the conflict’s origins?

The answer, based on a review of writing on this topic, is that, while there is great interest in reforming narratives, and many attempts to create new ones, no one seems to know. It is striking that the strongest recommendations fall into the negative camp: some content—the most “hate-filled” or clearly untrue material—is clearly counter-productive for reconciliation and could create such continued moral harm to those who suffered most from violence that it cannot be allowed to appear in school materials. Social divisions after violence and injustices, whether as replicated in narratives or in the school systems themselves, have proven very resistant to amelioration. Gallagher notes the difficulty of integrating divided school systems in societies ranging from Northern Ireland, with a recent peace agreement, to the U.S., half a century since the Civil Rights movement (and a century and a half since a civil war), as well as difficulties in Northern Ireland in addressing the history of the conflict in the classroom despite creative curriculum initiatives intended to facilitate the process.20 Spinner-Halev cautions against expecting too much of education in general and history education regarding the violent events in the search for reconciliation. Like increasing numbers of educators, he is skeptical of contact theory, which is based on the belief that simply bringing people from different groups together in contexts where identities have been polarized by violence is effective in

overcoming differences and promoting tolerance. And while he says that teaching of hate must be *proscribed*, he is not able to *prescribe* what should be taught and how.  

One distinct challenge to identifying changes in history content to promote a sense of justice and eventual reconciliation is the existence of essentially two approaches to teaching the history of recent difficult events, or, beyond the schools, promoting society-wide examination of these events. They represent a deep division between approaches to post-conflict social reconstruction in general. One approach holds that the events are simply too divisive to study or debate widely, at least for a long period of time, possibly several generations. This is generally known as the “amnesia” approach to the past. One problem with it, of course, is that it may emanate from states and political leaders who are implicated in past atrocities and/or who can use enforced national unity to consolidate their own power. The most iconic statement of this position is that of Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen, whose philosophy is that “we should dig a deep hole and bury the past.”  

History education is still suspended in post-genocide Cambodia. Despite the self-serving nature of many of these impulses, it is hard to argue, with Kaufman, that discussions of past atrocities would not be divisive, especially in a state where democratic means of debate and disagreement have not yet put forth strong roots.

---


22 Seth Mydans, “Cambodian Leader Resists Punishing Top Khmer Rouge,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1998. Note that as former member of the Khmer Rouge Hun Sen is implicated in those events despite having gone over to the Vietnamese, so his call to forget the past is at least as self-serving as it is intended to further peace in Cambodia, if not more so.

23 A history textbook on the Khmer Rouge period was published by the Cambodian Documentation Center [CDC] in April 2007, and has been distributed to schools, libraries and government officials, but it is not included in the official curriculum in Cambodia and is apparently not being widely used in schools, despite untiring efforts for decades by CDC’s director, Youk Chhang, to promote reckoning with the period via education in the schools. Journalistic accounts and surveys find that people born after the conflict know very little about it, indeed, question their parents’ account of the shocking brutality of what has been called by some an “auto-genocide.” See Bertil Lintner, “The Day of Reckoning in Cambodia?” in *The Far East Economic Review*, March 2009, 43-45.
to the point where efforts to create a viable national project would be undermined. Some arguments for society-wide, willed forgetting are based on the belief that this process is necessary for social healing, particularly in certain cultural settings.  

The other position, one that aligns more closely with transitional justice, is summarized by GEI’s Falk Pingel, a foremost expert on history textbook content revision: “Without recognition of crimes, there can be no reconciliation.” Pingel sees this as extending from the political level to that of the schools. The general belief is widespread that outright lies—denial—about something as important and salient in the lives of people after conflict should be reduced whenever possible, but all but the most simplistic commentators agree that how this truth-telling should be pursued in practice is not at all clear. To add to the level of the challenge, the schools are perhaps the most difficult arena for such truth-telling. School history is much more sensitive than academic history or other social fora involving adults, as schools are a conservative institution in general, where such subjects as history and civics, especially, are closely bound up with national identity and the perceived political impressionability of the young. In addition, schools, whether integrated or segregated, are immersed in the society that surrounds them, including the group identities polarized by violent conflicts and systemic injustices. Teachers, who are the link between narratives and children’s reception of them, have group identities themselves; are potentially the objects of pressure or even threats to their safety, when violence is still present in the society; and, especially directly after conflict,

---

24 See, for example, Rosalind Shaw, “Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone.” USIP Special Report 130 (February 2005): Sierra Leone has a local custom for reintegrating combatants, children and adults, known as ‘cooling the heart’: “Because having and maintaining a ‘cool heart’ requires a transformation of social identity, ex-combatants were discouraged from publicly talking about the war after these rituals. Such a process of social forgetting ‘unmakes’ past violence and ‘remakes’ ex-combatants as new social persons,” p. 9.

25 Pingel, op cit, p. 194.
have been affected by all the relevant events. Thus, the ability of teachers to teach sensitive, emotional and contested issues directly is constrained by many factors, despite the fact that many apparently would like to contribute to more peaceful and just societies and even to be able to at least touch on issues related to past injustices, provided they can find a safe and effective way to do it.

B. Banish History Education, or Welcome It?

Why not consider banishing history, or at least supporting a policy delaying or curtailing its scope (i.e., not teaching recent history, where the injustices of interest for transitional justice generally lie) for a generation, given these divisions and the fact that education in general and history in particular may not play a helpful, or at least, very large, role in serving justice and reconciliation after conflict; that history education about the conflict may be harmful; that in any case empirical evidence of the efficacy of history education reform is very difficult to find? A concrete rebuttal of the argument in support of banishing history education is important to make here, especially considering that a forceful argument was made to do exactly this in the our case study, South Africa.

South Africa has not banished discussions of the past. To the contrary, these discussions have been front and center in the struggle for justice and reconciliation, especially via the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many officials and experts in the upper levels of education and history education policy may have been uncomfortable, as members of the old elite, with a history curriculum that included a repudiation of the old Afrikaner narrative. Yet, unlike in many other contexts, the views of the old elite
were not a deciding factor, because South Africa is a state in which the former losers of history, the black majority, became the ruling party. In addition, South Africa’s strong commitment to constitutional democracy and a full set of civil-political rights would not allow the government to try to impose one narrative in a repressive way, in any case, as was done in Rwanda and in Spain until Franco’s death, for example.

