

Intercultural Education

Kosovo Stories of Struggle and Resilience

Edited by

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Series in Education



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Preface

Cameron White

University of Houston

“History doesn’t repeat,” but it can educate.

Timothy Snider

The title of this book, *Intercultural Education: Kosovo Stories of Struggle and Resilience*, is quite intentional. It is through stories and history that we learn the true nature and passion of humanity. As a social educator, I suggest that the idea of offering stories that challenge traditional conceptions and hopefully educate regarding often unknown or ignored histories is vital in the 21st century. We are often taught that those who don’t learn history are often doomed to repeat it. History and humanity are much more complicated than that.

The struggles and resilience of Kosovo and its people provide an opportunity to learn from history. After all, Kosovo is the newest country in Europe and suffered through horrible genocidal war at little over 20 years ago. It still suffers from issues of poverty, development, global recognition, and inconsistent support from its international community. My ongoing educational experiences in Kosovo and with its people continue to teach me much about struggle and resilience.

We can all gain from such stories. The ongoing story of education in Kosovo can come alive with educators sharing individual perspectives regarding their struggles and resilience as students, teachers and parents. These stories can be difficult, but what is history but the investigation of issues, controversy, and struggle, with the hope of transformative change merging. We must have the courage to learn the difficult things. Themes embedded in the book focus on the struggle and resilience of Kosovo educators’ lived experiences and U.S. educators’ reflection on their experiences in Kosovo.

Although the focus is on the country of Kosovo, the hope is that an intercultural understanding arises rather than the traditional international one. The idea is that culture is what makes us human and that nations are comprised of a variety of cultures—race, ethnicity, gender, ability, choice, age,

etc. We often are taught history through the lens of nation-states and their interactions, often tied to borders—real or imposed. This is definitely a story of Kosovo, a country whose borders are still being challenged.

Kosovo is comprised of Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Christians, Muslims, young, old, poor, some wealthy, on and on... That too is a focus of this book—to celebrate culture, perspectives, difference, similarity—what is it that makes us human. It is hoped that the culture of education, teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction, students, teachers, principals, parents, and the community can be championed as one of the great possibilities of humankind. The hope is that through intercultural education we will build bridges not walls.

“Education is the passport to the future,
for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

Malcolm X

Part I.
Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction to Kosovo Education: A Model of Education Transition from 1990 to Present

Blerim Saqipi

University of Prishtina, Kosovo

Abstract: Kosovo, as the youngest state in Europe, has gone through difficult political developments in the last decades. The underground operation of the educational system during the 1990s opposing the oppression from the Serbian regime, including the ban of education in its own language, were the main developments in the last decades. Moving out of an internationally managed educational system during the transitional period of 1999-2003, Kosovo embarked on educational reforms characterized as moving from survival, on to revival and currently into the development stage. The recent curriculum reform has shaped the policies that are needed; however, challenges remain to ensure that the education of the right values and the correct classroom implications exist for full immersion with European society.

Keywords: transition, values, survival, social dimension, historical perspective, education context, Kosovo

Introduction

Kosovo is a country in transition in southeastern Europe. It is known as a country that came out of war in 1999 in its attempts to fight for human rights and independence from Serbia and had lived through almost 5 decades of communism under what is known as former Yugoslavia. It is inhabited by a majority of Albanians while the rest is minority groups such as Serbs, Bosniaks, Turkish and Roma. In 2008 Kosovo declared independence as a

sovereign state from Serbia, as inheritor of the former Yugoslavia. Though independence was declared in 2008, Kosovo went through an internationally monitored and supported transition in 1999 to ensure locally-led institutions functioned as an independent state. Ever since 1999, Kosovo society has shown aspirations and has put efforts into joining Western European values.

The Kosovo education system has recently moved from a highly centralized system to a less centralized one. The current organization of the system gives municipalities responsibility for pre-university education, and the role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is planning education policy, curriculum design, school inspection, and quality standards in various sub-sectors. In order to understand the current situation in Kosovo's education system, it is important to examine the specifics of the system in its current state as well as the historical and cultural dimension of schooling.

Historical Perspective of Education

Kosovo has a territory of 10,908 square kilometers and is located centrally in the Balkan Peninsula. Kosovo is estimated to have less than 2 million inhabitants and about 60% of the population is under age 25 (UNDP, 2006). Its population is multi-ethnic, and it is estimated to be 92% Albanian and 8% Serb, Turkish, Roma, and other ethnic groups (Vula & Saqipi, 2009).

