



# History teaching, conflict and the legacy of the past

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## Abstract

The article examines the utility of enquiry based, multi-perspective history teaching in divided societies and those emerging from conflict. Using findings from Northern Ireland as an example, it concludes that, while empirical research is required in a range of conflict settings, an enquiry approach, placing an emphasis on the examination of evidence and the study of multiple perspectives, can have a positive impact on young people's thinking. However, for history teaching to contribute fully to the reconciliatory process it must engage critically with the legacies of the more recent past. The article draws on the distinction between what Minow calls 'psychological' truth, associated with 'truth-telling' in the immediate aftermath of conflict, and historical truth. It suggests that by engaging with storytelling history teaching may have the capacity to encourage young people to 'care' for those from different backgrounds who have been victimized by conflict; and also to examine such stories critically and thereby acquire a more complex understanding of the events of the recent past.

## Keywords

history teaching, multi-perspectivity, post-conflict education, reconciliation, truth recovery

## Introduction

### *Education, conflict and history teaching*

The question, how should history be taught in conflicted societies and those emerging from conflict has become an increasingly important focus for study within the expanding field of education's relationship to conflict. A greater understanding is emerging of the relationship between education and the causes of conflict as well as education's potential to facilitate peace-building and social cohesion (Smith and Vaux 2003; Gallagher 2004; Tawil and Harley 2004). For the latter to happen fundamental curriculum change is usually necessary. Smith and Vaux (2003: 2) identify reform of the 'national subjects', the arts, literature, geography and history, as key as these contribute to consolidating a common sense of national identity. For them 'the teaching of history is of particular

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significance in contested societies and stands out as an area of the curriculum particularly open to charges of bias and prejudice' (Smith and Vaux, 2003: 31).

Faced with the challenges posed by teaching history in post-conflict contexts this paper critiques the prevailing view that an enquiry-based, multi-perspective approach offers the most effective way for history teaching to contribute to post-conflict understanding. Empirical evidence is mainly drawn from studies conducted in Northern Ireland though other areas of conflict are referenced as illustration. The strengths and limitations of the contribution of enquiry-based history in Northern Ireland currently makes to the peace-building process is addressed and, suggestions are made as to how learning to date might be applied to the problematic task of dealing with the recent past. The central tenet is that the move away from a single narrative approach to one based on enquiry and multi-perspectivity is a promising development but that the impact is limited unless history learned in schools is made directly relevant to young people's day-to-day cultural and political experiences.

### *The context for reform*

Northern Ireland is a suitable context to examine enquiry-based history teaching. Over a 40-year period educators have promoted it as a way of improving inter-community understanding. Yet when generalizing with regard to deeply divided societies caution is necessary for two reasons.

First, making comparisons between different conflict situations is difficult, such are the complexities of each. The nature and timing of interventions, or reforms, will vary according to local circumstances, be these the level of sensitivity pertaining through the trauma of violence, the relative power imbalances between opposing groups or the more pragmatic issue of available resources. For instance, in the relatively sophisticated educational context of Northern Ireland, where there was academic and governmental sympathy for reform, the curriculum encouraged teachers to wrestle with communal division prior to the cessation of violence. In contrast, in the aftermath of traumatic genocide in Rwanda it was deemed necessary to place a moratorium on the teaching of history. Cole (2007: 20) advocates that, normally, intervention through the history curriculum is best as a 'second stage' of the reconciliation process, once other structural legacies have been addressed. While a post-conflict environment is likely to be more receptive to positive intervention this should not deter those 'risk-taking' innovators in zones in which conflict is on-going, such as Israel/Palestine, from challenging young people's perception of the past (Bar-On, 2010).

Even when the decision is taken to intervene, the question remains as to what aspects of the past should be dealt with and, particularly, how far should historical study encroach on recent, violent events. In the Balkans, developmental work has addressed more distant historical periods (CDRSEE, 2009) or social history (OSCE, 2008) without including the recent events referring to the break-up of Yugoslavia and its aftermath. Appropriate decision making on curriculum design, in relation to underpinning aims, sequencing of activities and the selection of content, is important in scaffolding effective innovation, both for structuring the learning and accommodating sensitivity.

The second reason for caution when generalizing on the impact of multi-perspective, enquiry based history is that, despite its widespread advocacy in conflict situations, it has not often been subject to systematic research scrutiny at the operational level of the classroom. Consequentially, empirical evidence of the impact on students is limited. The Northern Ireland studies referenced here contribute but much work has yet to be done in a range of conflict regions to lift the advocacy beyond the aspirational to one based on research informed judgment.

