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# Education, Social Cohesion, and the Future Role of International Organizations

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Although they have many important functions, The European Union, many federal governments, and the United Nations (UN) have few areas where their mandates call for them to dictate, adjudicate, or legislate education policy. Education, for the most part, has traditionally been viewed as relevant to local culture and hence subject to local control.

This is now changing. Traditional interest in mathematics, science, and language remain, and although there are distinct influences drawing school systems into cross-national interests and endeavors, the main focus of attention is not on this area. Today, the main focus of attention is on the citizenship function of education, that purpose of public schooling that transcends curriculum and helps to create social cohesion, the basis of a stable democracy.

This article summarizes some of the social cohesion issues involving education, the concerns over how education performs this function, and the implications for international organizations. It begins by reviewing the purposes of public education, then it discusses some

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modern challenges to those traditional functions and why it may be important for international organizations to assume a new educational role. This article concludes that the world requires more educational intervention in the future than it has in the past. The question remains: How well are our international organizations prepared to fill these new functions?

### The Purpose of Public Education

Mechanisms to impart organized wisdom have been developed in every culture. Public education, however, is a different matter. Public rationales for sending children to school were articulated in the time of Martin Luther, about 400 years ago, and centered on the need to improve “public morality”:

I am of the opinion that the government is obligated to compel its citizenry to send their children to school. If a government can compel its citizens to bear spear and gun, to run about on the city wall, and to assume other duties when it desires to carry on war, how much more can and should the government compel its citizens to keep their children at school. (Luther, 1530, cited in Helmreich, 1959, p. 15)

The Prince of Wurttemberg, in 1559, is acknowledged to be among the first of political leaders to sponsor state schools, but it wasn't until 1717 that Frederick William I made urban education compulsory and helped finance education from homes for children who could otherwise not afford it. It was his son, Frederick the Great, however, who is often credited as being the “father” of public education. It was Frederick the Great who deviated from having a single public religious morality as the principal rationale for public schooling. Because Prussia had recently acquired lands in which there were Catholics as well as Protestants, in his *General-landschulreglement* in 1763, and later in the *Allgemeine Landrecht* of 1794, he established the principle of compulsory education (for both urban and rural areas), the state's supervisory role with respect to private (usually church) providers, and most importantly, the principle of tolerance toward confessional activities in lieu of a common loyalty:

There are few lands in which all citizens have the same religion, and the question arises: is such unity to be forced or can one permit every one to think according to his own views? To this the answer must be that it is impossible to establish such unity...general tolerance alone

guarantees the happiness of the state... (Frederick the Great, 1763, cited in Helmreich, p. 29)

The philosophic foundation for public education as it is known today, however, was established in the 19th century in France by Francois Guizot (1787–1874), in New England by Horace Mann (1796–1859), and in the Netherlands by Petras Hofstede de Groot (1802–1886). With each, the effort to enlighten a nation through a system of popular education was concerned more with attitudes and values than with the skills of literacy and numeracy. As Glenn (1988) observed,

popular education was not simply, or even primarily, to teach literacy or other skills but to develop the common attitudes and values considered essential to a society in which broader and broader circles of the population were entering public life. (p. 45)

What was “at stake” was the forging of a nation based not on principles of tyrannical control, but for the first time, one based on the informed consent of the governed, across the full gamut of religions, classes, languages, and ethnicities from which the modern heterogeneous state was contrived. As Stiep Stuurman (1983) put it with respect to the Netherlands,

Through education and propagation of (common) culture among all classes, the circle of citizens could be broadened, as would the basis of the state... a homogeneous Dutch nation would come into being. This is the political core of the common school policies, the school as a nation-forming institution must not be divided among sectarian schools or left in the hands of an exclusive political or church party. (pp. 116–117)

To some extent, the success of the modern Netherlands, with the merging of Catholic and Protestant subpopulations, can be attributed to the success of the public system of schools and the overriding ethos of tolerance enforced through the state in both Catholic and Protestant educational curricula. In New England, however, the subpopulations were more numerous; hence, the challenge was thought to be more complex. The solution in New England seemed to rest on a common school managed by the state and independent from all sectarian control. As W. S. Dutton explained in 1848,

The children of this country, of whatever parentage, should not wholly but to a certain extent be educated together—be educated not as

