

## ***Introduction***

Learning and teaching history is a growing concern in post-conflict societies. Such contexts including Cyprus, Rwanda, Croatia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bosnia and Lebanon – to name a few – have utilized, to some degree or another, history education as a tool for peace building and social reconstruction. However, challenges in learning arise when historical narratives, the selection of histories and approaches to learning bring out sensitivities to the classroom. Also, political agendas have resulted in controversies over content knowledge, assessment procedures and (at times, consequently) methods of learning. Indeed, some history teachers have preferred to steer away from dialogic activities and turn to memorization and “teaching to the test” as more secure approaches to history learning.

In the context of Lebanon, challenges in history education came to the forefront during the civil war when several religious and political groups constructed and taught their own versions of history to advantage their communities. Consequently, the Ta’if Accord, which followed the 15-year armed conflict (1975-1989), stipulated the necessity of unifying the history textbooks for sustainable peace. In 2011, two decades later, Lebanon still lacks that unified history book. Moreover, to a great extent, many of its schools embrace traditional pedagogies of teaching and learning. And so, the conditions of learning and teaching history in Lebanon generate numerous questions including those that examine the justifications of a unified history textbook and the effectiveness of a content-based curriculum.

The conference, *Learning and teaching history: Lessons from and for Lebanon* (25-26 March), took place during a crucial moment in Lebanon’s education development. In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education drafted a revised history curriculum for grades one to nine. At the two-day conference, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers came together and examined educational approaches and experiences aimed at promoting critical thinking, dialogic participation, active citizenship and social cohesion through history education. In addition to the Lebanese

experiences, contributions also came from the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Germany, the Netherlands, Egypt, Bahrain and Iraq. As a result, each day turned into a 12-hour marathon of sharing experiences, debating concepts and generating other intellectual stimulations.

These proceedings have collected the papers presented and report on some of the most thought-provoking conversations that took place during the roundtable discussions. The entirety of the conference was recorded through digital audio and translators and the LAES ensured the accuracy of transcriptions and translations. All papers presented in English have been fully translated into Arabic and all the contributions in Arabic are translated into English as abstracts. All English and Arabic abstracts are also translated into French. For further inquiries into the papers, contact details of the authors are provided.

### **Bringing the conference together**

Researchers, educationalists, teachers and graduate students were invited to submit presentation proposals that addressed the following issues related to history education at national and international contexts:

The history curriculum	New instructional methods & strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unified history or multiple histories</li> <li>- Oral history and memory meet “official” history</li> <li>- One history or many: Implications for citizenship and classroom learning</li> <li>- Politics of knowledge and pedagogy in history learning</li> <li>- Local communities versus national government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Constructivist approaches to learning and teaching history</li> <li>- “Hands on” history: Implications for classroom practices</li> <li>- Historiography, narratives and content analyses in the classroom</li> <li>- Dealing with controversial issues in the history classroom</li> </ul>
Learning outcomes	Learning resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acquisition of knowledge, thinking skills and values related to history</li> <li>- Building empathy, perspective-taking and historical understandings</li> <li>- Fostering active citizenship and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- History education through archives and museums</li> <li>- Outdoor history education, e.g. visits to historical places</li> <li>- Textbooks, accounts and sources for active learning</li> <li>- IT and media in the classroom</li> </ul>

The proposals were welcomed in the forms of a) theoretical and conceptual papers; b) empirical studies; and c) evidence-based accounts of school and classroom practices.

Within a span of two months, the committee received over 60 submissions from local, regional and international candidates. From the pool received, we ensured that each group of topics ranged from academic and teacher-based papers. A crucial component of the selection criteria required the use of evidence to support claims in addition to clear and sound methodologies. As a result, we were left with a shortlist of ten papers from overseas, a saturation of debates on the textbook and an abundance of teachers' experiences. For the local context, there was a paucity of contributions based on empirical research and topics related to pedagogy. The committee then took corrective action and began to 'search' for papers that would show empirical evidence.

A great number of teachers also sent in draft papers that presented their ideals of teaching history. The committee also supported teachers' abstracts and draft presentation so that they illustrate more of their processes and experiences with students and schools in learning and teaching history.

### **The program**

During the two-day conference, a total of 173 attendees registered for the first day and 120 for the second, with 72 attending both. Researchers and academics led the panels and presentations of the first day while the second day zoomed more into the classroom, its pedagogies and activities.

The conference welcomed the attendees with motivating addresses from Dr. Raouf Ghusayni, President of the LAES, followed by Her Excellency Ms. Elsa Fenet, chargé d'affaires at the Delegation of the EU and His Excellency Dr. Mneimneh, Minister of Education and Higher Education.

From the UK, Dr. Arthur Chapman from Edge Hill University opened by delivering the keynote, which analyzed evidence showing how students develop understandings when learning history. A series of three panels followed. The first, *History Education: Problems and Prospects*, examined generalized issues in the Iraqi context and critically reviewed teachings of certain histories in Lebanon. Panel Two brought in a European perspective with valuable experiences of history education in post-conflict societies from

Cyprus, Germany and EUROCLIO. The third panel dedicated its platform specifically for papers and debates on the unification of a history textbook with papers from Lebanon and one from Bahrain.

On day 2, Dr. Christine Counsell from the University of Cambridge facilitated a series of learning activities using second order concepts to generate constructions, discussions and critical thinking. This was followed by a series of two panels whereby the first focused on *Approaches to Teaching History* and, subsequently, *Innovations in History Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives*. These two panels prompted dialogues that strengthened the connections between the conceptual concerns of the previous day and documented classroom practices. After lunch, two large halls were simultaneously running Round Table discussions entitled, *Notable Teaching Experiences from the Classroom*. Teachers from around Lebanon and various denominations put forward their practices and insights that resulted in lengthy and stimulating dialogues. Indeed, it was a truly marvelous spectacle watching the sun set through the colossal hotel windows while over 70 history enthusiasts – highly representative of teachers and leading academics – continued sharing experiences and exchanging arguments until 7:30 pm.

### Mainly reflections

A considerable challenge in preparing these proceedings was to detail the narratives and atmosphere of constructive tensions and contagious enthusiasm. Hence, these proceedings archive the papers presented and reflect on the lessons learned from and to Lebanon.

From the conference activities, two inter-related strands emerged. First, we saw that the dialogues in Lebanon on history education heavily concentrated on the contentions of **what** goes into a history textbook. The discourse basically maintains debates on a unified textbook or one of various versions or several textbooks for classrooms. On the one hand, a unified textbook would aim at minimizing the use of history to indoctrinate certain perspectives while, on the other hand, perspectives of history would facilitate the learning of multidisciplinary concepts and skills.

Since Lebanon's independence over 60 years ago, educationalists have been concerned with what to include in the history curriculum with very little attention given to the **how**. We tried to deal with the 'how' by inviting

those from outside to share their approaches for classroom learning and by inviting teachers from Lebanon to talk about their teaching methods and experiences with students. The web of debates illustrated an ideological standoff regarding historical content and revealed the extent to which approaches to learning history have yet to be examined and celebrated at school, government and institutional levels. We hope that these proceedings support the momentum towards widening the network of history education enthusiasts and help build on the teachers' and students' learning communities in and beyond the history classroom.

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