

Macedonia: Retelling the History

Evaluation Report

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Keith C. Barton

University of Cincinnati

Executive Summary

The *Macedonia: Retelling the History* project has achieved its goal of developing an innovative approach to history education in Macedonia society that stimulates peace, diversity, and understanding. The project was implemented in an efficient and time-effective manner, and the dedication and hard work of the participants were major factors in the success of the project, which could not have been conducted without the funding of the United States Institute of Peace and the additional funding and organizational support provided by EUROCLIO. The project successfully accomplished both of its major goals: 1) The writing team that took part in the project included representatives of both major language groups in the country, and its work was accomplished in a highly inclusive and collaborative manner; 2) The curriculum materials produced in the project provide a new approach to history education in Macedonia through an emphasis on historical sources, multiple perspectives, active learning, and critical thinking. Ultimately, such an approach has a great deal of potential to contribute to civic society.

With more time and resources, the materials could have been improved through greater attention to interpretation of evidence, more sources reflecting a diversity of experiences, and inclusion of guidance materials for teachers. The small-scale nature of this project may also limit its wider impact on history teaching in Macedonia. It has had a positive impact on the professional development of the individuals involved, and it should strengthen the capacity for those individuals to become leaders in the country's history education community. The project has also produced materials that can serve as a model for new forms of history teaching. Wider impact, however, will depend on further distribution of the materials, on official endorsement by the country's Ministry of Education, and on provision of professional development opportunities, so that history teachers can develop expertise in new approaches to their subject.

The *Macedonia: Retelling the History* project has achieved its goal of developing an innovative approach to history education in Macedonia society that stimulates peace, diversity, and understanding. The project aimed to achieve this goal both through 1) creation of a collaborative, inclusive, teacher-led writing team, and 2) development of teaching materials that will promote respect, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence. Both these goals were achieved. A great deal more effort will be necessary in order for this small-scale project to have a significant impact on history teaching in Macedonia, but both the process and the materials that were developed have the potential to serve as models for new forms of history teaching and inter-ethnic collaboration in the country.

Project evaluation methods

The project was evaluated through several overlapping methods:

- a) Review of final curriculum materials produced by the project in light of their balance, neutrality, and adherence to contemporary scholarship on the teaching and learning of history, particularly with regard to principles of historical thinking and the promotion of multiple perspectives
- b) Review of the activities that took place during the project's three seminars in Macedonia, on 1-3 March 2007, 14-16 June 2007, and 2-4 September 2007, including direct observation of all activities in the third seminar, as well as reports of the first two seminars compiled by Dr. Dean Smart of the University of West of England

- c) Extensive formal and informal interviews with the two leaders of the project, Mire Mladenovsk of the History Educators Association of Macedonia and Joke van der Leeuw-Roord of EUROCLIO, covering the background of the project; the cultural and organizational context of history education in Macedonia; the process of developing and implementing the current project; and the potential for the project to influence history education in the country
- d) Numerous formal and informal interviews with all members of the project team (conducted individually, in small focus groups, and in whole-group discussions), covering the current state of history teaching in Macedonia; their reactions to the project and its impact on them professionally; their reflections on the role of history teaching (and of this project specifically) in creating a multiethnic society; and the potential for the project to influence history education in the country

Implementation of the project

This project was implemented in an efficient and time-effective manner. Curriculum development efforts such as this one generally require a much longer time frame and many more face-to-face meetings, yet this one was accomplished in a period of just nine months, from the first seminar to the publication of the final materials. This achievement clearly was due both to the effective use of time during the seminars and to the dedication and hard work of participants—not only in the seminars but in completing their responsibilities between meetings. Each of the seminars had a clearly defined agenda and expected outcomes; no time was wasted during the meetings,

which were held to a tight schedule and which consisted of significant activities directly related to completion of the project. During these seminars, participants consistently remained focused on the tasks at hand and were deeply engaged with the practical and intellectual demands of the project. At the end of each seminar, participants left with clearly defined responsibilities and a specific timetable, which they adhered to closely.