Baptists, or Methodists, or Episcopalians, or Presbyterians; not as Roman Catholics or Protestants, still less as foreigners in language or spirit, but as Americans, as made of one blood and citizens of the same free country—educated to be one harmonious people. The common school system, if wisely and liberally conducted, is well fitted in part at least to accomplish this. While it does not profess to give a complete education and allows ample opportunity for instruction and training in denominational peculiarities elsewhere, it yet brings the children of all sects together, gives them, to a limited extent a common like education, and, by such education and by the commingling, acquaintance, and fellowship which it involves in the early unprejudiced and impressionable periods of life, assimilates and unites them. (pp. 166–168)

In contrast to developing countries today, the first public school systems in Prussia and the Netherlands did not expand schooling. Rather, they reorganized and coordinated the different school systems, which already existed under the auspices of voluntary and religious organizations. But the manner of organization was quite different. European public education included public roles for sectarian schools. American public education monopolized the provision of public education through the state. This distinction remains to this day.<sup>1</sup> However, the rationales for public education in the beginning were quite similar.

Much thought has been given to how schools might teach values, but none summarize the process better than the comment cited by Hyman and Wright (1979), “Children learn to think about what it is like to be another person” (p. 67). But the question remains: Should these educational functions, originally developed in the “West” be transferred to other parts of the world? Stephen Bailey (1963) said yes. He pointed out,

if education for political development means anything it means the assertion of these value universals and the delineation of man’s attempts over the centuries to fashion and to perfect instruments of law, administration and the politics to create—not the Great Leviathan—but the good society. This does not mean that (new) countries must slavishly copy (western) laws and constitutions. It does mean that whatever laws and constitutions they fashion for themselves must place restrictions upon the character and exercise of political power. In essence, man’s long political odyssey has some universal

<sup>1</sup>The United States is the only industrialized democracy in which public financing does not support sectarian systems of education.

lessons. Like its Homeric analogue, man's political odyssey has had its Cyclops and its Circes, its Scyllas and Charybdises. Wise leaders throughout history have lashed themselves and their crews to the masts of law to escape the siren call of demagogic tyranny... Surely (new) nations need not recapitulate all the sorry political errors of history, any more than they need revert to a labored progression beginning with stone implements to prepare themselves for the wonders of modern technology. To pretend that education has something useful to say about the conquest of disease, poverty and technological backwardness, but nothing to say about political backwardness, seems to me fantastic... if education in (new) countries cannot or will not affirm these things it will have missed its imperative mission. (pp. 57–59)

### How School Systems Contribute to Social Cohesion

All societies have four "pillars" to support the objectives of social cohesion. To be effective, all must operate consistently. These include the following: (a) political organizations (the honesty and transparency of courts, legislatures, and the executive branches of government); (b) social organizations (shared moral principles of church groups and voluntary associations); (c) economic organizations (the quality of corporate governance, adherence to legal procedures when acquiring and promoting employees); and (d) educational organizations, schools, and universities (Heyneman, 2002/2003). Each makes its own contribution. Political bodies organize the debate and establish the means for public policy. Economic bodies organize entrepreneurial endeavors and generate income. Social bodies bind people to moral norms. What about schools and universities? What functions do they have, and how do they perform them?

Educational organizations perform five essential functions (Heyneman, 2003). First they teach the "rules of the game"—the interpersonal, political, social, and legal principles underpinning good citizenship, the obligations of political leaders, the behavior expected of citizens, and the consequences for not adhering to these principles. Schools can facilitate a student's appreciation for the complexity of issues related to historical and global events and in so doing may increase the likelihood that a student will see a point of view other than his or her own. By teaching the rules of the game in this manner, schools foster tolerance and lay the groundwork for voluntary behavior consistent with social norms.

Second, schools and universities are expected to provide a classroom experience roughly consistent with those citizenship principles, in effect, decreasing "the distance" between individuals of different origins. Both

formal and informal social contracts require elements of trust among strangers—to the extent that the socialization of citizens of different social origins has allowed them to acknowledge and respect each other. This is why it is often felt that schools segregated by social groups may work against social cohesion goals.

Third, school systems are expected to provide an equality of opportunity for all students. If the public perceives that the school system is biased or unfair, then the trust that citizens place in all public institutions is compromised. For instance, the willingness of adults to pay taxes and more generally “play by the rules” is compromised if fairness in the earlier education system is suspect.

