THEMES FOR CONSIDERATION IN ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN PEACE PROCESS

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In This Issue

Formal and Non-Formal Peace Education Programs for Youth in Armenia and Azerbaijan: Challenges and Opportunities

Marina Danoyan, Gulkhanim Mammadova

During the decades-long conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan have promoted ethno-nationalist conflict narratives in all spheres of political and social lives, including public education, contributing to radicalizing positions and excluding reconciliation and dialogue as means to achieve sustainable peace. As a milestone for lasting peace, peace education can contribute to reconciliation processes by instilling values of peace and tolerance from an early age. In this regard, this paper explores formal and informal peace education initiatives, programs, and projects, as well as the current situation of peace education in schools in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The analysis is based on data gathered from personal interviews with peace education experts, practitioners, and educational specialists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Finland. The findings demonstrate that despite of the existence of various peace education programs, they have not been widely promoted in both countries due to dominant nationalist discourses and policies that consider peace education a sign of weakness and even a threat to national security. The paper also identifies challenges to promoting peace education and opportunities for the integration of informal initiatives into school curricula in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It also provides policy recommendations addressed to international donors, local and international CSOs experts in education and peacebuilding, and

policymakers, which can help to improve the field of peace education in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Introduction

Since the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan and Armenia have stepped into enormous political uncertainty. Even though the trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia on November 10, 2020 presupposed the cessation of hostilities and the implementation of a number of measures on the road to the peaceful coexistence of the three-decade-long rivals, the lack of mutual trust since the military conflict poses serious obstacles to the achievement of "positive peace" (Galtung 2001, 3) between the two nations in South Caucasus. In fact, during the decades-long conflict, both Armenia and Azerbaijan promoted conflict narratives that nurtured polarization and hatred toward each other. The ethnonationalistic conflict narratives were promoted in all spheres of political and social life, including public education, contributing to radicalizing positions and excluding reconciliation and dialogue as means to achieve sustainable peace (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2021). In this regard, we believe it is crucial to use the experience of informal peace education initiatives and apply it to the formal educational institutions of both countries. This, in turn, will help to restore trust between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, as well as prevent possible escalations.

Since we consider peace education a milestone for lasting and sustainable peace, in this article we discuss the problem of peace education initiatives in Armenia and Azerbaijan and formulate recommendations that might help to integrate informal peace education initiatives and their methodologies into formal education programs. We have analyzed various programs with different goals, such as improving critical and analytical thinking to instill peace values or changing attitudes, stereotypes, and increasing tolerance to contribute to the normalization of relations between the two neighboring societies. It is worth mentioning that by referring to educational institutions we imply primary and secondary schools, as we consider it important to instill values of peace, tolerance, and understanding from an early age. It is difficult to achieve development or progress in peace education without a clear definition of it. We believe peace education should be based on the needs and characteristics of the community in which it will be implemented (Harris

2002; Salomon 2002). Therefore, for the purpose of our analysis, we rely on a definition of peace education developed by Betty Reardon (1988), which includes educational policies, pedagogy, and the practice of teaching essential skills and values, as well as the development of the awareness necessary to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way and live together in mutual respect and harmony.

The primary data for our analytical research was collected through individual interviews with peace education experts, practitioners, and educational specialists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Finland. We conducted 11 interviews to gather information about the programs and projects implemented in the peace education field, as well as the current situation with peace education in schools, and to identify the challenges for promoting peace education and creating opportunities for the integration of informal initiatives into school curricula in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Our secondary data is related to the peace education models that have been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Finland. The Finnish educational system is often referred to as a successful model that encompasses values of peace within various subjects in school curricula, often referred to as "Global Education", "Human Rights Education", "Intercultural Education", or "Active Citizenship Education" (Saleniece 2018; Demos Helsinki 2021; Niittymäki 2014). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia has shown interest in the Finnish educational model for the ongoing educational reform in Armenia (ESCS 2022a). Therefore, we found it relevant to study this model in our research. On the other hand, the Bosnia and Herzegovina case is relevant to Armenia and Azerbaijan due to a similar conflict-related context, particularly the high level of ethnonationalist antagonism deeply internalized by the respective societies (Babayev and Spanger 2020). Thus, we consider it important to study the experience of this country and determine the pros and cons of various peace education programs carried out there.

The article is structured as follows: First, we identify the prevailing concepts of peace education in the literature. Further, we discuss peace education models in formal studies implemented in Finland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Subsequently, we present our empirical findings from Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are based on interviews with experts and

practitioners. The findings section describes the current situation in the field of peace education in both countries, ongoing formal and informal peace education initiatives, as well as challenges and opportunities for formal peace education. Finally, we present policy recommendations based on the analyses of the gathered data that can be applied to promote peace education in schools in both countries.

Concepts of Peace Education

The origins of peace education date to ancient times and relate to religious attitudes. Religious leaders such as Buddha in antiquity taught and emphasized that individuals should promote peace in their daily lives and avoid violence (Rahula 2003). With the development of science in the Middle Ages, peace education was also disseminated through education and philosophy.