A different argument during South Africa’s initial transition was made in favor of banishing history. The 1996 anti-history educational argument had two components, a practical and a philosophical one. First, history was not thought to be useful in helping the majority of South Africa’s children—deeply disadvantaged black South African children—finish their compulsory education prepared to get jobs. In addition, the anti-history vision for new South African identity, transformation and social justice excluded history, not because it was divisive, but because it was considered politically irrelevant, not part of a “forward-looking” vision for a community that it was hoped would come to exemplify African modernity.

The anti-history approach to education, called the “Outcomes-Based Education [OBE] Priority” of the first post-apartheid South African curriculum, “Curriculum 2005,” had the support of many political actors, especially the labor unions. It was highly technocratic and pragmatic, with a sharp downplaying of history. Gail Weldon, a former senior curriculum writer for the Western Cape Education Department and the convener of the history writing group responsible for the post-apartheid curriculum, characterized this pragmatic, future-focused approach to education as follows: “National identity [in the OBE philosophy] was not to be located in an understanding of our past, but in the recognition of our diverse society, multilingualism, co-operation, civic responsibility and
the ability to participate in all aspects of society and an understanding of the national,
provincial, local and regional and developmental needs in the present.” While Weldon
herself disagreed with this philosophy and has been part of the group implementing a
different, pro-history and -humanities approach to education that finally triumphed over
OBE, it is important to note that she recognizes the moral impulses behind the anti-
history camp; OBE did not downplay tolerance for diversity but it also did not draw from
the past, or attempt to face the injustices of South Africa’s past, to build a sense of justice
and tolerance in students. Weldon also notes that there was suspicion by some in the new
government that history as a discipline was too tainted by the approaches and
assumptions of the old, white (and specifically Afrikaaner, since Afrikaaners had
dominated the educational elite) order to ever be revisable, relevant or valuable in the
new.26

Curriculum 2005’s rejection of history stood in stark contrast to a public
reckoning with history that took place daily in South African society via the TRC, which
began to work in 1995, and brought the history of apartheid, through the lived experience
of South Africans, into daily life. How could history education disappear when the
country was engaged in such active remembering? In the end, the bid to banish history
was not feasible for a South Africa which drew so strongly on history for the nature of its
transition to a society based on human rights guarantees. The OBE Priority and
Curriculum 2005, and the vision of education that animated them, were replaced in 2001,

under the leadership of Kader Asmal, one of South Africa’s preeminent human rights legal scholars and moral leaders, who became Minister of Education in 1999.

Instrumental to the shift was the publication of an important document, the “Values, Education and Democracy—Report of the Working Group on Values in Education,” which ushered in a new curriculum, entitled “Values in Education.” This report makes a strong counter-argument to the banishment camp by means of three arguments in defense of history. It could contribute to national pride, tolerance, acceptance of different groups and democracy—ultimately, to justice and a new South African identity—via three specific approaches to the past: by teaching human evolution with scientific accuracy, to counter pseudo-scientific defenses of racism; by presenting the history of “all the people who happen to reside in South Africa who, in turn, are connected to the people of Africa, Asia and Europe to encourage openness”; and by transmitting the history of past human rights abuses in order to “serve as a powerful reminder of the folly of repetition” and prevent the future instrumentalization of the past. In addition, the value of history was seen in its ability to “enable us to listen to formerly subjugated voices, redress the invisibility of the formerly marginalized.” The language of this report, strongly reflecting South Africa’s commitment to human rights, is a powerful expression of belief in the value of education about the past.

Approaches to History Education Reform

---

27 Asmal is not only a distinguished human rights legal scholar who had been an important actor in the anti-apartheid movement, but also originally studied to be a secondary school teacher and taught before going on for advanced degrees in England.

Two approaches to history education reform in the interest of promoting truth-telling, acknowledgment and repair in the wake of massive human rights violations can be identified. While not unrelated, their areas of focus differ, with one working primarily on content and secondarily on the skills of teachers, and the other primarily on teachers, especially pedagogy and secondarily on content.

A. Content-Focused Approaches

The first approach, bilateral or joint textbook activities, involving representatives of groups in conflict, has been much more common in inter-state contexts, or in contexts in which two states are expected to emerge, that is, Israel-Palestine, where many of the most frequently described and analyzed projects are located. These examples, particularly bilateral activities between two states such as Franco-German, German-Polish, or German-Czech textbook commissions, are somewhat less urgent than cases in which deeply divided identities and historical experiences impede the formation of a workable and just state polity, since the affected groups do not have to interact closely with one another or work out educating their youth in the same school system, or even in the same classrooms. In two-state cases, the search has been rather to find “bridging discourse,” a vocabulary and discourse that is mutually intelligible and minimizes dissonance, rather than a substantially new narrative that a majority of citizens in one country can agree on.29 In these cases, which do not involve citizens of one state, “the emphasis remains on developing mutually acceptable areas of inquiry rather than enforcing answers that both sides must accept.”

---

Two historical narratives thus “negotiated” to the point that both sides can endorse them\textsuperscript{30} may not be close enough to work as a national narrative based on robust reconciliation. It is a constant paradox of history education reform that progressive history-writing and pedagogy oppose the creation of a single, hegemonic narrative, yet the goals of transitional justice, to facilitate public recognition of and accountability for major human rights abuses, at some level assumes something like that.

It should also be noted that the bilateral textbook projects, both those more developed ones based in Europe and newer ones in East Asia, all concern relatively “cold” conflicts, in which violent conflict dates back to World War II, renewed interstate violence is not likely, and the stakes are rather continued tensions, low-level hostile acts such as angry demonstrations, and, in general, reduced capacity for citizens of each state to work collaboratively with the other on what could be problems of significant importance.

The Israel-Palestine case, though, offers more insights for divided societies, despite the fact that an eventual two-state solution still seems the only realistic one: until recently the two peoples’ economic lives were substantially intertwined, and the Palestinian narrative applies not only to people living in close proximity to Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza but also, in large part, to Arab Israeli citizens.