Fourth, school systems are supposed to incorporate the interests and objectives of many different groups and at the same time attempt to provide a common underpinning for citizenship. Often there are disagreements over the balance between these objectives. These disagreements must be adjudicated. School systems can be judged as successfully supporting social cohesion objectives on the basis of how well disagreements across social groups can be adjudicated. Adjudication can be accomplished through many mechanisms—public school boards, professional councils, parent–teacher associations. What is important to note is that the success of the school system is based in part on its ability to garner public support and consensus, and hence its ability to adjudicate differences over educational objectives.

### The Evidence of Performance

Have schools been successful at fostering social cohesion? The evidence is ambiguous because the influence of education on nonmonetary benefits is particularly difficult to isolate from other influences. However, there has been some progress in spite of the difficulties. Research has included the following: schools’ roles in broadening outlook and increasing tolerance and desire to participate in the political process, the association between more and better education and a nation’s democratic stability, the connection between educational structures and democratic stability, the degree to which more education is associated with greater voluntary political participation, the connection between education and an individual’s orientation toward legal behavior and good citizenship, and the association between classroom climate and civic behavior (Heyneman, 2002/2003).

There has been comparatively little research on the influence of specific curricula such as social studies or civics on values or behavior (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). However, as Lawrence

Cremin (1976) pointed out, when placed in context, the influence of schools is surprisingly robust. "It is not that schooling lacks potency," Cremin stated, "it is that the potency of schooling must be seen in relation to the potency of other experiences." (p. 36)

### New Challenges

Today, school systems face social cohesion challenges that have little historical precedent (Heyneman, 1997, 1998). Expectations for what students should know and be able to do are not determined by simply economic needs, but also by what it takes to perform the responsibilities of citizenship adequately. Participating in political discourse in the 18th century did not require as much understanding of science or statistics. In the 21st century citizens need to make judgments about issues with strong statistical underpinnings, such as the evaluation of competing claims over health and the environmental risk, the use of genetically altered foods, and choice of sexual behavior. In essence, the citizenship standards for literacy and numeracy have risen.

Also, the foundations for social cohesion have shifted. Well into the 20th century, social cohesion was understood to be the outcome of assimilating peoples of diverse religions, ethnicities, and social groups into a nation with a common language and values. That has changed. A new understanding of social cohesion—taking shape recently—fosters accommodation, not simply assimilation. It often requires compromise and redefinition of the "typical citizen" from many sides, including by the majority as well as minority population.

In some parts of the world, challenges to social cohesion are not a simple extension of growing social diversity. Trends such as street violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, corruption in public service in Asia, the provision of social services by drug lords in South America and by mafia figures in Italy and Russia, and the egocentric consumerism among suburban youth pose problems of a different sort. In these instances, the task of the public schools is much broader than forging ethnic harmony (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000).

The current challenge of education in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union might be analogous to that faced by education in Europe and North America in the early 19th and 20th centuries. New nations must be forged, at peace within themselves and tolerant of their often divergent neighbors. So far, however, the record of success is mixed (Mitter, 1996; Shadrikov, 1993).

In fact, school systems are neutral as to the direction of their influence. They are like a sharp tool, a knife, or a saw. School systems can fashion

views, which lead to social cohesion, or they can do the opposite. In the case of Sri Lanka, pedagogical materials as early as the 1950s led to the opposite. The dominant historical image portrayed in textbooks was that of a glorious but embattled Sinhalese nation repeatedly having to defend itself and its Buddhist traditions from the ravages of Tamil invaders. Tamils were portrayed as historical enemies. National heroes were chosen, whose reputations included having vanquished Tamils in ethnic-based wars. Segregated in their own schools, Tamil textbooks emphasized historical figures whose reputations included accommodation and compromise with the Sinhalese. In neither the Tamil nor the Sinhalese texts were there positive illustrations drawn from the other ethnic group. There were few attempts to teach about the contribution of Tamil kings to Buddhist tradition, or the links between Sinhalese kingdoms and Buddhist centers in India. Language texts were largely monocultural with few positive references to other ethnic groups (Nissan, 1996).

Because texts were culturally inflammatory and because there was no effective effort to balance the prejudice stemming from outside the classroom with more positive experiences, the Sri Lankan schools can be said to have achieved the opposite of the intention of good public systems. Instead of laying a foundation for national cooperation and harmony, they helped lay the intellectual foundations for social conflict and civil war (Heyneman, 1998, 2000).