Later in the twentieth century, in response to numerous violent events such as wars and genocides, scholars around the world emphasized the necessity of modern innovation in education (Vriens 1999) to fight discrimination and intolerance and foster a culture of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect (Bar-Tal 2002; Reardon 2000). They argued that it is necessary to teach children from an early age how to make independent decisions and not to follow belligerent and militaristic governments that use violence to achieve their goals (Montessori 1959). The logic behind these arguments lies in a strategy of peace education, which "depends upon millions of students being educated, who first transformed their inner hearts and minds and then must turn it to work to transform violence" (Harris and Morrison 2013).

Peace education evokes the 'instincts' of peaceful coexistence and highlights the values necessary for this (Harris 2009). To achieve the goal of building a more peaceful and sustainable world, various concepts of peace education with different goals, practices, and principles have been developed (Bar-Tal 2002). Due to the variety of concepts, scholars and practitioners divide peace education programs according to their primary objectives, such as human rights education, democracy education, and training for conflict resolution (Agarwal 2014). Peace education can focus on conflicts between individuals or conflicts between collectives. The former approach provides people with information about peace values and behavioral competencies to achieve compromise and find solutions to

interpersonal conflict (Deutsch 1973; Johnson and Johnson 2005). The latter approach aims at bringing lasting changes in people's minds by legitimizing and humanizing other collective's history and narrative, recognizing each other's crimes, and developing cognitive/emotional empathy and positive attitudes (Salomon 2009). In this regard, some peace education programs implemented in, for instance, Rwanda, Kosovo, or Northern Ireland, were oriented particularly toward resolving and preventing group and collective conflicts (Coleman 2003).

Along with the different focus of peace education, scholars have also defined several categories of peace education based on their objectives: peace education for changing mindset, for inculcating new skills, for the promotion of human rights, and for the promotion of the culture of peace and disarmament (Salomon 2002). At the same time, despite the numerous concepts and approaches to peace education, all these programs are unified in their goals to instill peaceful values in children and make them "agents of change" (Bajaj and Chiu 2009) to achieve equity, social justice, and promote human rights.

Peace education initiatives can be also distinguished between formal and informal, which according to some scholars are called, respectively, "integrative" and "additive" peace education (Carson and Lange 1997). Even if both forms can have written curricula, the method of the programs is different. Formal, or integrative, peace education entails the schooling system; informal or additive peace education is an initiative implemented by non-governmental grassroots organizations.

Peace Education as Part of Formal Studies: The Cases of Finland and Bosnia Herzegovina

There is strong evidence that schools can play a key role in advancing the values of peace when peace education is included in formal studies curricula (Brooks and Hajir 2020). School is a site that shapes social behaviors, norms, and attitudes, and where the culture of peace can be developed. Research suggests that peace education programs have resulted in improving relationships between students and creating a safe environment where they achieve better results (Brooks and Hajir 2020). Moreover, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) considers peace education a fundamental right of children and not just an optional subject in curricula (Fountain 1999). In this regard, the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed special curricula to promote tolerance and non-violence (UNESCO 1998).

Peace education in formal schools has a multidimensional nature: it starts with creating an inclusive space in the classroom, encouraging students' cooperation, developing analytical skills and critical thinking, and teachers' training. The second level looks at the school environment and how students interact with their immediate environment on a day-to-day basis. Here, the skills of peacemaking and leadership play an important role. Finally, to increase the impact on the wider community and environment, peace education seeks to foster formal-informal collaboration, which can be linked to policy and legislation (Brooks and Hajir 2020).

Peace education, in this case, is not considered a separate program but is incorporated into the school curriculum and integrated into various subjects. One of the countries that has adopted this framework is Finland. According to Hanna Niittymäki, a peace education expert from Finland, in the country's primary school (grades 1-9), topics such as "cultural understanding", "interaction and cooperation skills", "participation", and "active citizenship and building a sustainable future" are part of the national curriculum and are supposed to be involved in all the subjects' studies (Interview with Niittymäki 2022). In general, in Finnish national curricula from various periods starting in 1970, peace education has held a central place (Niittymäki 2014). The 1985 curriculum stated that "goals are guided by values." These goals included the diverse development of the student's personality, nature conservation, national culture and national values, gender equality, and international cooperation and peace. The 1994 curriculum called for the following to be considered when building the value base for education: promoting sustainable development; cultural identity; multiculturalism and internationalization; and physical, mental, and social well-being.

According to Liisa Jääskeläinen, education counselor at the Finnish National Board of Education, who also worked as a UNESCO school coordinator for a long period, any subject can include topics related to peace. Accordingly, "[e]xamples in math books are often quite indifferent in content, but those could, for instance, include the distribution of money and food in the world or calculate how much money is spent on education

in Finland and how much on defense." As Jääskeläinen puts it, "People who hold values, global perspectives and critical thinking, are at the center of everything" (Niittymäki 2014). It is important to stress that corresponding policies and pedagogical approaches are essential for the understanding of conflict and violence. However, policies are shaped and adopted by social and political elites who can adopt policies that either maintain structural violence in school and foster inequalities or, on the contrary, promote equality and peace (Jenkins 2019). When education policies and legislation support peace education, it helps to achieve full integration into formal school settings (Brooks and Hajir 2020).