Several projects bringing together Jewish Israeli and Palestinian or Arab Israeli teachers and history textbook writers have been or are being attempted. Adwan’s and Bar-On’s “Learning Each Other’s Historical Narrative” project did not attempt to achieve a “bridging” narrative, because the conflict has not yet reached any kind of political

settlement. Their necessarily less ambitious project consisted instead of bringing together history educators from each side of the conflict and having them present their distinct narratives to each other—already a tall order for a conflict in which identities are absolutely at a “zero-sum” level and violence is ongoing. The narratives, which each included accounts of atrocities and illegal appropriations committed by the other side, were presented in columns on each side of the page, with space was provided in the middle for students to write down their impressions of comparing the two sides’ stories. The project itself promoted recognition of the “other side” and its narrative of injustice, in fact an aim of transitional justice. It provided the physical and rhetorical space for the teachers from the two sides to learn about and reflect upon the two narratives and come up with their own thoughts, and with questions for each other. The value of this exercise was to lay the narratives bare to each group and to compel them to compare and analyze the differences, in the hopes that familiarity with how the Other experienced, remembered and interpreted events that involved both groups would reduce mutual hostility, or at least make the other group’s stances seem less wholly strange and irrational, a product of primordial hostility. It can be claimed that the results were minimal: the educators involved from each side who took part in the cooperative exercise were small in number, and the books could not be used in any official settings, although, like products from other similar projects, they have been used in informal settings or as supplemental materials. However, given the political circumstances, Israeli-Palestinian

projects like these are courageous, building on-going professional contacts between educators, and at least exposing and deepening understanding of the most contentious areas in history between the two groups. The hope is that, even if extensive joint work on narratives is currently impossible, such projects can assist each of the two sides to begin to re-consider its own narrative of justice and injustice, each in the relative safety of its own homogenous setting, and thus reduce the general “strangeness” of the Other, contributing to a lessening of the polarization that has led Israeli Jews and Palestinians to define their own identities largely in light of the existence of a fixed, existential enemy—the other group.

These projects, however, reveal some of the greatest challenges to be faced in work on divergent history narratives, including resistance from students and other members of each community. Bar-On and Adwan report that efforts to use the text their project produced in classrooms elicited challenges from students, who asked “If these texts were ‘the enemy’s propaganda,’ why teach them in class, especially at this time of violent conflict?” The implied questioning of the teachers’ credibility “created a crisis among the teachers concerning the purpose of the project.” In addition to ideological opposition inside the classroom to newly created narratives that attempt to overcome the stark differences or outright untruths in past ones, other challenges for new and controversial material include obtaining official approval of materials, in systems where official approval is required, as well as the financial and bureaucratic obstacles to producing and distributing the textbooks or supplemental materials throughout a national system. However, even when new, more accurate and pedagogically up-to-date materials

33 Bar-On and Adwan, 2006, op cit., p. 213.
exist, the largest challenge may be helping teachers to use them effectively in the classroom.

**B. Teacher-Focused Approaches**

Even if new, politically controversial teaching materials on recent injustices get written, are politically feasible, and overcome bureaucratic and financial obstacles to become part of the official curriculum, how is this new and sensitive material being taught? It has long been observed that a skilled teacher can make good use of poor materials, or create her own to supplement or replace them, while a poorly trained teacher can ruin even the best teaching materials.

Increasingly, experts in history education reform in post-conflict and/or democratizing contexts have begun to focus on the importance of pedagogy reform, on teachers as equal in importance to, often more important than, textbooks and teaching materials. Within this context, content is not overlooked—no new teaching methods could make up for teachers who essentially stick to elements of older narratives that demean or leave out minority groups, defend dictators or policies such as apartheid or ethnic cleansing, or completely deny incidents of major human rights abuses such as disappearances, torture, rape or mass murder. But particularly in cases where tackling these subjects directly in the classroom is very difficult, what is being tried in post-conflict situations is helping teachers to learn about new techniques and purposes of history teaching.

Pingel notes that there is a major disagreement virtually worldwide about the ends of teaching history, “whether the history curriculum should define a body of knowledge,
unquestioned values, and moral judgments that represent the shared historical memory of a given society or whether students should be trained in skills that allow them to compare different interpretations, to develop critical thinking, and to form their own judgments.’’

This important debate, sometimes referred to as intrinsic versus extrinsic approaches to history education, is summarized by Barton and McCully in relation to the debate in Northern Ireland: “Should teachers chiefly concern themselves with students’ understanding of past events? Or should they overtly seek to confront the present through the past?”—and, by implication, questions of justice and injustice in the present and recent past. It is clear that those who promote history teaching reform in post-conflict settings strongly favor the latter, as long as the disciplinary distinctiveness of history is not compromised and history does not become “carrier” for citizenship education, with historical material reduced or stripped out.

For Weldon, based on the South African experience, in history at its best, process is the key rather than content, “a process of enquiry, of interpretation and effective communication” to provide students and teachers with “knowledge and skills to enable them to interrogate the past, to understand historical interpretation and to recognize bias, propaganda and racism, hopefully ensuring that no historical narrative could again dominate to the exclusion of another and that distortions and manipulation in history texts could be identified.”

---

34 Pingel, op cit, p. 182.
37 Weldon, op cit., Ch. 3.
In addition, beyond the role of well-taught history with new narratives in post-conflict settings, Seixas and Peck, for example, attest to several crucial connections between historical consciousness and moral development. They cite the ability of acquiring historical thinking to understand ‘significance’, defined as being “about a relationship not only among events and people of the past, but also about the relationship of those events and people to us, in the present, who are doing the historical thinking. Defining historical significance involves organizing events in a narrative that will show us something important about our position in the world.” Historical thinking also can promote empathy if based on historical evidence, without which it might generate cynicism by appearing too sentimental or easy: “Empathy, or historical perspective taking, is not, in this context, an affective achievement. Rather, it is the ability to see and understand the world from a perspective not our own.” Finally, it may engender in students an appreciation for historical agency. While Seixas and Peck are less convinced about the third possibility, this is the core of the pedagogy developed by the U.S.-based education group Facing History and Ourselves [FHAO], which encourages students to analyze the choices individuals had in history, especially during events of great moral harm to groups, and to look for examples of moral agency being exercised to resist and to aid others. (FHAO’s work will be discussed in more detail below.)