A more recent illustration is provided by the ex-Yugoslavia. Here is a 1994 civics textbook intended for 12-year-olds in Bosnia:

Horrible crimes committed against the non-Serb population of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Serb-Montenegrin aggressors and domestic chetniks were aimed at creating an ethnically cleansed area where exclusively Serb people would live. In order to carry out this monstrous idea of theirs, they planned to kill or expel hundreds of thousands of Bosniaks and Croats...The criminals began to carry out their plans in the most ferocious way. Horror swept through villages and cities... Looting, raping, and slaughters...screams and outcries of the people being exposed to such horrendous plights...Europe and the rest of the world did nothing to prevent the criminals from ravaging and slaughtering innocent people. (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 1994, p. 24)

Whether the events occurred or not is an issue separate from whether the text is appropriate. The public school experience is intended to mold desired behavior of future citizens, therefore citizens of all different groups must feel comfortable about the content. If one group is uncomfortable,

then the school system has abrogated its public function. This is an example of where that abrogation of public responsibility occurred.

The lessons could hardly be clearer (Fogelman & Edwards, 1997; Maynew, 1985). Many organizations have taken an interest in the problems of social studies and civics education out of professional concern about the possible implications of interethnic and national tension. These organizations include the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Soros Foundations, and many others.

So sensitive have been the threats to peace and stability that military organizations have developed a new concern over education on the premise that interethnic tensions expressed through education could well constitute a risk to peace in the region. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for instance, established a High Commissioner on National Minorities, based in the Hague, the Netherlands. The High Commissioner has already issued recommendations pertaining to the education of the Greek minority population in Albania, the Albanian population in Macedonia, the Slovak population in Hungary, the Hungarian population in Slovakia, and the Hungarian population in Romania. In 1996, the High Commissioner requested assistance from the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations to work on a possible set of guidelines governing the education rights of national minorities.<sup>2</sup> After considerable discussion and consultation, these guidelines, known as the Hague Recommendations, were published in 1997 and can be added to the many other international conventions and regulations that attempt to identify and to protect the educational rights of children and various subpopulations.<sup>3</sup>

In general, these covenants and conventions pertain to the problems of populations that may be subjected to discrimination and prejudice. They

<sup>2</sup>The Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations was established with the purpose of carrying out research in support of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Its mandate is to "prevent inter-ethnic tensions from developing into security-threatening conflicts."

<sup>3</sup>These include the Polish Minorities Treaty of 1919; the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948; the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education in 1960; the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959; the subsequent U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989; the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in 1950; the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1995; the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 1992; the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages in 1992; the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice in 1978; and the Copenhagen Declaration of the Conference of the Human Dimension in 1990.

concern the right to be educated in one's mother tongue, the right of fair access to more selective training in higher and vocational education, freedom from discrimination, cultural bias, and the like (Byani et al., 1994; Packer, 1996). Although these issues are indeed important, effectively they address only one half of the problem.

The other half of the problem pertains to the rights of the majority or the rights of the national community. Their educational interests are no less compelling: the Kazaks in Kazakhstan; the Latvians in Latvia; the Romanians in Romania, and so forth. What is to protect the national community from extremist versions of history as portrayed by curricula designed by minority populations? What are the rights of the national community for having a sense of compromise and historical dignity ascribed to their national culture by minority populations in their own country? What protection does the national community have against the possibility that a minority community within the same country may encourage loyalty to another nation where their ethnic group is more numerous? The problem of civics education has multiple sources, and therefore must involve multiple solutions. Not all solutions can be incorporated under the auspices of the "rights of minorities." None of these conventions address this other side of the equation.

Although the notion of public schooling was established in the 17th century, it is not true to suggest that the educational challenge in the modern era is analogous. The fledgling nation-states of the 17th century required social cohesion, but they often used a central authoritarian system to achieve it. The techniques of nation building in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union today are not uniform, but for the most part they have emerged from an era of extreme authoritarianism into one more tolerant of divergence and local opinion. This complicates matters considerably. Not only are these nations faced with achieving cohesion, they are faced with the difficulties of achieving it, for better or worse, through widespread participation in the rules of engagement and flexibility as to its direction (Putnam, 1993).

In anticipation of these unprecedented challenges, there have been some recent efforts on the part of the international education community to establish a set of civics education standards. These standards, discussed and distributed through CIVITAS International in Strasbourg, France, speak to the necessity for compromise. Instead of attempting to establish the rights and privileges of minority populations, they attempt to delineate the obligations and responsibilities for all populations, majority as well as minority (Center for Civics Education, 1994; CIVITAS—International, 1995).