In the Finnish context, the defining concepts for educational reforms were the principles of reconciliation and national integration (Pakkasvirta and Tarnaala 2018). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Republic of Finland, as a newly independent country, experienced a violent civil war between the "Reds" and the "Whites." In the wider context, war, revolution, and the breakdown of empires in preceding years opened up possibilities for national transformations. Those processes impacted both ordinary people and political regimes. Since 1918, rebuilding trust in all spheres of social and political life became fundamental for the new polity in Finland. This led to the gradual modernization of health, welfare, and educational systems. In the post-World War II period, Finland has reinforced its reforms towards securing independence and democracy and building a welfare state capable of providing stability inside and outside the countries' borders. Pakkasvirta and Tarnaala (2018) argue that the Finnish comprehensive and equal school system after WWII reflected the need for political stabilization in Finland, as well as securing the interests of different economic sectors; therefore, it has had strong political, economic, and social motives underlining it. To achieve this goal, educational reform was undertaken with the principle of equality at the center. This meant that regardless of their family background, every child would have a right to high-quality education.

According to Jenkins (2019), *collaborative partnerships* are essential to influencing policy-making. Peace education programs in non-formal settings have a solid ground and have proved their efficiency with the potential to influence change on a higher level. When bridges are created to connect formal and non-formal dimensions, they can set a path for constructive dialogue. According to Hanna Niittymäki (reference?

Interview (2022) or online article (2014)), the Finnish national school curriculum heavily encourages cooperation between the formal schools and NGOs that often provide free courses to schools on different topics related to peace education (such as diversity, gender equality, media awareness, emotional intelligence, conflict and peace mediation, etc.) as well as teachers training. The Finnish educational policies state that schools are supposed to educate active citizens and thus need to widen the learning environment outside of schools. Niittymäki stresses that one critical issue is to make sure that this expertise and opportunities are also available in remote areas and not limited to the capital and large cities.

Another example of a country with an integrative curriculum is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is populated by Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosniaks. The country went through an ethnic war during 1991-1995. During the war, the education system was used as a tool for dividing people according to their nationalities, religions, and language (Pasalic 2008). After the war, various international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Open Society, United World College (UWC) in Mostar, and others started to play a leading role in improving the education system by bringing new reforms (Clarke-Habibi 2019). The pilot program "Education for Peace" (EFP) was launched in six schools in June 2000. It can be considered as one of the main initiatives implemented in formal peace education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on integrative peace theory (ITP), the main goal of the EFP was to contribute to the creation of a culture of peace among all three ethnic groups. The curriculum of the program was built on a combination of the principles of unity, worldview, and peace, in which peace is considered the main result of a unity-based worldview (Emkic 2018). At the same time, it also promotes emotional insight, critical thinking, and creative experience.

The program itself emerged out of a teachers' training at the Pedagogical Institute for educators assigned with implementing this program in schools (Emkic 2018). Later, since the pilot project demonstrated efficient results and received support from education ministries and municipal leaders, it was implemented in 112 primary and secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Danesh 2008). The integration of the program into the formal school system and curriculum started with the removal of

potentially offensive context from the primary and secondary school textbooks on history, geography, mother languages, and music (Torsti 2003), and the creation of teaching manuals (Emkic 2018). Eventually, the Education for Peace project was fully recognized and supported not only by the local community and the international community, but also by the government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further, the state-level Education Reform Strategy (2002) was applied to create depoliticized and "integrated multicultural schools free from political, religious, cultural and other bias and discrimination" (Clarke-Habibi 2019). Consequently, since September 2003, the program had been conducted in 100 schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conducted research showed that the EFP yielded positive results and contributed to the healing and creation of cultures of peace (Danesh 2008). Notwithstanding, the program was not continued due to a lack of financial support (Emkic 2018).

Another peace education project, which was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2017 to 2020 is the "Restoring the Civic Mission of Education—a window of opportunity for change." This project was implemented by the Association of Democratic Initiatives in cooperation with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights and sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation Programs and Activities (Global Reconciliation Fund). Its main methodology aimed to expand the capabilities and skills of teachers in the country to make them agents of social peace and reconciliation, as well as to support primary and secondary educational institutions in the creation of peace education programs. According to the statistics of the Regional Cooperation Council, as of 2019, 419 teachers, 832 students, and more than 200 school representatives had participated in this project to integrate the concepts of peace, mediation, and conflict mitigation into formal education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Peace Education in Armenia

Peace Education Programs in Schools

Peace education curriculum materials were introduced to the Armenian national curriculum as early as 1995. These are supplemental materials to the national curriculum as peace education is not given space as an exclusive subject. According to Garine Palandjian (Interview with

Palandjian 2022), the Armenian national curriculum is demanding of the teachers' time and focus—prioritizing time for math, science, mother tongue, etc. Therefore, peace education is often utilized as supplementary materials and taught during free periods such in classes with the head teacher. One of the more successful initiatives in Armenia has been the Women for Development (WFD) programme, a locally-based initiative that began in 1995 and has been providing support, training, and materials for teachers across Armenia. Aside from the WFD curriculum, other initiatives have been introduced in Armenia including the UNICEF Diversity and Tolerance manual. However, this manual has not been as successfully implemented across the country due to a variety of reasons including providing follow-up, proper training, and materials. Both of these curricula were received differently by teachers in large part due to the implementation and timed approaches. For example, the UNICEF Diversity and Tolerance material was launched at a time when tolerance was misinterpreted by the Armenian government officials in their approach to the local LGBT community. On the other hand, WFD's material responded to young people's demands for new pedagogical practices and curricula as a result of the collapse of the USSR. WFD's "Peace and conflict resolution education" programme was incorporated in the school program and proved its efficiency over years (Batton 2019).

