



Education in the Shadow of History

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Introduction

What does history education have to do with post-atrocity repair? Is history education, especially history textbooks--the content of education--the right area to focus on?

My Argument

In the aftermath of atrocity, history education is important, but education is even more important--and it is not receiving enough attention.

[NB: Education here=formal K-12 school-based education--connected with state even if schools not all run directly by state]

Paradigms of Repair: Where does history education fit?

- Conveys recognition by state and society
- Acknowledgment
- Inclusion
- Signal of non-repetition, change of identity
- Deepens work of other processes (truth commissions, apologies, etc)
- Seems to be valued by and inspires trust in victims and/or their descendants, advocates

History Education Reform

Many challenges and limitations; not many examples of “success”-- in fact, we may not really know much about what “success” looks like or how to measure it

History Education: Not a stand-alone

- History education is embedded in larger education systems, and the systems themselves in societies
- These systems reflect faithfully the problems and injustices of societies;
- “Education systems with roots in the past have remarkable resilience and cannot be easily displaced by new frameworks, no matter how rational or progressive the new frameworks appear.” (Sommers & Buckland, writing about Kosovo)

Education's Challenges Despite Improvements, a Grim Story

- Access (children out of school): primary, secondary
- Quality: teachers; repetition/drop-out rates; weak learning
- “Marginalized” children
- Worst results in conflict-afflicted countries where so many atrocities take place

Education as a Priority: A Rising Profile

- Through the rights lens
- Valued by communities: safety, normalcy in times of crisis, extends human timeline to possibilities for a better future
- Valued by children
- Key to a better future? Within limits--but potentially one of the most powerful social tools we have

Education and Injustice, Reform and Moral Repair

- Schools as places of danger, humiliation, injustice--more often than we think--a rights, security, humanitarian, justice and development issue
- Reform of schools may be more possible in **transitional settings**: “Conflicts create significant and unusual opportunities to introduce changes that can, in time, and with local involvement, transform an education system,” Sommers & Buckland

Education and Moral Repair

Attention to those injustices in the education system that are linked to historical injustices, and the causes of violence

Part of the moral repair that “restores or creates trust and hope in a shared sense of value and responsibility...the recreation of moral communities...a pragmatics of moral repair”
(Margaret Urban Walker)

Bringing History Education Reform Back In

- History will not disappear: the rise of victims' claims and voices will keep us from reverting to victor's history (Elazar Barkan);
- The rise of social history means older, elite narrative models are insufficient

Bringing History Reform Back In: Textbooks and Beyond

- From textbooks--
- To curricula--
- To teachers and pedagogy--
- And the changes in the larger education systems this implies--a more democratic style of teaching--
- And--caveat!--in the larger society: acceptance of new narratives must begin outside the schools

Conclusion: Education, The Indispensable and Impossible Institution

- “They [children] crave to have it demonstrated to them, by their education system, that justice can be done” (Anna Obura, on education before and after the genocide in Rwanda)
- What education means to children worldwide, and how injustice in schools shapes their worldviews