### *The challenges facing history educators in contested societies – one or multiple narratives?*

If reforming history teaching as a contribution to post-conflict renewal is beneficial then two possibilities offer themselves. One might be to work to construct a common narrative which is broadly acceptable and inclusive to all parties; the other, the prevailing orthodoxy currently, is to present contested narratives for investigation. At face value the former may seem an obvious approach in a divided society, or one emerging from conflict, in that any history curriculum that promotes greater social cohesion through a common sense of heritage and national belonging should benefit the re-construction process. After all, it has been a function of history teaching in most countries, particularly since the development of mass formal education in the 19th century, to present a narrative that indicates to young people that their attachment to the nation state gives them a unique identity that makes them different from 'others' around them. But, here lies the difficulty in that rarely have single narratives been inclusive of all groups within a country's sphere of influence. Rather, they have tended to reflect prevailing power structures and, therefore, contribute to at least a degree of xenophobia. It is when the history curriculum is used systematically to exclude or vilify other nations, or ethnic groups, as was obviously the case in Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jews or with the apartheid regime's portrayal of South Africa's past, that history teaching is open to the charge that it directly foments hatred and conflict. If a politically motivated history curriculum, using a dominant narrative, has often been one pre-cursor of conflict then any intervention, either to help alleviate violence or to contribute to more equitable social relationships in a post-conflict re-building phase, will have to take account of previous imbalances and misrepresentations. It is questionable as to how far any single narrative presentation can fulfil this function. Rwanda is a case in point. There the post-genocide government has allied itself to a narrative, the purpose of which is to generate national unity by blaming colonialism for creating the ethnic tension which eventually led to the atrocities of 1994. While an historical case can be made for this interpretation there are many historians who question its veracity. The government has become authoritarian in asserting this position through its educational policies, including the re-emergence of history education, to the extent of forbidding references to ethnic division in classrooms, or in public debate. Freedman et al. (2008: 685) draw attention to the dangers inherent in imposing the government's narrative of national unity when ethnic tensions persist close to the surface. They conclude that:

the policy of denying the reality of ethnicity and the inability to discuss ethnicity comfortably make it hard for everyday citizens to process what happened during the genocide and to talk about lingering fears and dangers. Unless that policy is addressed and remedied, the teaching of Rwanda's history will be flawed and the potential for further destructive conflict will remain a concern.

The alternative, a multi-narrative approach, can be justified by reference to the complexity by which national and ethnic groupings use the past to define their collective belonging. History learned in school is only one source of our knowledge of the past, alongside family, community and other less formal cultural influences. Where deep divisions exist it is usual that these are underpinned by reference to perceived grievances or betrayals in the past and that historical justifications have a strong base within the national or ethnic collective memories of opposing parties. Seixas (2006: 8) defines collective memory as 'the study of how ordinary people beyond the history profession understand the past'. For Wertsch (1998, 2002) narrative is the principal cultural tool for understanding the past, helping us to organize knowledge into meaningful wholes and coherent plots. Narratives often compete and single or master narrative frameworks, 'schematic narrative templates' (Wertsch, 1998: 60) exist through which specific events can be interpreted and thus

contribute to the collective memory of any given group or society. In turn, such master narratives, when it is politically expedient, become the 'national story' that is often taught through formal education, endorsing the identity of some, and marginalizing that of others. Conversely, the marginalized, too, adhere to their own 'truth' and resist the 'official' state version of the past, as Wertsch (2000: 38–39) observed of Estonians in their encounter with official Soviet history.

This inter-connectedness between historical learning and sense of identity has become the focus of keen academic study through the concept of 'historical consciousness' (Seixas, 2006; Barton, 2009). Seixas (2006: 10) accepts historical consciousness as 'the area in which collective memory, the writing of history and other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind merge'. That formal historical study is just one source of historical knowledge for young people, and that it often struggles to make an impact against more dominant (and emotive) narratives in the community, is borne out by experience in Northern Ireland (Barton and McCully, 2010), and by studies elsewhere. For instance, Porat (2004) found that Israeli students who attended a religious academy, and who aligned themselves with the right wing of Israeli politics, adhered to a legendary and heroic narrative of the Tel Hai event of 1920 (an example of Jewish-Arab conflict), even when they read textbook accounts that portrayed the event as accidental and largely insignificant. Students reinterpreted or added details to the textbook accounts so that they aligned more closely with their prior narrative frameworks. Secular, left-wing students, in contrast, were more likely to accept the textbook at face value and to dismiss an account that portrayed the event as Jewish heroism.