According to Gohar Markosyan, president of the Women for Development, this program was incorporated into the formal school curriculum as part of an optional weekly course with the head teacher. Between 2002 and 2018, the program was implemented in 850 schools across Armenia, trained 6,000 teachers, and provided about 70,000 students with lessons and trainings in peace education (Batton 2019). The program has been institutionalized and supported by the National Agency of Education (NAE). Together with the WFD, the NAE conducted teacher trainings, regular monitoring, and evaluation. As Markosyan explains, when the project began in 2002, it was called peace education. Later, the name changed to education for conflict management because the term 'peace education' supposedly had a 'political connotation', while conflict management, especially interpersonal conflict management, was more neutral. According to Markosyan, stress was put on interpersonal conflict management and thus avoided touching on inter-state conflicts, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Interview with Markosyan 2022).

The program aimed at spreading the culture of peace to children and educators at schools throughout the country (Batton 2019). As Markosyan explains, the program was popular because it allowed interactive discussions and encouraged children to share their views and opinions, which was not a common approach in the Armenian educational system. This has been an important tool for the teachers to manage conflicts between children. Several evaluations conducted during the implementation of the project showed positive changes in teacher-pupil relations during the implementation of the project. Students became more tolerant and applied skills gained during the course to resolve everyday conflicts (Interview with Markosyan 2022). At the same time, teachers also noticed changes in their own behavior as they became more patient, tolerant, calm, and had better tools to act in conflict situations (Batton 2019).

According to Markosyan, the program has been translated into English and Georgian because the WFD was partnering with Youth Centers in Georgia that tried to introduce this initiative into school programs there. They have also collaborated with educational experts in Kazakhstan. In general terms, over the years, the WFD became part of a large network of professionals in the field of peace education all around the world. However, after the reforms in the education system in Armenia, the NAE was dissolved in 2019 and there has been no clarity about whether conflict management education would remain in the school program. According to Markosyan, without support from official bodies, it became impossible to continue the program and it was eventually suspended. At the same time, Markosyan stressed that the project had been running for a long time and could not continue as part of WFD programs. After many years of the operation, the project was supposed to sustain itself. Yet, the educational materials have been distributed to the schools and it is possible that the initiative continues to be implemented to a certain degree, but the WFD does not oversee it any longer. However, Markosyan noted that several teachers across the country contacted the organization and expressed interest in continuing to teach this program, so interest is still present. According to Markosyan, no NGO in Armenia has had such a long engagement with peace education. In general, she evaluated the project as successful (Interview with Markosyan 2022).

Another important and recent peace education initiative in Armenia is the Peace Education Manual for schools created by the Frontline Youth Network (FYN), an NGO based in the Tavush region, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (ESCS). According to the co-founder of the FYN, Lusine Kosakyan (Interview with Kosakyan 2022), the organization has been created to provide a platform for youth to support youth development in the Tavush region. The themes around which the NGO has worked have been human rights and democracy. However, with the Second Karabakh War in 2020, it has shifted its activities towards peacebuilding, which is currently the priority area of the FYN. Education has been part of its program as a non-formal education for youth. However, in order to make a more substantial change, they started cooperating with formal educational institutes to integrate quality education in schools specifically in the aforementioned region.

As Kosakyan noted, the six-month project has been supported by a Czech organization People in Need through EU funding. The project included the elaboration of the manual on peace education and the training of 20 teachers and media campaigns to reach a wider audience. The manual is designed for the students of grades 7-9 (12–14-year-olds). The topics in the peace manual are built around three main blocks: 1) Understanding peace and conflict, including different types of conflicts, peaceful communication, and an introduction to peacebuilding; 2) Human rights and peacebuilding, focused on democracy and peace; 3) State and peacebuilding, which teaches about politics as a tool for peacebuilding, focusing on the topics "State and state politics" and "State and culture." Each of these blocks takes one to three hours to teach in the framework of the social sciences subject. It is designed in a way that gives flexibility to the teachers to decide how much time they want to dedicate to this subject (Interview with Kosakyan 2022).

It is noteworthy that the current educational reform in Armenia, implemented by the World Bank and funded by the EU, has opened space for introducing peace and conflict-related topics in various subjects in secondary school. According to Avetisyan, an expert on public education (Interview with Avetisyan 2022) before adopting the state standard for general education, a lot of studies have been conducted to examine the different existing international models. The new standards have been adopted based on international practices including Finland, Singapore,

Israel, Baltic States, as well as some American states, such as Massachusetts. At the same time, the new standards imply a revised educational toolkit that specifically targets Armenia's needs (Ajazi 2019). Avetisyan highlighted that the current reform pursues two main goals. First, it aims at empowering subjects from the natural sciences in order to develop pupils' abilities to supply sector-specific skills required in the context of the high-technology industries' development. Second, in contrast with the previous knowledge-centered education system, the reform aims at developing skills, attitudes, and values that will allow pupils to apply the acquired knowledge in everyday life situations and to develop analytical thinking regarding any phenomena (Interview with Avetisyan 2022).