39 FHAO is an international education and professional development organization headquartered in Boston, MA, USA. For an introduction to FHAO’s mission, work and curriculum resources, see www.facing.org, last accessed on August 3, 2008.
Case Study: History Teacher Training in Post-Apartheid South Africa

“The humiliating expectations and traditions of segregation creep over you, slowly stealing a teaspoonful of your self-esteem each day.”
–Melba Patillo (one of the nine black students who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Alabama, and a central figure in FHAO’s source material about racial relations in America) [cite is from??]

Theories about pedagogical approaches and their potential contributions to democracy, tolerance and respect for diversity, all markers of the national identity that South Africa is trying to promote in place of the violently racialized and hierarchical one that had been common during apartheid, are extremely abstract. In order to explore how history pedagogy reform is being tried on the ground, in deeply divided societies that are searching the best ways to promote peace, justice, reconciliation and hope, we now turn to a case study. The description reflects the work that one of the authors, Karen Murphy, of Facing History and Ourselves, has been involved with since 2003 in South Africa. Note that our selection of an FHAO project is not an endorsement of the work of this organization above others, and our approach to the project is descriptive and analytical, not evaluative: FHAO’s project was selected for inclusion as a case study because FHAO is one of the few education organizations that is specifically committed to working on issues related to past violence and human rights violations, how they are remembered, judged and studied as part of a history—not civics, current events, conflict resolution or human rights—curriculum. It is also one of the few education organizations

40 FHAO has had over 80 evaluations in the past years. To see a summary of a number of studies that have been done on this organization and its methodology, see the evaluation section of FHAO’s website, http://www.facinghistory.org/sites/facinghistory.org/files/eval_summary_1108.pdf. Accessed December 21, 2008.
that works extensively both domestically, focusing on American teacher development, and internationally, in a consultative role. FHAO, while it does not define itself as an organization dedicated to human rights education, nonetheless considers itself a human rights organization, in the sense that its work is intended to serve the building and strengthening of human rights by making students aware of their own human rights and those of others.\footnote{Resources provided for teachers on FHAO’s extensive online “campus” include many materials directly about human rights, including a five-part module on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and units on Rafael Lemkin and the Genocide Convention, along with others on broader, but related themes like justice, civic courage and citizenship, prejudice, scapegoating and dealing with difference.}

FHAO has also been involved in history education reform in Northern Ireland and Rwanda, each an important case that contrasts with the others in illuminating ways, but South Africa was selected for inclusion here because it includes both strengths and weaknesses. Among its strengths are the fact that it had some processes for reckoning with past abuses in the form of a truth and reconciliation commission and institutional reform (although there have been few criminal prosecutions and little in the way of a fair and thorough program of reparations) which helped to demarcate a break with past racially based injustices; an educational infrastructure that needs improvement but was not shattered by conflict; a rhetorical commitment to reconciliation, to world-class standards of human rights/civil rights, and to rule of law; a generally democratic political system; and no single, state-enforced historical narrative. Among its serious challenges and weaknesses, however, are continued socio-economic inequities, including unemployment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, generally weak, under-resourced education, and continuing high levels of violence—now criminal instead of political, but recently
explicitly identity based, unleashed against economic refugees and migrant workers from other African countries.

South Africa represents a very interesting case for exploring the role of history education in relationship to transitional justice and national identity. The apartheid system was made up of an infrastructure of laws and public policies that were in turn shaped, informed and buttressed by social practice, informal interactions among people, and, importantly, violence and humiliation. The latter two “tools” were used widely and regularly, making apartheid both a controlled system and a highly diffused one with countless effects. The education system shaped and reflected all of these conditions and, in turn, reproduced them. History education itself was an incubator for many of these conditions, reproducing and reinforcing apartheid ideologies through not only a historical narrative, but also the conditions of the schools themselves, the realities of segregation, the inequalities of teacher professional development, and the very ways that teachers taught their pupils. Weldon summarizes education under apartheid as follows:

The segregated education reinforced inequality and the racialised identities (which lowered the self-esteem of the majority of South Africans and enhanced the self-esteem of the minority). Thus education during apartheid was an instrument of division and oppression. The institutional ethos of the education departments was highly authoritarian. The vast majority of those within the bureaucratic hierarchy were male (in white education, Afrikaner male), and virtually all supported the apartheid system. The education system deliberately set out to inculcate notions of superiority and inferiority; of those born to rule and those born to follow (delineated along racial lines). Apartheid education was Christian and National, ostensibly a policy for white Afrikaans-speaking children, but also spelling out the features of education for black South Africans that clearly articulated the racist ideology nurtured in the 1930s by the ruling National Party during the 1948 election campaign.\(^{42}\)

As is typical in authoritarian states that place a premium on the development of obedience and conformity in its citizens, the content that teachers used in history classes

\(^{42}\) Weldon, op cit. Chapter ?
was strictly aligned with a dominant narrative constructed by Afrikaaner nationalist historians. Not unlike the United States’ dominant narrative prior to the 1940s, this narrative represented a people, a “volk,” who were deeply intertwined with the emergence of South Africa as a nation-state and chosen by God to rule the country: these people arrived in a country that was empty and, through their labor, shaped it into a modern nation. In this triumphant, progressive narrative, a clear hierarchy is articulated with Afrikaaners at the top. This narrative, fused with racialized policies, retained the superiority of Afrikaaners, while ultimately merging culture and language with race/color.

In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was introduced. Bantu Education created a separate education department for black South Africans that reflected the values of apartheid. Black people were to be educated to become manual laborers and taught not to aspire to other positions in society. Black teacher training colleges reflected these ideas and black schools themselves carried them out. In addition to a lack of resources, a largely non-academic curriculum, poor professional development opportunities for teachers (and no expectations for them since they were developing workers), students and teachers faced the realities of too few schools and too many students per class.

