

Chapter 11

Exploring Challenges and Possibilities in Pre-Service Teacher Education: Critical and Intercultural Pedagogy in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

Twenty years after the war (1992-1995) in Bosnia and Herzegovina the country is still very fragile, dysfunctional and continues to face numerous political and socio-economic challenges. Ethnically fragmented and exclusivist approaches to education in Bosnia and Herzegovina are anathema to the development of critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to open young minds, reduce intolerance and question the ethnic status quo narrative (Perry, 2015). This paper will try to present a good example of academic and social successes achieved with students who are attending an English language teacher education program at the University of Sarajevo in the context of challenging teaching and learning environments. The paper will explore the possibilities and challenges for using a critical pedagogy framework and intercultural approach to foreign language education in pre-service teacher education courses that emphasizes reflection, critical thinking, empathy, multiperspectivity along with other aspects of intercultural communicative competences which are integrated in this course.

INTRODUCTION

Two decades after the war (1992-1995) Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) is still very fragile, politically and socially dysfunctional and burdened by its violent past. A most brutal war the likes of which had not been seen in Europe since the end of World War II brought to B&H numerous challenges, fragilities and struggles. As a post- conflict society, Bosnian society has faced enormous issues and challenges in

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terms of loss of infrastructure, shortages of qualified teachers continuously attending teacher education programs, educational administrators and major curricular reforms. At present a lot of political, social and economic issues remain unresolved and are among the core reasons for the country's continued lagging behind in various aspects of development and progress, and as such creating the fragility of a turbulent, stormy and unstable peace. The fragmented social structure and ineffective public administration and institutions at different levels of governance have created results which are "visible in separate and minimally portable social welfare and health care systems; separate policing jurisdictions and practices; a devolved and dubiously independent judicial system; and divided and ultimately segregated schools" (Perry, 2015, p.12). Division in Bosnian society "is most visible in approximately 50 "two schools under one roof" where both the Bosniak and Croat curricula are taught to different "schools" of students in either different shifts or separate floors of the building" (Perry, 2015, p.14).

Bosnia and Herzegovina is still at the stage of post-conflict reconstruction which brings with itself countless new opportunities for creativity, innovation and new developments, but which can also be very difficult to attain "inside established educational systems, so long as adequate external finance and internal leadership are in place" (Nicolai, 2009). The international contribution in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been more limited "on pilot projects or technical support seeking to skirt the core political issues" preventing more comprehensive reform and with such a strategy focusing more on surface issues and technical matters, "rather than on the principal level and policy matters" (Perry, 2015). The most essential reforms on how we teach our children, what skills, attitudes and knowledge we want our teachers to possess, what values we transfer, what skills we give to our students so that they feel prepared to respond to multiple problems and issues in critical, constructive and empathic ways, have remained on the margin of political and social attention and no strategic and systematic policy or state approach with clear vision has been articulated, leading the Bosnian education system to a dead end street of stagnation. According to Perry (2015, p. 16) the root of all of the problems in the stagnation of education reforms in B&H is singular and simple: "a reliance on monoperspectivity as a teaching method and curricular goal, driven by local political actors interested in maintaining political and territorial control by ideological indoctrination".

In an attempt to move on from the stagnation and look at some positive streams of action despite the pessimistic visions of the past and future of the Bosnian education system this chapter will present a good example of academic and social success achieved with students who are attending an English language teacher education program at the University of Sarajevo in the context of challenging post-conflict teaching and learning environments. Some of these students were attending "two schools under one roof" as children. Located in different parts of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in these schools curricula were divided and taught to different groups of children, in either different shifts, or on separate floors or completely separate buildings. In an attempt to better understand all the complexities of the connection between conflict and education two decades after the war in a fragmented and complex Bosnian society, this chapter will analyze the role of teacher education in building resilience, restoring hope and empowering student-teachers to be the social change agents by reaching out to hundreds of children and youth with new methodologies, teaching pedagogies and approaches rooted in multiperspectivity, interculturalism, critical pedagogy and reflection.

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