As Avetisyan noted, within the new state standard for general education, elements of peacebuilding are introduced already in the second grade within the subject "I and the World Around Me." Children at this age discover who they are, which then expands to discovering the community, the country, and then the world and the universe. At this stage, children learn about interpersonal conflicts and relationship-building. They acquire practical skills on how to resolve conflicts with their immediate environment. In higher grades, besides interpersonal conflicts, students start studying inter-state and inter-ethnic conflicts. Since 2021, the pilot program has been tested in the Tavush region of Armenia. In May 2022, the feedback from the teachers was collected and the first phase of the reform was concluded. The outcomes of the reforms are currently being evaluated. The program will be adjusted based on the evaluation and applied on a larger scale in secondary schools across Armenia starting in September 2023 (ESCS 2022b).

Challenges and Opportunities for Peace Education Programs in Schools

Such terms as "peace" or "peacebuilding" are not easily accepted by the wider Armenian society, especially after the Second Karabakh War, as peacebuilding is associated by some with weakness and even considered a threat to national security (Palandjian 2013). Nevertheless, in Lusine Kosakyan's opinion, it is now the right time to work with youth in this direction to raise awareness about peacebuilding so as not to let this theme be manipulated. The YFN is actively working with youth on the topics of peace and peacebuilding. Kosakyan stresses that if presented properly, the youth accept these concepts rather easily. She said that it is crucial that she

is herself from the Tavush region and she and her colleagues are considered as one of "ours," even when they talk about peace and peacebuilding. They introduce the idea through personal storytelling which is usually accepted very positively. At the same time, she stressed that if a foreigner came and promoted those ideas, the reaction might be different and not so positive (Interview with Kosakyan 2022).

Often, the question that comes from youth when talking about peace is whether promoting peace values is not a sign of weakness. Kosakyan acknowledged in the interview that there is no easy answer to this question:

> On the one hand, it needs to be acknowledged that peace education is not widely promoted in Armenia either. On the other hand, we are not aware about what is done in the area of peace education on the Azerbaijani side, and this allows people to assume that peace education does not exist, which certainly is not the case.

She stressed the importance of knowing what programs in peace education exist in Azerbaijan and when and how they are being implemented. Kosakyan is concerned that often society is not well informed on what is done in the field of peacebuilding on the other side because those initiatives are not openly spoken about. Therefore, without having a full picture of reality, it is easy to make false assumptions.

Similarly, during her research on peace education in Armenia, Garine Palandjian observed that in certain cases, there has been resistance from the Armenian teachers and schools' principles to the idea of "preaching peace", which is considered by some as a sign of weakness. The assumption was that Armenians would teach peace while the Azerbaijani side is preparing for war. At the same time, Palandjian observed that when the Armenian and Azerbaijani teachers were meeting in a third country in the context of a conference or teacher training events, they were able to overcome the fears and mistrust against working together. She therefore stressed the importance of contacts between Armenian and Azerbaijani educational professionals. According to Palandjian, the main issue with not only the peace education programs but education more broadly is the lack of trust between the conflicting sides. She explains: "Teaching about peace should come up in diverse disciplines (history, sciences, geography, etc.). In order to be efficient, we should take a holistic approach, look at the whole school curriculum critically, and encourage a joint and sincere

discussion with the specialists from both sides" (Interview with Palandjian 2022) .

In our interview, Gohar Markosyan also highlighted the value of peace educational programmes on a regional level. Although the conflict management program developed by the WFD was mainly focused on interpersonal conflicts without touching upon regional conflicts, Markosyan noted that when children acquire skills in conflict management, they are likely to use them on many different levels, including in relation to regional conflicts. In this regard, it is necessary that those programs are implemented in all countries of the region where there is a political conflict. She stressed that the program developed by the WFD could be an important basis to achieve peace on a broader level, but it is not efficient if implemented only in one country (Interview with Markosyan 2022).

One of the core ideas behind the WFD's peace education program has been that it was designed not only for the children but also for the teachers, the school as a whole, and also the family, i.e. the environment in which the child lives. Markosyan strongly believes that the whole environment should be similarly approached in order not to leave the children in isolation with the acquired skills. In this regard, special attention was given to the training of teachers: specialists were trained abroad and after the training, they adapted the program and its material to the Armenian context.

The holistic approach has been also a core principle for YFN while developing the Peace Education Manual for schools. Thus, the first component of the project included the needs assessment they did through working meetings with relevant experts which served as a basis to elaborate the content of the manual. They involved both peacebuilding and educational experts. The working meetings have been very participatory, including also civil society organizations and the National Agency for Educational Development and Innovation (an agency affiliated to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport [ESCS] that replaced the National Agency of Education) which is specifically responsible for the development of the curriculum of social sciences subjects at school. According to Kosakyan, the involvement of ESCS ministry officials since the beginning has been very important to ensure their buy-in. Also, the training of the teachers has been crucial to ensure

their ownership of the program. In this regard, Palandjian (Interview with Paladjian) noted that because peace education has been part of the extra subject curriculum and not a separate subject, the teachers' willingness and motivation were crucial for including this topic in their program. In this regard, Serine Avetisyan also stressed that the reaction of the teachers towards the new programs at school is very different. Her experience shows that the implementation of a new program in schools depends greatly on the principles' openness and readiness to accept it (Interview with Avetisyan 2022).