The proposed international professional guidelines include standards of many kinds. They include standards for curriculum content, for example, presenting different views of history and different opinions as to its contemporary relevance. They include a set of terms to identify different levels of critical thinking—being able to identify a concept, describe it, explain it, evaluate a position about it, and take and/or defend a position concerning it. They include a set of standards for “participation” in civics—being able to manage a conflict, build a consensus, influence others by moderating someone else’s view, and so forth. Last, there are standards proposed for terminologies used in civics—civil society, constitutional rights, private opinion, citizenship obligations, and the like. The sum result of these components constitutes an international precedent because it establishes for the first time an international standard for curriculum excellence in civics.

The purpose of an international professional standard is to actively establish a set of principles against which each country and each local curriculum authority may measure its own civics curriculum. National authorities need a professional benchmark by which they can hold local curriculum authorities responsible. The opposite also pertains—local and minority curriculum authorities need an international benchmark by which they can judge the degree to which national curricular authorities are fair and balanced in their views of history and civil rights and responsibilities.

The difference in nation building between the 17th and the 21st centuries is one of time: The world can ill afford the centuries of development that was required for Europe and North America. As David McClelland (1963) reminded us, “The world’s biggest problem is how to keep the peace. The world’s second largest problem is how to achieve prosperity” (p. 61). The first is essential for the second.

### International Organizations

It is true that early identification of a school system, ineffective at addressing social cohesion issues, may not have prevented the tragedy in Bosnia or Rwanda. However, the cost of inaction can be high. If one discovers a school system that systematically undermines social cohesion, as in Sri Lanka in the 1950s, it is possible to predict where there will later be civil conflict and perhaps civil war.

But what is to prevent extremist curricula? Is there an international court to which an ethnic group might appeal if they feel their culture or history is disrespected? Would this court be willing to consider the rights

and privileges of a majority group as important as a minority group? Is there an institution that on a regular basis can analyze the degree to which school systems are adequately performing social cohesion functions? Is there an institution able to respond to social cohesion “hot spots” and render proactive professional advice?

In brief, the answer is no. The terms of reference for most UN organizations were established 50 years ago when the problems and challenges were quite different. Although there have been quite successful bilateral commissions, for example, between the Federal Republic of Germany and France in the case of history textbooks, the experience of Japan, China, and Korea is quite different. Without similar attention to history as created in Western Europe, curriculum in Asia continues to exacerbate problems that could have been solved decades ago.

Could an agency of the UN such as the World Bank, be used to fulfill this function? Probably not. Members of the World Bank are national governments, whereas many of the educational problems are subnational in their nature (Heyneman, in press-a, in press-b). UNESCO has been working on problems of culture and education for many years. A considerable level of expertise has been built up that combines curriculum issues with the rights of minorities, gender, and other social forms of discrimination, and the techniques of achieving effective pedagogy and school management. However, because national states constitute voting members, UNESCO might have difficulty filling the need to provide effective professional action on a subnational level or in a highly charged context where two nations may disagree on the content of one another’s curriculum. What about specialized agencies such as UNICEF? Advocacy is a long-standing specialization of UNICEF. However, it too may have problems filling expectations in this particular context. Most of UNICEF’s operations depend on voluntary donations, and some might feel that the source of financing could influence its professional judgment.

This is a time for creativity in thinking about new agencies and new functions within current UN agencies. It is a time for realism. What is clear is that the world needs a professional institution capable of adjudicating problems of education and social cohesion. There needs to be a source for monitoring trends and tendencies. One possibility might be to raise the capacity of an organization such as CIVITAS in Strasbourg so that it might be able to fulfill these functions from the basis of professional standards among civics educators. There may also be ways to expand the role of regional organizations, such as the European Union in these areas. It certainly would be useful to gather better statistics on civics education performance through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the recently established UNESCO Institute of

Statistics. Well before there is an outbreak of civil disturbance, the world needs to know where there is discomfort and concern.

For the most part, education must remain a local responsibility, under local authorities. At the same time, however, we need to recognize that its implications are broader than the local community. Although it remains true that local communities have the right to educate citizens in the way they choose, it is also true that the world community has a right to know when and where there are instances in which the direction of local education makes citizens and neighbors uncomfortable and the region potentially unstable.

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