History teaching, then, in a divided environment creates special challenges, especially because history is so closely tied to the emotions associated with national identity and collective belonging. Arguably, a traditional single narrative approach is of restricted value in any educational context but by presenting one interpretation of the past uncritically as the 'truth', it is especially unsuited to a divided society where it is often nationality itself that is disputed. Even a single narrative based on a degree of consensus is unlikely to penetrate the emotionally protected corral of collective memory. Hence, those seeking alternative approaches are attracted to a view of history teaching that emphasizes the process of historical enquiry, as opposed to an agreed single narrative. They place emphasis on acknowledging competing communal narratives but also ensure that these are put under the direct scrutiny of critical analysis. Thus, they advocate enquiry and multi-perspectivity.

## The enquiry approach and multi-perspectivity

From the 1990s the broad principles of this enquiry or 'multiple perspective' model have been promoted by international agencies such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE in states emerging from conflict and/or in democratic transition from totalitarianism. The model has its origins in the Schools' Council History Project (SCHP), which began in England from the late 1960s (Shemilt, 1980). It focuses on students developing 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, they are encouraged to view history as process orientated, to recognize that actors in the past often saw events differently and to evaluate differing (and conflicting) interpretations in the light of available evidence. Note that enquiry based history was not a specific response to conflict or post conflict environments. While SCHP recognized the importance of convincing students of history's relevance its philosophy was located very much within the academic discipline of the subject. Slater (1995: 125–126) refers to the *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* aims of history teaching. The former are those that are inherent in the subject discipline.

The latter are the broader educational aims focused on changing society. The aims of SCHP were predominantly intrinsic with the emphasis on developing young people's historical thinking.

Yet, as early as the 1970s, teacher activists in Northern Ireland saw its potential to challenge the historical myths and misconceptions perceived to be contributing to communal division there. Thereafter, it became embedded in the history provision of the province's statutory curriculum (first introduced in 1991, then revised in 1995 and, again, in 2007) in the belief that exposing young people to the critical examination of evidence and a range of views on, and from, the past can contribute to greater mutual understanding in society (Smith, 2005: 143–155).

'Multi-perspectivity' is not a familiar term within the Northern Ireland Curriculum but the substance of the idea is present in its rationale. In the context of history teaching, the term originates on the European mainland in the work of the Georg Eckert Institute and the Council of Europe. Stradling (2003: 14) defines the characteristics of multi-perspectivity as:

A way of viewing, and a predisposition to view, historical events, personalities, developments, cultures and societies from different perspectives through drawing on procedures and processes which are fundamental to history as a discipline.

Multi-perspectivity applies to 'interpretations of the past', how the past is seen by those looking back, or 'perspectives in the past', how actors at the time perceived events as they unfolded. Both aspects are vital in societies where the past is hotly contested. Young people need insight into why the cultural and political outlook of individuals and groups today help shape attitudes to past events. They also require to understand why people at the time, depending on their standpoint, may have perceived events in very different ways; and that even partial accounts have validity and are inter-connected. As Gallagher (1996: 52), herself a teacher in west Belfast at the height of the 'Troubles', argues on behalf of the Council of Europe, 'looking at issues from other perspectives ... may begin to affect everyday attitudes ... transforming into an actual attitude of mind or value system which might roughly be characterized as a search for truth'.

## **The strengths and limitations of the history teaching in Northern Ireland**

This assessment of the impact on history teaching on young people's understanding of the past in Northern Ireland is initially based on a Royal Irish Academy funded study conducted between 1999 and 2003, involving an observed visual task and paired interviews with 253 students from 12 schools. The detailed findings are reported elsewhere (Barton and McCully, 2005, 2008, 2010) and there is only space here to refer to the work's conclusions.

Students in the study valued school history and appreciated the chance it provided to learn about other perspectives, particularly when this exposed them to the motivations and experiences of the other community. They recognized the difference between school history and community history but they did not necessarily rate one to the exclusion of the other. Rather, they often engaged in quite a complex process in which they combined multiple sources of historical information in order to develop their own historical understandings that were never simply mirrors of any one of those sources. Thus, they neither 'appropriated' nor 'resisted' either school or community history, but tried to combine elements of both. Yet, when the paired interview transcripts were analysed holistically it became clear that grappling deeply with differing perspectives was very challenging and difficult for students. For many the tendency was to assimilate new

knowledge into their dominant community frameworks. Further, students' understanding was restricted to perspectives which portrayed Northern Irish history as the clash of two opposing monolithic community positions.

