

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Truth commissions and national curriculum: The case of the *Recordándonos* resource in Peru

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This paper traces the trajectory and development of a curriculum resource based on Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR)). The resource, which comprises three workbooks for primary and secondary school students respectively and two teachers manuals, was developed following the presentation of the CVR's final report in August 2003. The result of an agreement between the CVR and the Ministry of Education, the *Recordándonos* workbooks were intended to be adopted as supplementary resources to be used in primary communication classes and in secondary social science lessons, as well as in lessons on human rights, which considered a cross-cutting theme through Peru's National Curriculum Design.

The design and implementation of truth commission-based curricula merits attention for a number of reasons. Reaching consensus around how (and whether) to teach about the recent violent past is often a major concern facing educational policymakers in postconflict contexts. Therefore, it is useful to ask how a truth commission's work, and the version of conflict it produces, – often understood by TRC proponents as an 'official version' – might serve curriculum developers, teachers and students. Likewise, truth commissions are often criticized for producing unwieldy and inaccessible final reports and for lacking continuity upon the completion of their mandates. In this respect closer linkages with the educational sector, and engagement with classroom processes, may hold potential both for truth commission dissemination and for an enhanced social impact of truth commission findings. Despite this potential this paper finds that truth commissions are in fact rarely used in national curriculum, making Peru's intended use of the CVR in curriculum of great interest.

The paper is based on qualitative research conducted in Peru in 2008, including interviews with members of the *Recordándonos* team, Ministry of Education officials and former Commissioners and staff of the CVR. The paper traces the development and internal pilot of the *Recordándonos* resource by a team from a Peruvian University Education Department and a national human rights NGO. It then charts the attempted approval process of the *Recordándonos* resource within the Ministry of Education. *Recordándonos* was presented to the Peruvian Ministry of Education in 2004 during the administration of Alejandro Toledo's Peru Posible party frequently described as being without 'human rights debt' due to the party's creation following the end of Peru's armed conflict. Despite the Toledo government's lack of involvement in the period under investigation by CVR, and the agreement between the Ministry of Education and the CVR to produce educational materials, *Recordándonos* was approved for use in national curriculum.

Instead, *Recordándonos* was first subsumed within a broader Ministry of Education policy framework that targeted materials specifically towards target schools identified as the most vulnerable – generally schools in rural or impoverished urban areas serving

largely indigenous populations. This decision was taken on the grounds that *Recordándonos* would aid in ‘preventing future conflict’ since the vulnerable communities had the same characteristics of those most involved in Peru’s conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the paper argues that confining *Recordándonos* to this initiative in fact undermined one of the CVR’s principal messages; namely that all Peruvians held some responsibility for Peru’s conflict and therefore ought to learn about its realities. Subsequently, the *Recordándonos* initiative was denounced by members of Congress and authorities within the Ministry of Defence as inappropriate for the nation’s children given its condemnation of the Peruvian armed forces’ role in conflict. The 2006 election of a President who had also led the country during five of the twenty-year period investigated by the CVR took the *Recordándonos* initiative firmly off the Ministry of Education’s agenda.

A close attention to the case of *Recordándonos* demonstrates again the deeply political nature of national curriculum and challenges inherent in narrating recent and contested conflict. Indeed, in Peru the attempted transfer of the truth commission ‘official version’ into national curriculum appears to have engendered more opportunity for politically motivated criticism of the CVR than for balanced teaching and learning about the violent past. Therefore, the paper argues that such efforts should be accompanied by conscious and explicit policymaking around teaching about recent conflict. The paper concludes with a series of lessons learned from the Peruvian case and offers recommendations for curriculum development around truth commission processes more generally.

From the lessons and recommendations, key points include: 1) the importance of clear policy to accompany the development of curriculum content around the recent violent past; 2) the importance of considerable resources for teacher training around such components; 3) the importance of early and sustained coordination with the Ministry of Education in externally led efforts; 4) the need to include multiple perspectives, a diversity of sources and space for students’ own historical enquiry; 5) the value of encouraging public dialogue around the methods and approaches towards teaching and learning about recent conflict.