

### Book Review

**Review of *Peace Education Evaluation: Learning from Experience and Exploring Prospects*.** Edited by Celina Del Felice, Aaron Karako and Andria Wisler, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, North Carolina, 2015, 329 pp., (paperback), ISBN 1623969735, £79.50 (hardcover), ISBN 1623969743

By: Basma Hajir  
University of Cambridge  
bh452@cam.ac.uk

Amid a global crisis of rising violence, bigotry, racism and xenophobia, the legitimacy of peace education has become increasingly evident. A field ridden with complexity, peace education grapples with creating structures that facilitate building an equitable world, with increased tolerance and change perceptions of the self and the other. Such ambitious goals make building a wider net of support to the field more challenging, mainly because of the complications they pose on the evaluability of peace education programmes. Despite the inherent difficulty, evaluation is indispensable to determine impact, learn from activities done and improve future implementation. By foregrounding evaluation, *Peace Education Evaluation* by Felice, Karako and Wisler is a valuable contribution to the field. The book advances our understanding of intrinsic dilemmas and predicaments that lie at the heart of peace education evaluation. It explores a wide range of pertinent efforts and practices that highlight the multiple, ever-evolving forms of evaluation. The book also offers a light of hope by combining critiques and reflections with theoretical and practical guidance for novel forms of praxis.

In their introduction to the volume, Felice, Karako and Wisler suggest that “assessing outcomes of peace education requires specific redesign of existing evaluation tools” (p. xviii) applied in a variety of fields. They argue

that such outcomes should be examined from the three perspectives of education, efficacy and pedagogy. This three-dimensional conceptualisation of an appropriate approach to assessment seems particularly relevant. It evokes an awareness of the need for developing evaluation tools that transcend a focus on behavioural changes and that enable us to practically follow the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the learners. It also stresses that due attention should be paid to the extent to which the evaluation tools reflect the empowering principles of peace education. The volume is composed of three main parts, each attending to one of its three primary objectives: To critically reflect on 'theoretical and methodological issues' associated with peace education evaluation; to examine 'existing evaluation practices'; and to 'propose novel ideas and techniques for evaluation'.

Part one includes five chapters that collectively succeed in conveying theoretical and methodological complications inherent in the evaluation of peace education. Both chapter one by Hakim Williams and chapter two by Werner Wintersteiner speak out forcibly against positivist evaluative methodologies. They explicitly reject standardised evaluation criteria and articulate the need for developing specific ways of evaluation that take into account the complexity of peace education. While Williams commends the interpretive turn as a "reflexive interrogation of power" (p.13) and a "step in the right direction" (p. 16), Wintersteiner warns against trusting "an evaluation that reduces the complexity of education to a small list of parameters and numbers." (p. 22). In chapter two, Wintersteiner borrows the term "habitus" from Bourdieu and proposes it as a promising element that could enable us to transcend evaluation approaches that insufficiently focus on either a change of attitude or an increase of knowledge. He calls for creating a culture of feedback and reflection as a first step towards serving participants' own needs instead of the needs of the system. Similarly, the subsequent chapter by Hopson and Stokes advocates more participatory and culturally responsive evaluation practices that are informed by a deep understanding of nuanced local perspectives (chapter 3). This is vital if we are to add an in-built authenticity and promote the effectiveness and sustainability of the programmes. Cheryl Woelk narrows the discussion down and focuses on one major element of culture, namely language (chapter 4). Woelk reflects on language dynamics and their impact on participants' identities and experiences of reality. This chapter proposes that employing 'reflective practice' to evaluate the role of language in peace education evaluation is a promising avenue of practice. Chapter five brings part one to a close. In this chapter, Christina Procter and Erin Dunlevy suggest new ways to assessing the efficacy of restorative practices in schools. While the authors briefly engage in a critique of methodological issues related to restorative practice, the central argument of this chapter revolves around re-defining schools as systems of groups, establishing the link between restorative practices and group therapy and drawing attention to the potential benefits that can be gained from the evaluation criteria already established in psychotherapy

methodology. In this way, the value of this chapter lies in proposing a novel idea for evaluation. Having said that, I find the location of this chapter at the end of part one somehow controversial. In fact, Felice, Karako and Wisler state in their introduction of the book that this chapter is the first chapter in section two. Apart from this misalignment between the structure of the book as presented in the editor's introduction and the actual division of the three parts, I believe that by introducing a novel idea of evaluation, chapter five does indeed better serve the objective of part three of the book.

Part two includes 11 chapters that map manifold existing evaluation practices of different forms of peace education in a variety of international settings. This part starts with chapter 6 that can be perceived as highly informative in its own terms. However, it falls short when considered against the main objective of the second part of the book. While Roberta and Warren Heydenberk offer a thorough theoretical discussion on bullying and present promising practices for prevention and intervention, they discuss briefly, in the very last page of the chapter, the assessment and evaluation of such interventions. Given that, I believe that part two could have made a much more robust beginning had it commenced with what is currently chapter seven that directly contributes to fulfilling the objective of part two. Chapter seven by Antonia Mandry closely examines a Civic Involvement Project in higher education in Turkey. It elaborates on and critiques the used evaluation measures and argues persuasively for stronger evaluation techniques that match the ambitious scope and goals of the CIP project.