A very recent study of young people's understanding of the past (involving the surveying 968 young people and the engagement of 238 in focus groups across 12 locations) supports the core findings of Barton and McCully (McCaffery and Hansson, 2011). These researchers, too, found that young people learn their history from a wide variety of sources, that there is a massive variation in the levels of knowledge that they have about the past and that they particularly seek a greater knowledge and understanding of the recent past. The study concludes that 'despite a continuing trend to frame the past in terms of one's own community background or location of residence, there does seem to be evidence of a genuine willingness to appreciate alternative perspectives of the past' (McCaffery and Hansson, 2011: 52–53). Thus, research evidence points to a positive, if qualified endorsement of enquiry-based, multi-perspective history teaching.

The fact that students in Northern Ireland are wrestling with history from a range of sources and perspectives and trying to understand the past for themselves contrasts with findings of studies in other regions. Where a single narrative approach is the norm (Mosberg, 2002; Letourneau and Moisan, 2004; Porat, 2004) studies tend to confirm the appropriation / resistance model. In Northern Ireland, enquiry based history is having an impact even if students still encounter difficulties in moving beyond their own community identities. Although they believe that school history can, and should, challenge community perspectives, such challenges are difficult to reconcile with their prior ideas.

As neither Northern Irish study investigated students' actual experience in the classroom it can only be surmised that inadequacies in current practice may inhibit curricular provision from achieving its full potential. Several small-scale studies of teacher attitudes have indicated that not all teachers in Northern Ireland are committed to 'extrinsic' aims for the subject (Conway, 2004; Smith, 2005; Kitson, 2007; Thompson, 2007). These suggest that tension exists between those teachers who are prepared to engage in innovative practice, provided it remains within the confines of what they perceive as the academic boundaries of the subject area, and those 'risk-takers' whose teaching seeks to influence social change (McCully, 1998; Kitson and McCully, 2005; Kitson, 2007). Ultimately, progressive educational policy is dependent on classroom teachers for its implementation. Teachers are products of the society of which they are part and, therefore, are likely to share many of the pre-conceptions of those around them. Unless they are won over to new approaches in curriculum and textbook design then the likelihood is that they will bring their cultural backgrounds to bear to subvert proposed change, as has been the tendency among the three main ethnic groups in Bosnia (Low-Beer, 2001; Weinstein et al., 2007).

Therefore, development work is necessary with teachers to explore ways that their practice can help students be receptive to, and critical of, a full range of perspectives and interpretations. In Northern Ireland this is especially pertinent since the 2007 curriculum revision. This places even greater emphasis on social utility than before. Gallagher (2001: 51), in designing this curriculum for a post-conflict society, insists that history education at pre-tertiary level should not mirror academic history exactly, but should embrace societal change as a primary goal. Yet the subject's status on the curriculum over time has depended on demonstrating the inherent value of its distinctive disciplinary characteristics. The challenge, then, is to move teachers beyond a pedagogy that concentrates on cognitive development alone to one that also fosters values and dispositions conducive to conflict transformation. This has to ensure that students have the opportunity to apply their learning to issues beyond the narrow confines of academic requirements without



compromising the disciplinary rigour of the subject (McCully and Montgomery, 2009). While remaining realistic as to the impact the history curriculum can make, history teachers should not collude with 'social amnesia' by avoiding sensitive aspects of the past as has been the case in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and elsewhere. Thus, preparative teacher education to build confidence is an essential pre-requisite if teachers are to engage effectively in the transformative process. Working with practitioners from very varied backgrounds on the reformed curriculum in South Africa, Weldon (2005: 1) asserts that:

if we are to embrace this values-driven curriculum and develop in learners a respect for human dignity, equality and social justice, then teachers need to develop these same values first and use them to transform their classrooms and teaching.

In summary, research to date in Northern Ireland indicates that a process, enquiry-based model of history education has some potential to challenge politically and emotionally charged group narratives and thus contribute to peace-building. Young people value the approach even though pedagogy lags behind curriculum intention. Its strengths lie in four inter-connected areas. First, it provides students with a foundation in critical analysis; second, it encourages them to recognize that the interpretation of the evidence of the past is a discursive and constructivist process in which alternative versions vie for recognition; third, it fosters empathetic understanding, or caring, for others; and fourth, it promotes democratic values. Each of these factors is examined below and suggestions made as to how their application might be improved in the classroom.

