

Education in a Multicultural Cyprus

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The subject addressed in this volume is like the ‘elephant in the room’, or better ‘the elephant in the divided society of Cyprus’. The role of education in the peace-building process is a subject that the relevant authorities in Cyprus have consciously or unconsciously ignored or has not addressed properly. Although there are seemingly never-ending diplomatic efforts towards reunification, the equivalent political will to invest in education as a tool for building a culture of peace has so far been absent, not only between the two major communities on the island, but among the many minority groups who also live there. While individual researchers and academics have previously published on the subject, this is the first collective effort to approach education in Cyprus from different theoretical approaches and thematic angles, making it an insightful and valuable contribution to the field.

Education in a Multicultural Cyprus is a collection of papers from the conference ‘The Role of Education in Multicultural Cyprus’, which was held at the University of Nicosia in 2013 and was funded by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. According to the editors, the aim of the book is to deal with education in Cyprus as an institution and to investigate the content and structure of curricula (formal and informal), competing historical narratives, dominant perceptions of the Other, construction of social memory and internalisation of collective trauma storylines that might be reproduced or embedded in the existing educational system. More importantly, some of the authors focus on the cultural implications of these challenges. Although the authors clearly avoid proceeding with policy recommendations, it is clear that the book could have some serious policy implications for education in Cyprus.

The 14 chapters of the book are organised into three sections. The first section deals with international and theoretical perspectives on education in divided societies like Cyprus, Turkey, UK and Northern Ireland. The first chapter, by Matthew Lange, challenges the popular belief that education promotes peace and tolerance. The author reviews several comparative historical analyses and provides evidence that education can promote ethnic violence instead of tolerance and co-existence if led in that direction. Lange focuses on Cyprus as a case study and discusses the impact of education on the creation of ethnic frameworks, emotional prejudice and the mobilisation of resources for nationalistic movements. The author argues that the content of education plays a crucial role in determining whether education will contribute towards peace and

tolerance or violence and intolerance.

Kenan Çayır focuses on the educational system of Turkey and argues that essentialism promotes exclusionary national narratives which lead to social inequalities in multicultural settings and anachronistic readings of history. The author argues that combating essentialism in education is necessary if we want to create an inclusive imaginary community that will allow multiple identities to coexist in a peaceful and sustainable social environment. Çayır discusses the positions of three social groups in Turkey on the debate over de-essentialising education and developing a new inclusive shared identity.

Chapter three, by Tony Gallagher, explores the concept of coexistence and its application in various educational systems in diverse contexts. Gallagher highlights the importance of adjustability when applying the idea of coexistence to a particular educational setting, arguing that there is no fixed formula for pursuing coexistence in education. He brings to the discussion the example of Northern Ireland, where the 'share education' approach has been adopted recently, paving the way for collaborative networks between schools, teachers and students.

In chapter four, Wendy Booth discusses the idea of citizenship currently being disseminated through the educational systems, suggesting that schools incorporate sociological and psychological approaches into their curricula so that students can learn to contextualise differences and appreciate diversity. Sotos Shiakides closes out the first part of the volume with a discussion on international and theoretical perspectives. Shiakides focuses on the development of a 'political' or 'civic' identity in Cyprus, using the Habermasian approach to multicultural coexistence. The author proposes a two-level model where ethno-cultural and civic identities complement each other in the framework of a reunified Cypriot state.

The second part of the book is on the evolution of educational systems in Cyprus. Specifically, it offers a comprehensive analysis of how schools, and particularly history teaching, contributed to the construction of competing national narratives during the colonial years and after Independence. Panayiotis Persianis' well-written chapter opens the second part of the book by questioning how the two separate educational systems in Cyprus have shaped the perspectives of the local communities in relation to national identity. Persianis concentrates mainly on the British period and describes the cultural conditions under which the educational systems of the two communities remained separate, a situation inherited from the Ottoman empire. According to Persianis, the measures taken by the British colonial government in the 1930s proved incapable of restraining the strong national identities of both communities that were then reproduced in the divided educational system of the country. Persianis briefly mentions the post-Independence period and concludes that schooling has the power to create a sense of identity, or, as in the case of Cyprus, to split it in two.

In a similar vein, chapter seven has to do with Turkish Cypriots' efforts to gain control of the educational and religious institutions in Cyprus during the colonial era. Turkish Cypriots used education as an instrument for the infusion of nationalistic ideas and imaginaries. Like Persianis, Nikolaos Stelgias addresses the vital role that the two divided educational systems played in the development of competing national identities and narratives. According to Stelgias, school textbooks and curricula promoted the idea of a separate 'Sunni Muslim Turkish Cypriot identity', leading the Turkish Cypriot community to envision partition as the only solution that would ensure a peaceful settlement of the problem.

