Democratic Approaches in Education
and Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT: In this paper the author asserts that as post-conflict Kosovo has emerged from the stage of emergency rehabilitation towards long-term development planning to independence, its peaceful and successful development largely depends on the development of a strong education system based on tolerance and human rights values. This paper looks at ways to promote an education system which accessible to all and also builds on the human potential of Kosovo by encouraging democratic behavior amongst the younger generation. The author asserts that traditional teaching in schools is no longer appropriate and looks at efforts to introduce new approaches to teaching. She suggests that a transformation is needed in order to have effective reforms. Part of this transformation suggests that educators in Kosovo will need to better understand that, while the country may be undergoing a transformation, teaching is a changing and dynamic profession with continuing demands and that education and professional development is a lifelong process.

KEYWORDS: Kosovo, transformational education, second language teaching, democratic education, student-centered curriculum, post-conflict development, human rights.

As Kosovo moves from a stage of emergency rehabilitation towards long-term sustainable planning, its peaceful and successful development largely depends on the establishment of a strong educational system based on tolerance and human rights values. There is a critical need to reform the education system, which was left in shambles after the Kosovo war (the end of direct rule by Serbia). Such an educational system should not only be accessible to all but also build on the human potential of Kosovo by encouraging democratic behavior for future generations. A number of key agencies (Kosovo Educator Development Project – KEDP, UNICEF, World Bank, etc.) have worked with the Ministry of Education and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to develop and modernize the education system. This system aspires to comply with international standards and better respond to
the needs of Kosovo’s children. Consistent with this transition, and perhaps transformation, this paper will examine the democratic approaches in education and language teaching that are being introduced in Kosovo. Furthermore, I shall explore possible ways of introducing new teaching and learning strategies from the perspective of learner-centered instruction as a more interactive pedagogy.

**Historical Background**

The current educational context in Kosovo is shaped not only by its well-known recent history of violent conflict but also by the political events and processes of the last 30 years. In 1974, Kosovo was given autonomous status under the constitution of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. As such, Kosovo was responsible for the governance of its own education system. This relative autonomy ended as Kosovo lost its autonomous status and fell under direct control from Serbia (Belgrade) in the early 1990s. This resulted in a rapidly deteriorating context for schools and universities as Kosovo-Albanian teachers, academics, and administrators were removed by force from their posts and replaced by Kosovo-Serbs and Serbs from Serbia. Being robbed of the right for proper education, Kosovo-Albanians responded by using their own resources and the resources from a very large Kosovo-Albanian diaspora to develop a parallel educational system. This parallel system largely used the existing syllabi and teachers worked as volunteers or with modest payment coming from local residents and the Kosovo diaspora. Albanian primary school children could, in some cases, continue to go to their regular schools, but wherever Serbian children also attended, the school buildings were physically segregated or Serbian and Albanian children attended school in different shifts. Most secondary and university students studied in private homes.

Despite the great creativity of Kosovo-Albanian communities and the numerous efforts of teachers and parents to ensure the survival of a functioning school system, the quality of education inevitably declined. The outbreak of violent conflict in early 1998 did not help the education system in Kosovo as regular schooling and family life were disrupted. The conflict ended in 1999 and Kosovo’s education system became the responsibility of the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and in particular the Ministry of Education and Science. Initially, the efforts of these institutions were concentrated on the improvement of the physical infrastructure and resources, but recently the emphasis has been shifted to the improvement of the quality of education.