Education in Kosovo, as may be the case with many educational systems in the world, is closely linked with historical and political developments in the country. Kosovo was part of the former Yugoslav Republic and was unavoidably influenced by political developments in the last three decades. In 1990 the then Serbian regime imposed a Serbian language curriculum upon the majority Albanian speaking population (Shatri, 2010). Albanians, representing about 90% of the entire population in the country, rejected such a discriminatory policy and reacted by establishing a parallel education system with teaching in Albanian language. Private houses served as school and university facilities and mostly were made available by families for free in order to maintain the education system in the mother tongue during these difficult times. Understandably, due to the circumstances and conditions in which schools were functioning, the quality of the teaching and learning was significantly lower than normally possible. Teachers were working for little to no pay, classes were big, and resources were very limited (Shatri, 2010). Operating an education system in such a manner was deemed illegal by the Serbian regime led by Slobodan Milosevic at that time; thus, being involved in education in any capacity was a dangerous activity.

The parallel education system in Kosovo was perceived as an instrument for preserving the national identity and vital for survival. In addition to educating young generations, it was the only tool for ensuring social cohesion and

commitment towards making Kosovo a peaceful and democratic country. Teachers in this role were deemed heroes for their engagement in upholding schooling. It was clear that the number of unqualified teachers was higher during the parallel system because access to teacher education provision was limited and many teachers left the country to move to Western Europe (Pupovci et al., 2001; Shatri, 2010).

The parallel system ran until 1999 when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened to stop the repression of the Serb regime and allow the people of Kosovo to establish a situation where the rule of law ensures that peace prevails, and people of different backgrounds co-exist peacefully. Hope for a better-quality education for all Kosovar students was thus restored. The emergency phase was soon over, and Kosovo was established as an international protectorate under the United Nations (UN) governance. Under such circumstances, the education system was re-designed. Its aim was to support the development of a multicultural society and a peaceful environment where members of all communities would co-exist peacefully and harmoniously, ending a long dispute and negative relations between certain communities.

Various lead agencies were active Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) or donor projects that were mandated by the Department of Education and Sciences (DES) to coordinate activities in designated specific fields. The lead agencies that were appointed in the sub-sectors were as follows (Pupovci et al., 2001):

1. Curricula Development – United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
2. Pre-school Education – UNICEF
3. Teacher Training – Canadian Government
4. Special Education – Finnish Government
5. Vocational Education– German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)

In the eyes of the UN administration, this meant that the corrupt and disorganized education practices that were developed during the 1990s be discontinued. For the Kosovo educators and administrators this meant giving up the tradition and values people had held for education and the work of teachers.

A National Curriculum Framework was established in 2001 as a tool to shape teaching and learning practices in schools. As such, it raised hope for the

betterment of student experiences in schools. Development efforts in all areas of life were aimed at developing a multi-ethnic society, cultivating environments where people would co-exist peacefully, and establishing the parameters for adhering to the wider European family political structures and society. The 2001 Kosovo Curriculum Framework recognized that learning experiences should not only focus on information, but also provide, in a balanced way, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. The 2001 Curriculum served as a reference for what knowledge, skills, values and attitudes should be incorporated into school programs and how this should be accomplished in a post-conflict context. The document identified values that should be taught by learning areas, although it does not pay much attention to the way these values should be taught in schools, nor, more importantly, does it address current realities in teacher practice and beliefs on the new philosophy.

An initial assessment conducted by the London Institute of Education in 2005 (Peffer et al., 2005) outlined challenges of the Kosovo school system in delivering modern teaching, learning and assessment practices while at the same time recognizing the good ground that had been established for ensuring changes in teaching and learning. The general assessment has been that the 2001 Curriculum failed in changing teaching and learning practices to the expected level even though donor support had been extensive within the overall international efforts to develop Kosovar post-conflict society.

In the period from 2008 onwards, the education system has been largely focused on providing the facilities and resources for enhanced quality of education by building more school buildings and improving the infrastructure of existing schools, seen as a measure to develop the necessary conditions that would lead to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, school infrastructure was poor and damaged during the past decades. Education was made a national priority for Kosovo and all processes and development efforts are supposed to lead to achieving the standards of excellence.

From 2008 and on, the Kosovo education system has undergone a number of changes. The major structural change has been the decentralization of competencies from central to municipal and further on to the school level. At a more substantial level, the new framework (MEST, 2011) adopted a competence-based approach to teaching and learning in order to address various learner needs and development specifics. This policy document complies with the European Union 21st century skills and competency-based agenda. The 2011 Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) specified that teaching and learning in schools is to be organized around certain competences. The goals of education according to the 2011 KCF are:

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Acronym List

AFT	American Federation of Teachers
CQRM	Critical Qualitative Research Methods
DES	Department of Education and Sciences
EU	European Union
GED	General Education Development
KCF	Kosovo Curriculum Framework
KDA	Kosovo Democratic Association
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SCS	Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
US	United States
WCOTP	World Confederation of Organizations for the Teaching Professions
WHO	World Health Organization

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