The activities chosen for the seminars contributed directly to the successful completion of the project. These consisted primarily of three kinds of sessions. First were reports on the overall nature and status of history teaching in Macedonia, which were important in order to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of the current project and its potential for implementation in schools. Second were workshops conducted by Dr. Dean Smart, who modeled numerous forms of active learning and exposed participants to key elements of contemporary history education, including the role of evidence, multiple perspectives, lesson planning, and assessment. Participants consistently praised these exercises, and the content of Dr. Smart's workshops is clearly reflected in the curriculum materials produced by the project. Finally, a substantial portion of the seminars was devoted to the actual work of creating curriculum materials, including developing topics, questions, and objectives; planning activities for students; and writing and editing text. Each of these sessions was critical to achieving the aims of the project.

The project also endeavored to involve all relevant stakeholders. The team included historians from the Institute of National History and teachers from primary and secondary schools and gymnasia, and both major language

groups were included. (Representatives from the Bureau of Education were also invited to be part of the team but declined to participate.) Team leaders made a consistent effort throughout the project to solicit and consider the perspectives of all members of the project, in order to make sure that the outcome truly reflected a broad base of support.

Many of the participants had taken part in previous curriculum development efforts, and they agreed that this project was more effective in at least two important ways: First, there was a greater emphasis on students' learning, and particularly on the kinds of activities that would encourage student motivation and engagement. Second, this project was more inclusive of all the people in Macedonia, and this inclusion was accomplished by merging perspectives rather than treating each ethnic group separately. Participants agreed that although this project was small in scale, it was an effective beginning in the process of reforming history teaching.

This project could not have been implemented without the funding provided by the United States Institute of Peace, or without the organizational support and additional funding coordinated by EUROCLIO. Developing curriculum requires both financial and logistical resources—participants have to meet in person over an extended time, and this requires paying for meals, accommodations, travel, and release time; arrangements have to be made to carry out both practical matters and the actual work of the project; consultants and translators must be compensated; and published materials must be paid for. Yet the History Educators Association of Macedonia has no staff, space, or resources, and would have been unable to carry out even a small-scale project such as this without outside support. In addition, having the support of

outside organizations provides an important source of legitimacy within Macedonia; history teachers have relatively low status in the country, and participants noted that the involvement of European and U.S. organizations helps to ensure that their efforts will be taken more seriously by historians and governmental officials in Macedonia than it might be otherwise.

Project results: The writing team

The writing team was clearly a collaborative and inclusive one. It included five members of each of the two major language groups (Albanian and Macedonian), as well as one Serb. In addition, each of the subgroups responsible for planning specific segments of the materials included both Macedonians and Albanians. Moreover, the team was entirely teacher-led. All decisions about the content of the scheme of work—including text, materials, and activities—were arrived at through collaborative discussion of all team members, as were assignments for completing individual tasks. This approach resulted not only in a curriculum written *for* history teachers in the country, but one that was developed *by* teachers, in a way that showed understanding and responsiveness to local contexts.

The work within each of the subgroups, and within the overall team, was highly collegial. All members of the team consistently focused on developing materials that were educationally effective and politically neutral, and the project leaders and individual participants strived to include all team members in the discussions. The writing teams systematically sought input from all members in order to make sure that the materials would not be considered biased by either of the principal ethnic groups, and the

suggestions of all members were always listed to respectfully and incorporated into the final product.

Although disagreements sometimes arose both in small groups and among the overall team, these disagreements always revolved around pedagogical and historical questions, not political or ideological ones. That is, team members did not attempt to impose a “Macedonian perspective” or “Albanian perspective” on any of the discussions or materials, nor did disagreements ever fall out along ethnic lines. And although some team members naturally were more forceful or dominant than others, and although some took on greater responsibilities than others, these differences were not related to ethnic background. The final product reflects a truly joint and collaborative perspective, and its development clearly illustrates the possibility of working productively across community divisions, and hence of strengthening civic society in Macedonia.

Results of the project: Curriculum materials

The curriculum materials produced in this project clearly reflect principles of history education that are consistent with contemporary theory and research in Europe and North America, and the materials have the potential to make a significant impact on promoting cross-community understanding in Macedonia. The project team has accomplished these goals, first of all, by focusing the curriculum on key questions, such as “How did the 90s change life in Macedonia?” Thus, rather than requiring students to remember the details of specific historical narratives, the materials ask students to investigate questions and develop their own conclusions, based

on evidence. This is precisely the approach recommended by most leading history educators, because it engages students in a process of critical thinking rather than simple memorization.