Chapter eight is co-authored by Samani and Tarhan and focuses on history education in north Cyprus. They argue that education, and particularly history textbooks, has reproduced an 'ethno-nationalist narrative', based on the premise that Turkish Cypriots are the victims of the Cyprus conflict, that legitimises the existence and perpetuation of division. The authors discuss the relatively recent revision of history textbooks and the effects those narratives have had on public school education over the past five years. This chapter addresses the weaknesses and problems that arose during the revision process and explains what led to the new books being replaced with the old in 2009. It also demonstrates how non-governmental initiatives by groups like the Association of Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) can provide an alternative historical narrative.

Chapter nine, by Dilek Latif, offers readers a well-balanced overview of the cultural context in which history is being constructed and re-constructed in both communities. While other chapters touch on the content of history books and various efforts to revise them, Latif gives a much more detailed and nuanced review of that process within both communities. Like the other authors, Latif looks at the role of non-governmental organisations, like AHDR and POST, in peace building and reconciliation.

In the last chapter of this section, Evgenia Partasi writes about the policy and practice of intercultural education as enforced by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus. The author analyses the concept of intercultural education as it appears in important policy documents issued by the Ministry, while taking into consideration the changes that have occurred throughout the years. The author investigates the actual implications of these policies by interviewing teachers.

The last section deals with 'Understanding Coexistence'. While the first two chapters mainly tackle perceptions of cultivating peaceful coexistence and representations of the Other, the final two focus on initiatives taken by civil society towards trust and peace-building. In a particularly well-written chapter, Panayiota Charalambous, Constadina Charalambous and Michalinos Zembylas analyse Greek-Cypriot government educational policies stemming from the Cyprus Problem. The authors provide a short review of the educational policy 'I Don't Forget', which the Ministry directed in the

1980s, and the newer, complimentary policy of 2008-09, which aimed at cultivating the idea of peaceful coexistence with the Turkish Cypriot community. The authors treat the educational policies as 'discourse' and the views of teachers, recorded in the form of an interview, as 'interpretative repertoires'. The teachers were interviewed on their perceptions and stances on peaceful coexistence and their understanding of the relationship between the two educational policies.

In a particularly interesting study, Christiana Karayianni and Irene Photiou provide a discourse analysis of the representation of Turkish Cypriot Roma people who crossed to the south and settled in Limassol in the 1990s. The reader is given an account of the overarching themes that shaped the representation of this community in the newspapers. While the chapter sketches the rather negative attitude taken by the media, the authors underline the positive initiatives taken by the teachers and management of local elementary schools.

Chapter thirteen, by Andri H. Constantinou and Vasiliki Andreou, investigates a relatively understudied subject: the role of theatre as an informal education tool in the divided society of Cyprus. The authors focus on the interaction of Turkish Cypriot actors, directors and theatre clubs with the Greek Cypriot community after the events of 1974 and provide a detailed review of joint performances and events organised before and after the opening of the checkpoints in 2003.

The last chapter, by Maria Hadjipavlou, examines the peace-building activities organised by Winpeace for young participants from Cyprus, Turkey and Greece. This chapter is inspiring for anyone who deals with policy-making in divided societies. The author gives detailed information about the method and structure of the workshops, along with the participants' thoughts and reactions. Hadjipavlou highlights the role of civil society as a leader in social transformation and the need to have these efforts officially supported by the state.

Overall, *Education in a Multicultural Cyprus* is without a doubt a significant contribution to the study of education in Cyprus, arguing persuasively for education as a peace-building tool. Chapters have been selected carefully in order to contribute to the overall theme of the volume, and there is a balance between the topics examined and the historical periods and communities under scrutiny. In edited volumes that focus on a particular society or cultural context, there are inherent weaknesses, such as overlapping or repetition of historical backgrounds or settings. Nonetheless, it is clear to the reader that all 14 chapters belong in the volume and complement each other effectively. This book is the first collective effort to investigate the role of education in the divided society of Cyprus from a multidisciplinary perspective. It certainly sets the stage for further research and discussion of issues that are not fully addressed here. For example, the modern educational system(s) in Cyprus and nationalism are both cultural products of the so-called modern paradigm, and this relationship is

insufficiently explored in the cultural context of Cyprus. This could be the subject of a follow-up conference or a second volume in the series. Despite these gaps, the book is a well-thought-out synthesis of chapters with diverse perspectives and angles that give readers an in-depth conversation on the divisive or reconciliatory role that education could play in divided societies like Cyprus.

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