### *Critical thinking*

First, history develops skills and dispositions that promote critical analysis. An aim of education should be to create individuals capable of making rational judgments. Pursuing objectivity through the evaluation of evidence is central to history. The skills of evaluation, analysis, synthesis and interpretation, developed through the handling of conflicting evidence, both deepen students' understanding of the past but also provide a foundation for taking a more critical stance to those who seek to use the past to justify contemporary positions.

Curriculum design is important here. A curriculum requires to be constructed in a way that facilitates the embedding of skills prior to their application to more contentious material, such as the investigation of historical myths and misrepresentations, or the examination of territorial disputes. Flexibility is also a factor. For example, the establishment of a common history programme for all schools in Northern Ireland in the 1990s was a considerable achievement but it may be that the idea of exact symmetry in the curriculum, taking a common teaching approach with children, regardless of background, needs to be challenged, at least in the Northern Irish context. Teachers may require the freedom to modify their teaching to meet the needs of certain groups. For example, once dominant groups such as the Ulster Unionists, or perhaps, the Afrikaners or the Russian residue population in the Baltic States may require a distinct approach, or at least different emphases, to that used with groups who perceive themselves as previously oppressed. The assumptions and mindset in each case are different. Therefore, the narrative schematic templates of each may require to be challenged from different directions. Crucially, approaching history through an enquiry approach has the capability of fostering in students dispositions to view the past in a more open-ended way. History teaching must convince young people that it is their duty to pursue truth but that in the light of competing interpretations it is unlikely that there is a final destination. But this is not to say that anything goes. As Phillips (2002: 142) forcefully points out,

The idea that historical knowledge, truth and certainty can be subject to rigorous analysis does not entail the rejection of historical certainty *per se* but implies instead a re-conceptualized, more complex view of what historical knowledge is.

### *A discursive and constructivist process*

In short, students must become comfortable with complexity and debate. These are inherent in a multi-perspective approach. Stradling (2003: 19) points out that multi-perspectivity is more than the application of historical method for it aims to extend the breadth and scope of the historical analysis by examining the event from multiple dimensions. Earlier it was established that multi-perspectivity applies both to perspectives in the past and interpretations of the past. With regard to the former, often through the examination of accounts from the time, students get insight into the motivations for why people acted in the way they did. Stradling (2003: 18) contends that by studying a range of perspectives students can acquire 'a richer and more complex account based on interlocking narratives', which relate to each other but have also been shaped by each other, 'a recognition that each perspective is part of something bigger: a more complex but also more complete picture' (Stradling, 2003: 20). This, he argues, enlightens the study of conflict situations, particularly by helping students to understand how partisan views in the past have fed collective memory, thus influencing how respective groups today interpret past events. Multi-perspectivity can help students,

to understand that they [conflict situations] often arise, persist and are shaped by conflicts of interpretation where each party to the dispute assigns motives and intentions to each other's actions which are not founded on any specific evidence but which reflect long-established assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes.

The concept of historical interpretation can be a daunting one for teachers working with young people. However, the opening up of popular representations of the past to scrutiny in the classroom provides great opportunities (McAleavy, 2000; McCully et al., 2002). Popular 'interpretations' may be found in heritage centres, fiction, film or even television advertisements, and students can engage in deconstructing their purpose and degree of historical authenticity. In divided societies students can then examine how the past is portrayed through political propaganda in sites of remembrance, wall murals and pamphleteering. Nor should work be confined just to a critique of the validity of different representations. Students can also be supported to explore why people interpret history differently. Using fictional characters and drama approaches, for example, students can examine why personal background might lead individuals to see the past in the way they do. In turn, through this meta-cognition, they can then be asked to reflect on how their own upbringing might influence their interpretations of the past (McCully and Pilgrim, 2004).