In addition, memorizing narratives is one of the ways history can become distorted in the service of contemporary ideological positions, as students are expected to learn stories of conquest, victimization, or recrimination. Not only do the materials reject such ideologically charged narratives, they introduce teachers and students to an entirely new way of thinking about history—as a process of inquiry rather than as a matter of learning settled conclusions developed by others. Whereas learning historical narratives tend to close down critical thinking, questions such as those in this project open up students' minds and lead to a more critical approach to the past.

A related, and equally important, element of the curriculum materials is their reliance on evidence. All contemporary scholarship in history education emphasizes the need for students to understand how historical knowledge is constructed from evidence. This requires that students directly encounter original historical sources and that these be used not merely as illustrations but as the basis for conclusions students develop. Such sources, in the form of magazine and newspaper articles, commission reports, and official statistics, constitute the largest part of the materials in this project, and students are also asked to collect additional evidence through, for example, interviews with people who lived through the events being studied. And most importantly, these historical sources are directly linked to the questions students are asked to answer at the end of each topic. This link between

questions and evidence further reinforces a critical, rather than ideological, approach to history.

Another crucial element of the curriculum materials is their emphasis on the shared experiences of diverse people in Macedonia rather than on separate ethnic histories. Each of the topics allows students to investigate questions related to the entire population of the country—ethnic Macedonians, Albanians, Vlachs, Turks, Roma, and so on. But rather than seeing each of these groups as a separate entity with its own history, students are encouraged to look for both similarities and differences among their experiences as members of a single geographical space. This approach is further emphasized in the activities students are asked to complete, such as completing a Venn diagram comparing Islam and Christianity, or conducting interviews on inter-ethnic relations before and after the 1990s.

When multi-ethnic nations ignore the experiences of diverse ethnic groups, they alienate many of their citizens and ultimately create the conditions for social discord; but treating differing ethnicities separately can also lead to perceptions of isolation and grievance. In addition, presenting the history of each ethnic group separately makes it easy for teachers to omit or downplay the experience of one community or the other, and this has frequently happened with current history texts in Macedonia. The materials developed in this project, however, avoid each of these problems by recognizing diversity within a shared civic space, and by treating multiple perspectives as an inescapable part of the history curriculum.

The materials display many other characteristics consistent with contemporary scholarship on meaningful and effective history instruction. By

focusing on the recent past, for example, they provide attention to periods of history that are often neglected in the curriculum; addressing the recent past can be a motivating topic for many students, and it increases their ability to take part in direct collection of evidence. These materials also emphasize social and material history, rather than the political and military history that has traditionally been the focus of instruction. As research consistently has shown, this is an effective way of building on students' background knowledge in history, and it also allows for greater inclusion of historically marginalized groups, who have not usually had access to political power.

Pedagogically, the materials are also sound. The writing team was successful in avoiding biased language, and they were careful to use their professional experience to write in a way that will be comprehensible to students of the targeted age levels—a major change, participants agreed, from current history materials in Macedonia. In addition, each of the topics includes numerous suggestions for active student learning, such as interviews, debates, brainstorming, role-playing, and dramatization. Students who piloted the materials were enthusiastic about these materials and considered them a significant improvement over current methods of history teaching; as one of them said, “We usually sleep through history class.” Such activities are precisely those that would be found in the best curriculum materials in Europe and North America.

The drawbacks to these materials are those that have been necessitated by the brief duration and limited funding of the project. With more time and resources, the team could have produced more complete units of study, including full descriptions of each of the activities, and clear guidance

for teachers on how to implement the lessons. They also could have expanded the sample lessons to each of the topics rather than focusing only on the final one, "Independent Macedonia"; and they could have accessed a wider variety of historical sources and evidence, including those that illustrate more directly the experiences of diverse ethnic groups. Finally, the materials might have dealt more directly with controversial issues, and they could have included greater attention to the interpretation of sources (rather than only their comprehension and use). Given the limited scope of the project, however, the team has produced an admirable illustration of new and productive forms of history. A more complete curriculum would have required a substantially greater provision of resources and would have required much more time to develop.

The impact of the project on history education in Macedonia

This project made an important contribution to the professional development of the individuals who were part of the team. Participants were enthusiastic about their involvement in the project, and in particular about the process of collaboratively developing materials. They mentioned the value not only of learning new teaching methodologies, but of seeing how other teachers think and work, of carefully thinking through the development of teaching methods and materials, and of expanding their own knowledge and perspectives, particularly as these relate to other ethnic groups. Several emphasized the need to provide similar opportunities to other teachers in Macedonia.