As noted above, peace education is included in the social sciences subject. According to Kosakyan, the program for this subject has now changed and currently opens more space for alternative teaching and learning materials. Previously, the teachers had obligatory material and any other manual or textbook could be used only as secondary learning and teaching material to support the main program within this subject. Now, the teachers have the freedom to use any learning and teaching material they find appropriate for this subject if it contributes to the learning outcomes defined by the ESCS Ministry. However, there is an issue with such freedom for content as there is not much quality material available in Armenian that the teachers can use.

Another challenge for peace education programs is that their funding is often temporary and it is therefore difficult to ensure their sustainability. For instance, presently, the YFN is trying to fundraise for the continuation of their peace education program. At the same time, as noted by Kosakyan, NGO expertise in peace education is very valuable and could support formal education programs. However, this resource is usually under-utilized and the knowledge and expertise of the NGO sector do not reach formal education. Therefore, building bridges to connect the non-formal and formal fields of education is crucial for developing peace education in the country.

Peace Education in Azerbaijan

Formal and Informal Peace Education Initiatives

Even though the term "peace education" is rarely used, currently several peace education initiatives both in the capital and various regions of Azerbaijan are being conducted by civil society representatives. One of the vivid examples of such initiatives is Conflict School, which is organized

by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation in Azerbaijan within the framework of the EU-initiated "Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement" (PeaCE) program. According to Namig Abdullayev, Conflict School facilitator and European Council Peace Program consultant (Interview with Abdullayev 2022), the lectures delivered by experts, researchers, and representatives of public institutions cover different topics related to the sociology of peace, conflict theory, collective memory, the culture of peace, feminist peace, media and conflict, peacebuilding initiatives during First and Second Karabakh wars, the humanitarian aspect of the conflict, and public diplomacy. Abdullayev also highlights that the primary methodology of the Conflict School is based on the theory of intersectionality, which is considered by his team as most suitable for sharing local experience. The theory of intersectionality is defined as the inclusion of the interaction of different perspectives and experiences (Stavrevska and Smith 2020). In conflict-affected societies, it helps to understand different needs and interests, as well as views of sustainable peace. In this regard, the Conflict School, which is conducted every year, is pitched not only to students from social studies disciplines but also youth above 18 years old from different specialties.

Another example of an informal peace education initiative is the Memory and Alternative History in Azerbaijan dialogue project conducted in the country since 2017 by the Berghof Foundation. According to the project manager at the Europe Unit of the Berghof Foundation, Bakhtiyar Aslanov, the main methodology of this project consists of collecting individual biographies of people affected by conflict and who witnessed the Karabakh wars and sharing these experiences with different groups including children from different regions of the country. In his belief, the use of individual biographical stories is important to foster, promote, and facilitate group discussions about social, historical, humanitarian, and individual issues. In this regard, the team of the Berghof Foundation in Azerbaijan has also created the Baku Biographical Salon, which became a physical space for the project. The Memory and Alternative History in Azerbaijan dialogue project itself is a long-term initiative with no criteria for participation, which, in turn, makes the project inclusive and helps it to interact with different grassroots and community groups from different regions of the country. According to Aslanov, the transformation goals of these initiatives are long-term (Interview with Aslanov 2022).

Independent facilitator and civil society activist Asiman Gojayev is also organizing and conducting different informal peace education initiatives in the regions of Azerbaijan. According to him (Interview with Gojayev 2022), with the help of local stakeholders - for example, the Regional Development and Career Centers, which have representatives in 55 regions of Azerbaijan - his team conducts various trainings for children between the ages of 12 and 18. During these three-to-four-day trainings, role-playing, theatre, and other interactive training methods are mainly used to explain to children the definitions of friend and enemy, as well as to pose the question "Do we need an enemy at all?" He points out that it is possible to observe the change in values and the mindset of children who participate in the training. He also noted that along with short-term strategy, they were able to see how participants began to share their values with their friends. Along with children, these projects are also aimed at primary and secondary school teachers and principals, since teachers have the power to instill new values to hundreds of their students, which, in turn, helps to achieve tangible results within a relatively short period.

When it comes to formal peace education, the initiatives in this setting are mostly implemented within one course in both schools and higher educational institutions. For instance, primary and secondary school students take the "social studies" ('Həyat bilgisi' ['Life skills']) course, which includes the basics of social sciences (philosophy, sociology, law, economics, and politics) and teaches students about people's rights and responsibilities as well as how to live in society and form a civic position. In turn, the curricula of higher education institutions include the "Conflict Studies" course, which, according to Abdullayev (Interview with Abdullayev 2022), includes mostly theoretical input and lacks practice-oriented content on the subject.

Although currently the peace education initiatives in Azerbaijan are mostly conducted by local and international NGOs, in the past there were also several projects in the country that involved formal educators and students from schools. For instance, during the 2004-2005 academic year, secondary school teachers in Azerbaijan were trained to apply 'controversy procedure' in the teaching process within the Deliberating in a Democracy Project (Avery et al. 2006). In turn, the controversy procedure technique is included in peace education programs and teaches students how to deliberate about controversial public issues to understand the

opinions and ideas of others (Johnson and Johnson 1995). According to the research conducted, the use of this procedure was positively perceived by teachers and pupils in Azerbaijan (Johnson and Johnson 2006).