This system was not dismantled until 1994. At that point there were nineteen different education departments. One of the first acts of the new government led by the ANC was to create one department of education for all South Africans. Fourteen years later, however, South Africa continues to wrestle with the effects of a deeply divided and unequal education system, the violence and humiliation that reinforced it, the deconstruction of a narrative that was not, in any way, merely academic, but which
shaped worldviews and reinforced peoples’ views of themselves, each other and South Africa, and the long-term effects of inadequate teacher training and professional development.

Revisionist historians began to deconstruct the apartheid narrative in the 1970s and 1980s. This clearly laid a foundation for more critical work by scholars and by some progressive teachers. As Weldon argues, this work also created a basis for the development of a usable past which would inform the deliberations for a new history curriculum after 1994.

Weldon herself was part of the process for developing a new history curriculum. Her writing on this process reflects the challenges that the writers faced in coming to agreement on the direction the curriculum would take. It also reflects how deeply entrenched the attitudes, behaviors and ideas of apartheid were. Indeed, the people developing the new curriculum could hardly step outside themselves, their own experiences and a system that had violated, oppressed and manipulated everyone, victims, perpetrators, bystanders. One of the most challenging realities of transition is the (re)development and reform of institutions by the people who were implicated in the former regime. Whether in exile or freedom fighter or passive resister or active participant, being part of South African society meant that apartheid had shaped everyone’s identity at some level. The realities of this unjust system included the fact that whites were invariably better trained teachers and writers for the curriculum development process. Bantu Education and segregation virtually guaranteed that fact.

Upon being appointed Minister of Education, Kader Asmal made it clear that there was a central place for history education in schools and that history education was
far more than a subject but rather a critical foundation for citizenship in the new South Africa, especially modern and recent history, which were to serve the particular transitional justice goals of teaching about past human rights abuses to prevent “the folly of repetition,” and redress the formerly subjugated and marginalized. Importantly, participants in the writing process such as Weldon were insistent that a new, triumphal narrative could not be developed to replace the old, that one story of a chosen people would not be replaced by another. A new national identity could not be taught or imposed. Asmal identified the constitution and democracy itself as the basis for a shared South African identity. In this conception, the reintroduction of history education was not intended to provide a new collective memory and identity, but rather to provide history education with a strong ethical bias within a values framework. In his address to parliament on the TRC Final Report Asmal noted that “…a simple factual record of the apartheid past, devoid of an ethical basis, would be of little value. What matters is not merely the fact that we remember history but the way in which we remember it.”

History, of course, cannot be contained by schools. Institutions such as families, churches, mosques, community centered-cafes and bars, and other public sites, all participate in the construction of historical narratives and memories. Because South Africa was so rigidly segregated and because the fall of apartheid did not immediately usher in an integrated society in terms of where people lived and socialized, many of the very structures that buttressed the regime continued to inform the construction of identity, one of the most important is how most South Africans use color to identify themselves. As one self-identified Coloured teacher in the Facing the Past project noted, “I know I am

not supposed to say this, but I prefer to go to the movies with my Coloured friends. We laugh at the same things.\footnote{Karen Murphy notes from Facing the Past seminar, January 2007.} Racialized segregation reinforced the development of communities in relative isolation. People grew comfortable in these communities (not in their physical settings, but with each other), developed shared practices, traditions, and, often spoke the same language.

The new history curriculum offers a dramatically different approach to content requirements; for example, teachers are required to teach about apartheid, the Holocaust and human rights. The TRC is taught in both Grade 9, as part of a theme of human rights, genocide, transitional justice and the Nuremburg Trials, and in more detail in Grade 12, in preparation for a question on the TRC on the final, required exam paper.\footnote{Gail Weldon, personal communication to authors.}

Crucially, however, the new curriculum fundamentally transforms pedagogy as well as content, so that teachers and students will have the skills to approach this content, not as material to be memorized, nor as a sacred text to be accepted, but as material accessible to study, proof, debate, analysis. Students are to learn the work of historians—to work with sources, analyze, provide evidence, form hypotheses. In order to do this, teachers need to understand how to do this work themselves. Given their unequal training, white teachers had more practice doing this kind of work and often had access to more resources as well as better resourced classrooms and smaller classes. They also usually have students who are fluent in English or Afrikaans. Black teachers, as a whole, were trained more traditionally (rote education with teachers lecturing, students taking notes and memorizing) and experienced traditional, authoritarian education as students. They also have fewer resources, under-resourced classrooms and many more students per
class. Their students speak a number of languages and usually speak English or Afrikaans as second or third languages.

The proposed history education content and methodology were sophisticated and not easy to teach, especially for the graduates of black educational institutions. Neither the creation of new teaching materials reflecting a commitment to teaching history as a part of developing human rights consciousness in students, nor access to extraordinary testimonies from the TRC and other resources were sufficient to help teachers teach the new history curriculum effectively and with confidence. South African teachers needed to learn how to teach this material; the material itself needed to be made accessible and turned into classroom appropriate material; and teachers as citizens needed to struggle with the issues themselves before taking the issues to students in discussion. In addition, despite the relative unanimity at the political level on the injustice of the apartheid state, South African nonetheless continues to have groups who suffered less from the system than others, or even benefited from the system, whose reactions to this content could make teaching it a tense experience for teachers—especially in newly integrated classrooms.

In 2003, to assist South African history teachers in meeting these challenges, FHAO collaborated with the Western Cape Education Department [WCED] and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre [CTHC] to form Facing the Past, Transforming Our Future (henceforth Facing the Past), a teacher professional development and resource support project. In 2005, Shikaya, a non-governmental organization formed by South African Dylan Wray, took over primary management of the project. FHAO and Shikaya still work closely with WCED and the CTHC but are now the main partners for Facing the

46 For more information on Shikaya, see www.shikaya.org, accessed August 3, 2008.
Past. Since its inception, the project has trained 107 teachers and three curriculum advisors in the Western Cape and held several workshops in Johannesburg; forty schools, including private, religious and state and both well-resourced former white and under-resourced former black schools, participate in the project. Shikaya also offers continued support for teachers via email. Facing the Past’s methodology is completely aligned with the required national curriculum so that even though some people do not technically teach the entire Facing the Past curriculum, they still bring methods and content into their courses.