A textbook represents an interpretation of the past and textbook production has frequently been identified as a starting point for bringing about reform in history teaching (Stradling, 1997; Pingel, 1999). Textbooks can (with difficulty?) incorporate enquiry and multi-perspectivity but it may be that an over-reliance on the textbook is, itself, indicative of a more traditional mindset toward history teaching. In Northern Ireland a multi-resource approach has evolved in which the textbook is regarded as one source of information, open to scrutiny like all the others. However, in less resource rich environments core texts are likely to remain dominant. One way to ensure balance and multiple voices is to commission resources that are authored jointly by those from different backgrounds or ethnic groups. This method has been employed both in Northern Ireland and by Euroclio and



OSCE projects in Central and Eastern Europe (OSCE, 2008). Particularly interesting in this regard is the work of the PRIME project in Israel and Palestine (Bar On, 2010). Since 2002 three booklets have been produced for Israeli and Palestinian high schools that divide each page into three sections; one for each of the Israeli and Palestinian narratives and a third left blank for the students' interpretations. While this may risk re-enforcing polarized views it is, nevertheless, a creative response to a specific situation where not only the interpretation is disputed but the nature of the events themselves; and where the very different status of occupier and occupied bears heavily on attempts at discourse. That the subject matter covered runs to the very recent past makes the experiment doubly valuable for both practice and research.

## Caring

If multi-perspectivity is more than the application of historical method then students' learning must go beyond simply understanding why people thought and acted the way they did in the circumstances of the time. A criticism of the enquiry approach arising from work in Northern Ireland (Barton and McCully, 2010) is that it places too much faith on the premise of 'neutral objectivity'; that cognitive skills, developing rational thinking and balancing points of view, alone, will enable young people to overcome those cultural influences which prevent them seeing beyond their own community perspectives. The latter are deeply held and emotionally protected. If the danger of a dislocation between history studied in school and that encountered in communities is to be avoided then it is essential that the history studied in school connects with students' everyday experiences.

One way to achieve this is through the promotion of empathetic understanding; that 'pupils should feel as well as think their way through history lessons' (Illingworth, 2000: 20). The term empathy is a contentious one in history education, in that it has been argued that historical enquiry is primarily a cognitive process with little space for feelings or imagination (Foster, 2001). Barton and Levstik (2004: 206–242) abandon the term and, instead, separate it into *perspective recognition* and *caring*. The former is the intellectual exercise of understanding why people in the past acted in the way they did. The latter 'invites us to care with, and about, people in the past, to be concerned with what happened to them and how they experienced their lives' (Barton and Levstik, 2004: 207–208). It is this 'empathy as caring' that is a potential asset in breaking down emotional barriers in contested societies. From caring comes the motivation to study the past. As Barton and Levstik (2004: 241) see it, it establishes emotional connection with the stories of the past, 'the mechanism for rendering history meaningful'. Crucially, through caring comes the possibility 'to change our beliefs or behaviours in the present based on what we have learned from our study of the past' (Barton and Levstik, 2004: 229). As will be discussed later, this becomes especially important when presented with the stories of those from a different background to yourself who have suffered through conflict in the recent past.

## Democratic values

In the context of the 'New Europe' of the 1990s Council of Europe literature argued that 'history teaching has a potential contribution to make to the development of citizens who are open-minded, aware of diversity, willing to accept difference and to respect peoples of other cultures, religions and languages' (Gallagher, 1996: 22). To date, advocacy for this has tended to rely on the view that the thinking processes of enquiry-based history implicitly encourage democratic values. This position remains largely aspirational and untested. Here, three ways are suggested to take curriculum

policy and practice forward: by ensuring that the pedagogy of the subject espouses democratic values; by a syllabus design that includes content that places past democratic practice under scrutiny; and by ensuring a complementary relationship with citizenship education.

Perhaps, the modelling of democratic values in pedagogy is history's most underestimated contribution. This should be an explicit curricular aim of the whole curriculum but developments in history education, embodied in the enquiry approach, make it well placed to fulfil this role. Through its critical skills, the adoption of discursive and participatory teaching methods by teachers and the inclusion of a range of viewpoints for investigation, effective history teaching and learning models democratic practice and, therefore, fosters democratic dispositions in students.

Choice of subject knowledge can also allow students to examine the practice of democracy. For example, this might take the form of a critical review of the ebb and flow of democracy in particular contexts as advocated by Dawson (2008) or involve 'distanced' comparative study. Weldon (2005) explains how the experience of Nazi Germany was used to illuminate the ills of apartheid with a group of South African teachers. The key word here is 'critical' for such studies must not only assess democracy's strengths but also its limitations. This presents challenges in that it might be argued that constant questioning and the absence of a positive nationally orientated narrative may create a vacuum. Without signposts towards envisaging an alternative future students may draw on their learning selectively to justify the divisive political identities of their ethnic backgrounds, as was illustrated by the research in Northern Ireland (Barton and McCully, 2005). Barton acknowledges this void in provision, thereby concluding 'school history [in Northern Ireland] does little to help students develop a historically grounded identity that goes beyond the sectarian past – little that would help them see themselves as members of a common community' (Barton, 2009: 274). The inclusion of aspects of local studies and social history in the curriculum can go some way to exploring common experiences among diverse groups and thus contribute to social cohesion but this can only go so far in deeply divided societies, where social and residential segregation are likely to prevail.