It is worth mentioning that higher education in Azerbaijan is currently based on the principle of multiculturalism, which is officially stated as one of the core values of the country. Most of the higher education institutions across the country have the "Multiculturalism" course among other subjects in the curriculum (Bayramov 2017). In addition, followed by the establishment of the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre in 2014, the year 2016 was officially declared "the year of multiculturalism" in Azerbaijan. All these state initiatives were implemented to promote and develop traditions, values, and culture of multiculturalism.

Challenges and Opportunities

Regarding the 30-year conflict and the hatred produced from it, it is a kind of taboo to talk about peace and peace education in Azerbaijani society. That, in turn, can be considered one of the biggest challenges to promoting peace education. This challenge creates additional obstacles for peace education initiatives both in formal and informal sectors.

As mentioned in the previous section, in primary and secondary schools and higher educational institutions in Azerbaijan, peace education is mostly based on "Social studies" and "Conflict studies" courses. However, to instill the values and culture of peace in countries affected by conflict it is essential to include peace education in formal studies as a program of its own. According to Asiman Gojayev (Interview with Gojayev 2022), currently schools in Azerbaijan do not organize propaganda events aimed to instigate hatred toward the "enemy", which makes it possible to believe and hope that also informal peace education initiatives will have greater opportunities to impact children. In addition, another educational expert who was interviewed during our research and preferred to stay anonymous mentioned that this year they organized an event dedicated to peace in a secondary school. The main purpose of this small event, which was conducted by a group of pupils, was to spread the message of peace.

In our interview, peace education researcher Abbas Abbasov (Interview with Abbasov 2022) noted that by means of peace education it is possible to deactualize the history of conflict and consequently mitigate the hatred

produced from it. According to him, starting from first or second grade, children should be involved in peace education programs, since at this age it is easier to instill values and form children's mindsets with a more constructive, long-term, and sustainable position toward the conflict and to show another side of the conflict and a new perspective on it. Abbasov believes that peace education should include alternative history, which means that children should learn not only the tragedies experienced by their society but also the tragedies the other side faced during the conflict. However, since it will be difficult to teach about tragedies in primary school, according to Namig Abdullayev (Interview with Abdullayev 2022), the program can be started with human rights education. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Local Youth Peace Camp, which was organized in 2021 in Azerbaijan by the Council of Europe. The methodology of the four-day camp program was based on non-formal human rights education, which included promotion of skills such as non-violent communication, active listening, reconciliation, and empathy. In turn, the main goal of the event was to increase participation in the promotion of peace values among young people from the regions of Azerbaijan directly affected by the conflict.

Recently, there has been a particular trend leading to the establishment of connections between informal and formal institutions. In this regard, Asiman Gojayev, Namig Abdullayev, and Bakhtiyar Aslanov said in our interviews that during the implementation of peace education projects they often collaborate with various public institutions, such as regional youth houses, schools, universities, and local stakeholders. The format of these collaborations is mostly based on recruitment of participants, provision of training facilities, and sharing of experiences. For instance, Abdullayev mentioned that while organizing the projects in the field of peace education in regions of Azerbaijan such as Agdam, Barda and Mingechevir; local stakeholders, youth centers; and colleges helped them with the recruitment of participants and provided space for the implementation of these initiatives. In turn, Aslanov noted that since the education component is very strong in the strategy of their project, they often meet with officials and different institutions, for instance with local universities, to exchange experience, plans, and project outputs. He also believes that in near future these initiatives will be more open to the public and it will be possible to create connections with both public and private educational centers, even if this will take some time. In his opinion, after

the establishment of these ties, it will be feasible to include elective courses in universities based on their project. However, since the methodology of the "Memory and Alternative History in Azerbaijan" dialogue project is very convoluted and the collected stories are very traumatic, for now it cannot be implemented in primary and secondary schools.

Another challenge mentioned during interviews was the lack of expertise in the peace education field. Consequently, one of the main reasons for a relatively small number of local peace education programs and initiatives is the lack of peace education experts. According to Aslanov:

> [E]ven though Azerbaijan is a conflict-affected country, we do not have enough experts or organizations who could assist in creation of such programs, so there is a certain need to increase the numbers of peace education experts, researchers or think tanks, which will be focused on this topic.

Moreover, the important research produced by Anar Valiyev (Interview with Valiyev 2022) in his study of various peace education models implemented in universities around the world has not received enough attention and was not used for universities in Azerbaijan. Still, it is essential to encourage these kinds of research projects and initiatives and to apply their results locally.