FHAO’s pedagogy, which forms the basis of Facing the Past, offers students a framework and a vocabulary for examining the meaning and responsibility of citizenship and the tools to recognize bigotry and indifference in their own worlds. The curriculum offers a rigorous examination of the failure of democracy in Germany during the decades of the 1920’s and 1930’s and the steps and events that led to the Holocaust, along with other case studies of hatred, massive human rights violations and collective violence in the past century. Through this, but crucially, through the inclusion of the history of the modern human rights movement and other struggles for justice, such as the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle and the international movement for Darfur, FHAO teaches adolescents that prevention of collective violence is possible. Students learn to draw connections among events in the past, choices in the present, and the possibilities of the future.

FHAO is rooted in a pedagogy that identifies moral concerns and choices adolescents confront each day, and uses them as connections for students to move back and forth between understanding choices of the past and the present—between history
and their daily lives. Students learn to recognize distinctions among events, to draw appropriate relationships, and to grasp similar issues without making facile comparisons and imperfect parallels. FHAO uses a “scope and sequence” that typically begins with identity, moves into issues of membership and belonging, then into a historical case study that emphasizes human behavior and moral decision-making, then into questions of justice, judgment and reconciliation, culminating in the study of participation.

By using case studies from outside of South Africa, including the Holocaust and race issues in the U.S., the project directors have tried to create some distance for teacher participants, allowing them to begin to look at difficult issues and the choices people made in the past and their consequences. FHAO’s experiences in the United States demonstrated that teachers and their students find safety in this distance. They are able to make connections to themselves, to their communities and to other events in a way that they have not when faced with “their” history directly.

In the Facing the Past project, South African history teachers are introduced to core concepts of transitional justice through an online module that Facing History and Ourselves developed. In seminars and follow-up workshops, examples of land restoration, monuments/memorialization, truth-seeking (in the form of the TRC), prosecutions, and reparations are raised and explored. Workshops for teachers make use of multi-media materials, for example, in addition to texts, documentary films, including *Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers*, *Long Night’s Journey Into Day* (both about South Africa), Anne Aghion’s films about the gacaca process in Rwanda, and the PBS documentary *Not In Our Town*, about efforts to fight hate crime in the U.S., as well as

---

47 In the interest of full disclosure, Aghion has received support in the form of grants from the United States Institute of Peace for her films on Rwanda.
local community theatre productions. Materials from South Africa’s Institute of Justice and Reconciliation were also used and distributed to teachers. Workshop leaders work with clips of testimony from the TRC to model for teachers how this rich resource can be used in a classroom setting and the ways that it can be contextualized.

Typical questions used to structure teachers workshops might include: How do we see ourselves and others? How is our identity and that of others manipulated? How does our identity affect the way we treat others or the way we are treated by others? What are the challenges of making a democracy work and the dangers of destroying a democracy? How can states manipulate how we think and behave? How do policies based on exclusion result in the abuse human rights? What are the consequences of the violation of human rights? What are the factors that lead some people to take a stand against human rights abuses? How do we teach about difficult history? How do we recognize and deal with the issues of racism and prejudice that exist in our schools today?48

Exploring transitional justice approaches with South African teachers invites not only a discussion of the various processes, their limitations and opportunities, but also an important international comparative analysis. The Nuremberg Trials and the ad-hoc tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (ICTR and ICTY), for example, are introduced to raise discussions of the pros and cons of prosecutions: are prosecutions necessary to account for genocide and mass violence? In South Africa, should prosecutions have followed the TRC and been pursued more aggressively?

Examples of specific exercises used in workshops include an FHAO activity called the “Big Paper” project. This involves having facilitators choose a group of published narratives, including some taken directly from the TRC, that focus on a range

48 These particular questions were used to advertise a recent Facing the Past teachers’ seminar.
of experiences during apartheid. These are distributed to the teachers, who work in small
groups of three to four people to read their assigned piece together, discuss it in light of
their own experiences and then move on to another narrative while leaving behind a short
written piece (a comment, question or even a new story) for the next group to read
together with the original narratives. Each small group eventually reads, discusses and
comments on all the narratives, which represent many kinds of behavior during apartheid,
based on being a perpetrator, bystander or victim of violence, and displaying a range of
attitudes, shame, humiliation, resistance or moral courage. Small group discussions are
followed by discussion as a large group, after which facilitators invite the group as a
whole to reflect on the process itself and which aspects of it can be applied to classroom
work, including the skills of facilitating difficult discussions, creating safe spaces for
reflection, and helping students to listen to and respect competing views. Still other
exercises involve reading, discussing and writing workshop journal entries on literature
on the apartheid period (such as Coetzee’s memoir cum novel *Boyhood: Scenes from
Provincial Life*), or an excerpt from a testimony.⁴⁹

South African teachers, many of whom have been undermined by memories of
past humiliation and feelings of professional inadequacy in the new order (where black
or colored teachers, for example, may be asked to evaluate white teachers) are thus
empowered and asked to see themselves, too, as active participants in their country’s
transition, people who could make a positive difference. Black and coloured teachers
have repeatedly noted that one of the most important aspects of the Facing the Past
program is the confidence it gives them. This aspect of identity—confidence, an ability

---

⁴⁹ A portrait of a South African teacher who is using FHAO’s curriculum, including her experiences as a
student when the earliest classroom integration was attempted, can be found on FHAO’s website:
that you can do your job well, that you are prepared to do it—is vital not just for successful teaching but for the ability to imagine yourself as an active participant in society.