This is where a clear and progressive relationship between history and citizenship comes in to play. Lee and Shemilt (2007: 17) affirm that 'history is central to citizenship formation in any open and democratic society' but being true to its disciplinary structures it cannot take on that mantle itself. Rather, it has a distinctive but complementary role in which it provides the background and context for democratic debate. It establishes the linkages between past and present to then be carried forward to contemporary debate and action in and beyond the citizenship classroom. This complementary relationship between history and civic education requires research to ascertain how it can help young people re-position themselves with regard to cultural and political identity and their vision for the future.

## **Dealing with the recent past**

Those in countries emerging from conflict who follow an enquiry-based, multi-perspective approach to history teaching might still decide not to apply it to examining the recent contentious past. Dealing with the recent past is especially problematic because the situation is still heavily disputed, raw and characterized by personal trauma, anger and grief. Yet, 'truth recovery' as this has been termed, because it acknowledges 'abused power, complicit actors and the harms to individuals' (Minow, 1998: 127), is deemed a necessary but highly emotive component of the reconciliatory process. 'Deeply' divided societies are often characterized by 'identity politics' and experience violence and human rights abuses. Such societies, Chapman (2007: 321) argues, need 'multiple levels and types of healing and reconciliation and to move forward must come to terms

with the past'. This cannot be simply about 'the fundamental reinterpretation of a period of history' but also involves 'the recovery of embarrassing or painful memories', the attribution of personal and collective responsibility and the application of principles of social justice. The failure to see these issues through and, instead, cover up what Hamber (2009) calls the 'toxic past' is likely to lead to the re-emergence of cyclical violence at a point in the future.

Of course, history teaching, alone, is not capable of meeting all these objectives. In observing the 'dealing with the past' agenda in Northern Ireland relationship words such as 'accountability', 'restorative justice', 'forgiveness', 'trust', 'hurt', 'healing', 'therapy' and 'vengeance' are consistently referenced. It becomes clear that the post-conflict reconciliation process is a multi-faceted one drawing on a range of approaches and disciplines including philosophy, human rights law, sociology and psychology (Devine-Wright, 2002). Indeed, historians and history educators are often more conspicuous by their absence than by their engagement. Cole and Barsalou (2006: 2), surveying a number of post-conflict situations, conclude that while history education should be an integral part of transitional justice and social reconstruction it is an 'under-utilized' one.

Yet it does have a distinctive part to play and history educators should not abandon the interpretation of recent events to others. In conflict and post-conflict situations, past events and present positions are intricately entwined and the connections must be made. Clarification as to history's specific role may lie in a telling distinction made by Minow (1998) when considering the nature of the outcomes of truth recovery programmes such as those conducted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa and the Historical Clarification Commission in Guatemala. She refers to them as being about 'psychological but not historical truth' (Minow, 1998: 127); that the stories collected in such processes represent each person's own grasp of the past, perceptions that must be confronted in building new relationships between citizens and the state. They are important fragments of the historical record but they are not at this stage likely to be subject to the critical scrutiny of the historical process.

The 'truth recovery' process is often conducted through the individual testimonies of those who lived through the time, be they classified as victims, perpetrators, bystanders or survivors. Such biography is very powerful in allowing voices to be heard, and to facilitate redress. In time, these stories have the potential to be a very valuable resource in the history classroom, provided they include a full range of perspectives, as is happening in South Africa using extracts from the TRC (Cole and Barsalou, 2006: 10). However, initially when stories are being told this is likely to be in a cathartic environment where having the teller's perspective heard is of paramount importance. Such personal stories can prove very powerful in generating 'caring' and unlocking the emotional barriers that resist the scrutiny of the recent past, thus facilitating recognition, redress and repair. Yet, at this point, it may be difficult to verify such testimony through the more distanced vista of historical investigation. Shriver (2007: 4) refers to this stage as the telling of personal or narrative truth, 'to tell the story of one's suffering is to connect with innumerable stories that our neighbours can tell, too'. Yet as he points out 'some truth too simply stated becomes a lie. Publicly, there is only complex truth'. This, he suggests, is established through 'dialogical truth' – the coming together of stories through interaction, discussion and debate.