Peace education initiatives should be aimed not only at children but also teachers since they are able to promote peace values among their students. In our interview (2022), Abbas Abbasov highlighted that along with peace education itself, it is important that teachers in primary and secondary schools undergo special training. Such trainings can be part of professional solidarity cooperation. For instance, in 2016 the conference entitled "Strengthening the capacity of teacher trade unions to contribute to the promotion of education as a tool for creating friendly, tolerant and peaceful education environments" organized by the European Trade Union Committee for Education in cooperation with its member organization in Azerbaijan, the Independent Trade Union of Education Workers of the Azerbaijan Republic in Azerbaijan, addressed issues related to conflict resolution and the promotion of peace education, as well as the values of peace, tolerance, nonviolence, and respect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our research explored the formal and informal peace education programs and their interlinkages in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the challenges and opportunities for peace education in both countries. Some peace education programs exist both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, although in various forms and using different methodologies. However, they have not been widely promoted in both countries due to dominant nationalistic discourses and policies that have considered peace education a sign of weakness and a threat to national security. Moreover, the issue of 'trust' is a great challenge to promoting peace education programs. Our interlocutors brought up several suggestions on how to improve the programs and described the importance of establishing connections between existing practices among Armenian and Azerbaijani experts. In this section, we develop recommendations based on the suggestions that emerged from the interviews as well as from our analysis of peace education practices in Finland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. These recommendations are addressed to international donors, local and international CSOs experts in education and peacebuilding, and policymakers. Our main recommendations to improve the field of peace education in Armenia and Azerbaijan are the following:

- **Conflict-sensitive and context-specific approach.** International donors and NGOs should be cautious and not to bring ready-made examples from other countries but carefully consider the elements of peace education principles in other countries and their relevance to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict context, together with the local partners, so as to make sure these approaches are context-specific and conflict-sensitive. In this regard, it is also very important to ensure that the peace education programs are developed by local NGOs, as they have better chance at introducing such sensitive topics to their constituencies.

- **Long-term support and engagement.** For the peace education programs to be sustainable, the donors should engage in long-term projects which in addition to regular monitoring and evaluation would include continuous feedback from teachers, pupils, and parents to continuously improve their work with local beneficiaries over the years.

- **Conducting a pre-assessment.** A pre-assessment should be conducted in order to identify children's needs and assess their readiness for the planned peace education program. Only then, based on local needs and perspectives, the peace education program can be created. This pre-assessment can be done, for example, through pilot projects as part of some summer schools, which could include trips for local children to travel to other conflict-affected areas, where they can meet communities affected by another conflict. The documented results from summer schools could form a basis for the pre-assessment.

- **Adopting a holistic approach.** Peace education should be included in every subject of curricula. Therefore, some textbooks, methodology, and pedagogical approaches need to be modified according to the intended program.

- **Adopting an inclusive approach.** Personnel who will be directly involved in the program should also include people with a background in peace education or peacebuilding, as well as representatives from conflict-affected communities. It will help to make the process of peace education more inclusive and take into account different perspectives, including from those who were directly affected by the conflict.

- **Creating interlinkage with human rights.** Since human rights are one of the pillars for peace and sustainability, the peace education program can be based on education in human rights, which will help to promote friendship, mutual understanding, tolerance, and non-violence. The program should include both theoretical and practical inputs. Accordingly, the topics related to the culture of peace, theories of peace, and conflict resolution practices need to be part of the human rights education curricula. Thus, the school program for younger age children can be based on non-formal education methodology helping to answer a general question such as "How to solve the conflict between people?" In higher grades, pupils could start analyzing more complicated cases, including the Karabakh issue.

- **Promoting cooperation and exchange between the formal education institutions and the NGOs specialized in education** (i.e., linkages between formal and non-formal education programs). As mentioned above, there is a lot of information and

knowledge about peace education in the non-formal field (mainly developed by NGOs), which is not synchronized with and does not reach formal education. Building bridges to connect non-formal and formal education is important so that the knowledge of non-formal education can be institutionalized.

- For the NGOs developing peace educational programs, **involving the teachers and the relevant official institutions** (such as Ministry of Education and agencies affiliated to the Ministry) starting from the initial phase is crucial so as to develop a program in cooperation with state institutions. In this way, there will be greater likelihood that the program is accepted and implemented, and so will make its way into the formal curriculum or at least influence educational policies.

- **Promoting exchange of peace educational practices** among professionals from Armenia and Azerbaijan. In both countries, there is a lack of understanding and information about various peace education initiatives on the other side of the conflict. Opening channels to exchange practices would fill this gap and inform relevant parties about the efforts made in this direction on both sides of the conflict divide. The positive examples of colleagues from 'the other side' would motivate professionals working in peace education.

- **Developing peace educational programs within the South Caucasus region**. In this regard, practices of peace education in Georgia could be also studied and linked to the existing practices in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Cross-border initiatives would foster regional cooperation, contribute to restoring trust between the conflicting parties and, consequently, make those programs more acceptable to the wider public.

To conclude, the three-decade rivalry between Armenia and Azerbaijan and hatred produced by it create challenges for the implementation of both formal and informal peace education programs. In turn, collective trauma is one reason for the distrust and reluctance of the population to create good neighborly relations. In addition, the dominance of nationalist discourses throughout the decades of the conflict has not allowed people to be fully inculcated the values of peace and tolerance—on the contrary, these discourses have instilled certain reflexes regarding the 'enemy' and

its 'threats.' Despite the frequent escalations of the military conflict at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and uncertain prospects for peace in the South Caucasus region, the currently regular meetings between the officials of the two countries, as well as the creation of liaison groups between Armenian and Azerbaijani expert communities offer hope that there is a space for dialogue that can pave the way for conflict transformation. In this context, peace education initiatives and programs can play an important role in promoting mutual acceptance, understanding, and non-violent communication. We believe that the increase and promotion of peace education initiatives and their inclusion in school curricula will help educate a new generation with peace values and break the vicious circle of ethnocentric hatred and violence between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies.

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