An example of how important this sense of civic participation is and the opportunity to connect history with current events is the xenophobic violence that broke out across South Africa in 2008 against migrants and refugees from neighboring countries. Given that transitional justice is both forward and backward-looking, discussions with history teachers encouraged them to use South Africa’s apartheid-era history, including resistance to it and the challenges of transition, to address human rights abuses in the present and how to motivate their students to resist them in the future. Many of the teachers participating in Facing the Past workshops note the transition they have made from viewing their history as an essential aspect of their identity, often in terms of oppression and victimization, to wanting to use their history and move beyond the old restrictions of identity to take positive action in their classrooms. In a workshop session specifically focused on the recent violence, teachers recalled the tactics of apartheid—the shame, humiliation, violence and ostracism—as a way to understand what they were seeing in their communities in the present. They also talked about resistance and about prevention in new ways, as people who have a responsibility—and the power—to make a difference in their society, and to model this new role for their students.

Conclusion:
There are reasons to believe that programs to change history education can serve justice and reconciliation, despite the difficulty in obtaining empirical evidence of transformation of identities via education programs; the many obstacles to changing the different historical narratives of enemies after the formal conclusion of conflict, which underpin identity; and the specific challenges facing history education.

Education systems, while conservative, are not immune to change: the principle of egalitarian education in Japan, which includes having all members of the community from the principal down contribute to janitorial work and making stronger students who finish faster use their time to help slower students with assignments “is a relatively recent product of post-war reforms...a promising example of how educational institutions might serve a transformative rather than a conservative social function.”

With regard to historical narratives and history as a part of conflict mediation, Bishai and other scholars, such as Barkan, have noted that identities and narratives are not in fact frozen, nor do they exist in a vacuum but change as those of others they are in contact with change: “All identities change and grow in new directions in response to and in relationship to the course of historical events.” Nationalists clearly make use of “artificially emphasized histories,” but this indicates that, to some degree at least, historical narratives are malleable by non-nationalists. Kaufman’s contention that conflict-hardened identities are not infinitely malleable is certainly true, but the literacy to which he ascribes the persistence of atrocity memories also means that literacy can be used to engage new approaches to history and civic identity. Again, he is correct that

---

51 Bishai, op cit, p. 88; see also Barkan, op cit, see especially Introduction. [CHECK WHERE BISHAI CITES Guttmann and Appiah, Color Conscious, p. 125—need to cite here?]

41
victims cannot be talked out of real atrocity histories, but members of perpetrator groups can learn to recognize these histories, and succeeding generations, the descendants of enemy groups, can learn new understandings of history, their own identities and those of other groups.

In the specific area of history education, one transitional setting with hardened identities, Northern Ireland, has had one of the most progressive, inquiry-based history curricula in the world since the 1980s, based on developing in students the skills and concepts to enable them to investigate the past through the examination of primary and secondary evidence and to treat any narrative of the past as provisional and open to question. Thus, students were encouraged to view history as enquiry, to recognize that actors in the past often saw events differently, and to evaluate differing (and conflicting) interpretations in the light of available evidence.52

In addition, the interaction between Northern Ireland’s struggle to overcome its violent past and the history program is also one of the most studied such relationships in the world. Barton and Alan W. McCully, who have studied Northern Irish history education with regard to conflict, transitional justice and reconciliation, separately and together, for decades, write that Northern Irish educators and policy makers look to school-based history education to counter the divisiveness that characterizes their society after years of violence: “They hope that history education can diminish young people’s acceptance of narrow or partisan perspectives on the past, either by providing them with neutral and balanced portrayals of controversial historical issues or by emphasizing non-politicized skills of academic study.”53 Studies they have carried out in Northern Ireland have found that “young people valued school history’s commitment to balance and they welcomed exposure to other views of the past as an alternative to the partisan histories they often

52 Alan W. McCully, forthcoming, op cit.
53 Barton and McCully, 2005, op cit, 85.
encountered in their own communities.”\textsuperscript{54} Belief in this social role for history is not unanimous among educators, and evidence of the results of Northern Ireland’s consciously crafted history curriculum is mixed: McCully and Barton have found evidence both that “the current curriculum may have directly influenced students’ ability to question the authoritative stories of their communities and to base their own conclusions on evidence”\textsuperscript{55} but also that many students, as they get older, “draw selectively from the formal curriculum in order to support their developing identification with the history of their own political/religious communities.”\textsuperscript{56}

In addition, Pingel cites surveys from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda showing that pupils “want to know about war and genocide; they want proof of the stories they are confronted with in their families and in the media; but these stories are not permitted within the classroom, and students cannot examine them in a rational environment.” And while teachers he has worked with, “especially older ones, prefer a history with a clear narrative, not something that allows for different interpretations [an observation that underscores FHAO’s prioritization of teacher development: it is not only in South Africa that teachers struggle with new, more challenging history pedagogies—Authors]…the majority of people, be it parents, teachers, or students, in principle are in favor of teaching history to better understand the roots of the conflict—although they wish to avoid tackling the conflict itself.”\textsuperscript{57} His final point speaks strongly in favor of FHAO’s methodology of using “remote” cases, either to help students begin to discuss their own history, or, in the case of Rwanda, where teaching about the genocide itself is

\textsuperscript{54} Barton and McCully, “You Can Form Your Own Point of View: Internally Persuasive Discourse in Northern Ireland Students’ Encounters with History,” forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Barton and McCully, 2005, op cit.
\textsuperscript{57} Pingel, op cit, pp. 187-188.
still forbidden, the methodology used by a consulting group composed of FHAO and University of California Berkeley educators: they rely solely on remote cases combined with training in new pedagogy to help Rwandan teachers make the connections to Rwanda’s history, specifically, the genocide and its origins, in the hope that someday they will be able to teach about recent history.