It is at this stage that history teaching can begin to play its part. In the post-conflict context, the complementary function of history education should continue to be one of bringing synthesis, criticality, perspective and overview to 'psychological' truth recovery, thus preparing young people for the possibility of societal change. It can use the power of individual stories to engage 'caring', but also help place the accounts in their broader context and assimilate them into an overview. The synthesis developed is multi-dimensional in that it should accommodate the complexity of bringing together alternative, and often conflicting, perspectives and it should recognize that individual

experience is, sometimes, at variance with wider societal trends. Minow (1998: 143) identifies the particular role that historians (and, surely, history teachers) can adopt:

Work by journalists and historians, rather than political figures and government officials, can collect and connect seemingly disparate accounts of the violence, its causes, and its consequences. Historians can, and should, combine distance and empathy with all involved, even the perpetrator, in order to pursue the aspiration of truthfulness.

Therefore, this paper argues for Shriver's 'humane' approach to history teaching, one that is 'moral but not partisan' (Shriver, 2007: 22). Within the parameters of the disciplinary process it is still legitimate to ask the questions, who were the transgressors, what is it important to remember and what can we learn together to move forward? (Cole, 2007: 22).

Unless this stance is translated into practice it is of little use to practitioners. In Northern Ireland an oral project has been formulated involving two schools to date from either side of the unionist / nationalist divide in a rural town which experienced significant violence during the conflict. It focuses on 'Living during the Troubles' and aims to explore ordinary people's experiences of the period. No special effort is being made to identify combatants or victims but these stories will be incorporated into the overall picture as they arise. It is envisaged that as the project develops, and trust builds, between schools then pupil interviewers will 'cross over' to hear perspectives from different cultural backgrounds to themselves. The work fosters data collecting skills in students and, at the post interview stage, the evaluation and synthesis of evidence. The outcome will be some form of public presentation in a venue regarded as a 'shared space' accessible to both communities. Students and teachers are prepared for the strong emotional impact that they may encounter in the course of the interviews. The project clearly engages multi-perspectives and is enquiry-based. Particularly, it is designed to test the notion of 'caring'; to assess the extent to which listening to personal accounts, genuinely told, make history meaningful and influence beliefs or behaviours in the present based on what is learned from the past.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis of experience in Northern Ireland (contrasted to other situations where a single narrative approach to history teaching prevails) this paper advocates the use of enquiry based, multi-perspective history teaching in conflict and post-conflict situations. It argues that its emphasis on students developing their own understandings from their examination of evidence and a range of perspectives has greater potential in helping them scrutinize deeply held community positions, than does the teaching of a single narrative, even if the latter claims to be inclusive of all groups in society.

Yet this case for an enquiry-based, multi-perspective approach is far from conclusive, based as it is on relatively small-scale studies in one conflict context. Indeed, even the Northern Irish studies referenced illustrate just how difficult it can be for students to free themselves from family and community influences to achieve the goals that they, themselves, consider important.

Such challenges can be overcome through attention to curriculum design, pedagogy and associated teacher education. While too much of the application of enquiry-based, multi-perspective history in post-conflict contexts is aspirational, evidence to date warrants its continued use, provided more resources are put in place to monitor its implementation in practice and evaluate its longer term impact on students' learning, understanding and attitudes. It must be tested in a range of post-conflict environments where the nature of divisions and access to resources differ.

‘Enquiry’, ‘complexity’, ‘caring’ and ‘relevance’ are four ideas that have been advanced here to take history teaching forward in contested societies. Aspects of these that require further study are:

- how far can critical thinking developed through the history curriculum, alone, challenge the collective memory which shapes communal identity?;
- is it vital that a curriculum that fosters enquiry, complexity and the questioning of old ‘certainties’, also studies aspects of the past in which all students can find common identity and cohesion?;
- in explaining conflict, how do educators represent a full range of views, thus avoiding a simplistic stereotyping of the past into ‘two’ sides?;
- what advances in pedagogy can stimulate an affective learning process that takes students beyond cognitive understanding to develop sensitivity both towards those from different backgrounds they encounter studying the past, and those who identify with similar views in the present?;
- and how far can events from the recent, troubled past be investigated using personal stories without emotional retrenchment to deeply held communal positions?

Following up on these questions would provide history educators in conflict and post-conflict situations with a greater understanding of the capability of their subject discipline to equip young people with a foundation in the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to engage in democratic discourse beyond the confines of the history classroom and the school. In turn, they would be better prepared to convince teachers to take the risks necessary to promote the role of history teaching in transition from conflict.

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