In addition, the project has enhanced the capacity for wider organizational attempts at improving history teaching in Macedonia, and particularly the potential to involve both major language groups in such efforts. Before this project, few contacts had been established between Albanian and Macedonian history teachers in the country; despite occasional efforts to do so, the lack of a specific project to work on (and the associated funding) hampered these attempts. In addition to initiating such contacts, some participants are developing plans for a new kind of history teachers' association, one that would attempt to bridge the community divide, and that would include an innovative centre, newsletter, or website. Involvement in the current project has also begun to provide Macedonian history teachers with a better sense of how their efforts compare to wider international contexts, both through travel of several participants to conferences in other countries and through the provision of international consultants at the seminars in Macedonia. Although the number of individuals directly affected by the project is still small, it may ultimately have a significant impact on history teaching in the country by nurturing the expertise of those who are poised to become leaders in a newly collaborative community of history educators.

Most of the work of the project was devoted to developing curriculum materials, and the resulting product is one of the only alternatives to the existing, highly limited, set of textbooks available for history teachers in Macedonia. Yet participants and team leaders all agreed that the impact of these materials will depend on a number of factors. First, the materials will have to become widely distributed among history teachers in the country. At present, the only concrete plan to accomplish this is through electronic

publication on the website of the Macedonia Primary Education Project of the United States Agency for International Development. The History Educators Association of Macedonia has also approached the Macedonian Bureau of Education for further support in distribution. The effort to disseminate the materials, and to encourage teachers to use them, would be substantially enhanced if they were to receive some form of official sanction or acknowledgement from the government. Team leaders have met with a representative of the Ministry of Education to explain the project, and the initial response was positive, but it remains to be seen to what extent the materials will be officially endorsed. Without such sanction, many teachers may be reticent to use the materials, despite the fact that they fit within the required curriculum framework.

In addition, this project and the resulting materials were presented at the International Conference on History, Historiography, and Teaching in History in Skopje, in November 2007, and the response from historians was positive. Their recognition of the quality of these efforts may lead to more widespread acceptance, and this will certainly enhance the status of history teachers as potential curriculum writers—a role that is currently reserved entirely for professional historians in Macedonia.

Several of the participants emphasized, however, that simply distributing these materials, even with official sanction, will not have a significant impact on history education in Macedonia. They noted that the effort to implement new forms of history teaching will depend on more extensive professional development of teachers in the country, so that they better understand the approaches that have been taken in this project. Putting

new materials in teachers' hands, that is, will not help them better understand how to engage students in critical thinking or to investigate historical questions through the use of evidence. Developing these new approaches will require workshops and seminars for teachers, so that they can see both the value of new forms of history instruction and learn the pedagogical skills necessary to implement them. This kind of professional knowledge will also enable teachers to develop their own materials, so that they are not limited to the small range of published products.

Such professional development efforts are currently difficult to implement in Macedonia, because most workshops takes place on a school-wide basis rather than in discipline-specific settings. Teachers' professional development opportunities, that is, are limited to those that apply to all teachers within a school, regardless of subject, rather than those that would engage them in considering content and pedagogical issues with other history teachers. Participants agreed, however, that history-focused workshops, not generic ones, are necessary to change teachers' practice, and this observation is in keeping with recent academic theory and research. If it were possible to provide such opportunities, then the materials produced in this project could both serve as a model for new forms of history teaching and provide the basis for ongoing professional development. The History Educators Association of Macedonia, however, has neither the financial nor organizational ability to provide professional development, so the support of the government or outside funders will be necessary in order to carry out these efforts.

Summary and Conclusion

Macedonia: Retelling the Story was a small-scale project with limited funding and a short time-frame, yet it was able to successfully accomplish its two goals of creating an inclusive and collaborative teacher-led writing team, and of developing a set of materials for history education that will promote peace, tolerance, and understanding through critical thinking, multiple perspectives, and active student learning. The project had an impact on the professional expertise and capacity of those involved, and it has created an important alternative to the history curriculum materials currently available in Macedonia. For it to have a more direct and widespread impact among history teachers in the country, the materials will have to be distributed more widely, and this effort would benefit from official endorsement by the Ministry of Education. Even more important, distribution of materials will have to be supplemented by professional development through workshops and seminars, so that teachers understand how to implement this new approach and can further develop their own materials. In the context of such professional development, the materials produced in this project would serve as a model for innovative history teaching.