As is perhaps evident from this article, more is known, although not yet enough, about how history education can be made to serve the reconciliatory side of transitional justice by a focus on changing history pedagogy over content. Clearly, bringing in new points of view, voices and narratives in history content can serve as tools of justice via inclusion and recognition; bringing into the narratives past violations of human rights and acts of violence, the experiences of victims, serve as acknowledgment. The lack of these voices, narratives, events and experiences in history content is exceedingly clear in regional relationships in East Asia, where Japan has included them only in small, muted or hedged ways in textbooks on World War II, and in Turkey, where not only is the genocide against the Armenians missing from textbooks, but so are Armenians themselves, along with every other minority group that inhabits the land now belonging to Turkey. A sense of justice denied is palpable among Japan’s neighbors, who suffered from Japan’s occupation and wartime policies, and in the Armenian community in Turkey, in neighboring Armenia, and among the Armenian diaspora, scattered around the world by the genocide; and all these victims and descendants of victims refer specifically to history education and textbooks when they speak of the justice they seek, along with apology and truth-telling by state authorities.
By the time students are in university, they are seen as adults, and studying history is elective. But to what extent middle or high school history education can be the place to insist on and showcase the few unvarnished “truths” about the past, those “truths” that are the stubborn facts Rene le Sage referred to\textsuperscript{58}, the deaths and acts of torture that cannot be undone by any act of interpretation—is not clear. Facing History’s mission statement refers to human rights, and is built around the Holocaust as a primary case study, but its teacher training program in South Africa focuses as much on building the professional self-respect of members of formerly marginalized groups, on teaching skills to foster reconciliation and on overcoming entrenched identities of hierarchy, power and exclusion, as on helping teachers teach about human rights abuses. The Northern Ireland curriculum gets at injustices obliquely, through teaching students to question partisan stories they hear at home and putting Northern Ireland’s past into historical context, rather than by focusing on acts of brutality against individuals and deaths of innocent people in bombings. Here, too, the focus is on producing thoughtful adults who can take part in reconciliation with members of other groups, with identities more defined by inquiry, ability to debate non-violently and acceptance of diversity than by the old identities associated with conflict, dominance, privilege, suffering and victimhood. History education is in fact a somewhat oblique response to human rights violations: education about human rights abuses per se would aim for students to understand what the human rights violations were and to care about them, but history’s goal is to understand how we know what we do about the past, including about human rights violations.

\textsuperscript{58} Alain René Le Sage, \textit{Gil Blas}. Book x. Chap. i.
It should be noted here that there could also be arguments for substituting human rights education for history, that is, education about the modern concept and field of human rights, which is closer to civic or democracy education and focuses more on concepts than specific events, even when case studies are used. Oglesby, for example, found some evidence for this in schools in Guatemala, where there are still deep divisions about the extent of the violence and who was most responsible for it and the government has neither been willing to open up this chapter of Guatemalan history nor to embrace the findings of the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission [CEH], but students in some private, elite schools have had courses or units on international human rights, including detailed instruction on the Geneva Conventions and major human rights instruments. While educating student in human rights may give them familiarity with principles that states have signed on to via covenants and individuals around the world are committed to, thus making them more familiar as norms, if history education about the violence and abuses in their own past is missing then crucial connections are obviously lost, and human rights, while it may independently inspire some students to look critically into their history, can remain abstract and a problem of other countries and regions. Human rights education expert Felisa Tibbetts, the director of Human Rights Education Associates [HREA], believes that human rights education can open a space for discussion of difficult issues related to the recent violence when history is still taboo. At its best, Tibbetts says, human rights education is not “context-free,” as it, along with peace and conflict resolution education, is sometimes accused of being; current and recent events are liberally used as examples, even if by political necessity they have to be drawn from outside cases. Overall, Tibbetts feels that the greatest contribution of human
rights education comes from its impact on pedagogy: HREA and other outside human rights and civics education groups can act as conduits for new approaches to teaching in places where teaching has traditionally been conceived of as a “transmission belt,” ie, as enabling students to duplicate information passed on from teachers.

The history education field and transitional justice could work together much more than they currently do to create materials to use in classrooms. Technology, especially, can be used to strong effect to create multi-media teaching tools, such as audio-video materials for pod-casts and interactive websites which could accompany texts, to teach about trials, to interview historians, judges, activists and others able to communicate about history and the struggle for justice, and to preserve testimony from truth commissions. Oral history, too, is already a favorite for teaching about the recent past: oral history archives can provide materials for students, but students themselves can become oral historians by studying this particular genre and then going out to interview older family members, neighbors and others in their communities.\(^{59}\) Truth and reconciliation commissions as well as historical commissions and courts could have educators who work as liaisons to the educational community, providing outreach and workshops for teachers and creating didactic materials for teachers to use. Despite the costs involved in what are already expensive processes, these would help to bridge the distance between these institutions and citizens, to whose more just futures their work is intended to contribute.

However, these materials are not important if they sit on a shelf or if people do not know they exist, or if they do not have access to them, or if they are not modeled properly. Julia Paulson found this to be the case in fieldwork on the educational recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone: the TRC, with assistance from UNICEF, had produced a very clever version of its Final Report in the form of a graphic novel, with cartoon character mice representing the people of Sierra Leone during the war which devastated the country.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, it produced a classroom guide for teachers, to help them teach these materials, and also made explicit recommendations for the education system, including that corporal punishment (well-attested to have been rife in pre-war Sierra Leonean schools, as well as in schools throughout the region and indeed in many systems worldwide\textsuperscript{61}) be outlawed in schools, human rights education should be made part of the formal examinable curriculum and that the content of the TRC should be incorporated into education at all levels. However, in 2008, Paulson could not find a single school that had any of the education materials, and none of the high-ranking education officials she met at the Ministry of Education had ever seen a copy there.

Most tellingly, perhaps, when Paulson asked principals about human rights and peace education in their schools, “one explained briefly how the rights and duties of the child are taught before going into a lengthy description of discipline practices in the

\textsuperscript{60} The materials can be downloaded in PDF format at the TRC’s website, http://www.trcsierraleone.org/drwebsite/publish/index.shtml, accessed May 5, 2009.

school, listing the number of lashes doled out with the case for different offences.\textsuperscript{62}

Writing about Rwanda after the genocide, Anna Obura noted that “They [children] crave to have it demonstrated to them, by their education system, that justice can be done.”\textsuperscript{63}

Not only do teachers and pedagogical methods hold the key to ensuring that materials on transitional justice, history, and human rights get used, and are used in sound, effective ways, but how teachers teach models justice, equity, kindness and encouragement for students—especially those who have been subjected to violence, displacement and exclusion. Reform in this area may represent the greatest achievement of justice, and of transformation of identity, in the lives of children and young people in times of transition.

\textbf{Need to add these cites:}

\textbf{Cites for historical section, OBE:}