Part two of this volume is at its strongest when there is a clear theoretical lens behind the discussed evaluation practices such as chapter eight by Rajashree Srinivasan that explores the use of authentic assessment practices as a tool to prepare reflective peace builders. Highlighting the need for collaborative reflective inquiry and journal writing, Rajashree suggests that the evaluation of peace education can build on different modes of inquiry proposed by Reardon<sup>1</sup> (2011) to develop assessment rubrics that would enable us to better evaluate peace education. Another promising example emerges in chapter ten by H.B. Danesh. Danesh examines the Education for Peace programme (EFP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This programme views issues of conflict, violence and peace within the framework of the Integrated Theory of Peace (ITP). The project identified four dimensions of a successful peace education program and developed specific criteria to provide the necessary information and feedback regarding these dimensions. The key contribution of this chapter lies in shifting the focus to the importance of conceptual clarity of the evaluation design and comprehensive strategies of implementation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Critical/ analytic, moral/ ethical, and contemplative/ ruminative

Chapter nine by Zulfiya Tursunova highlights the potential of use of narrative methodology as a bottom up participatory evaluation tool that empowers participants critical thinking and places their needs at the centre of peace and conflict educational programs. While assessing long term impact is incredibly difficult, chapters 11 by Ned Lazarus and 12 by Wehrenfennig, Brunstetter and Solomon present two examples of two longitudinal evaluations. These two chapters have two strengths. First, they yield insights specific to peace education in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Second, they provide broader recommendations and conclusions on some practices that could positively contribute to longer term impact in other intractable conflict contexts. For example, while chapter 11 highlights the importance of follow up support activities, chapter 12 suggests keeping students actively involved in the program even after they return or graduate. Part two also offers a worthwhile input for those interested in non-formal peace education programs for youth (chapters 13 by Villanueva et al. and 14 by Susan Armitage).

The argument of chapter 15 by Ruerd Ruben seems to extend beyond the focus of this volume and triggers a question around its pertinence. By providing an examination of two distinctive evaluation studies in South Sudan and Rwanda, Ruben critiques the tendency of most bilateral and multilateral donors to invest in the reconstruction of physical infrastructure, recovery of facilities and service provision at the expense of paying due attention to the content of educational curriculum. Thus, the chapter focuses on evaluating peace-building and reconstruction rather than peace education per se. Given the wider implications of peace-building, the question naturally arises of the extent to which this chapter fits in with the purpose of the volume in general and part two in particular. In fact, the author of this chapter explicitly states the broader implications of peace-building. He does so by advocating support for civil society and local community actors and by calling for investments in peace education to address the behavioural dimension of the conflict. As expressed by the author, this is a crucial step “to support peacebuilding from below” (p. 235). While this chapter is one of the most interesting in the book, the editors’ lack of explanation on the ways in which it is different from other chapters limits the degree to which it contributes to fulfilling the objective of the volume. Some reflection on its relevance could have possibly made it more convincing.

Chapter 16 by Thonon and Ospina, the last chapter in part two, focuses on the evaluation of peace education initiatives at a structural level. The authors tackle key questions around methodological challenges to evaluating peace education and relate them to the three basic principles of the theory of complexity defined Edgar Morin (1995). By identifying some criteria for a future development of peace education indicators at a national level, the chapter seems to better serve the objective of part three of this book. In fact, the editors mention in their introduction that this chapter is the first chapter of part three. Again, this is another example of misalignment between the structure of the

book as presented in the editor's introduction and the actual division of the three parts.

The last part of this volume consists of four chapters that blend insightful suggestions for novel techniques of evaluation. Chapter 17 by Karen Ross draws on the scholarship of social activism and introduces a cogent argument for alternative approaches that can be used to expand an understanding of what success might look like in the field of peace education. Chapter 18 by Naghmeh Yazdanpanah sheds light on the blurred boundaries between education and evaluation and suggests that peace education itself is a constant evaluation of the quality of life. While this chapter is too theoretical for those looking for novel practical ideas, it includes a valuable elucidation of thematic similarities of the thoughts of Bakhtin, Freire, and Gandhi and proposes 'a pedagogy of addressivity' as an evaluator of peace education. Chapter 19 by Thomas de Hoop and Annette Brown stands in stark contrast to the arguments presented all throughout the volume around rejecting positivist approaches of evaluation and remaining loyal to the values that inspire the field. It discusses the use of comparison groups in rigorous impact evaluations and presents examples of quantitatively-oriented counterfactual analysis. Given this difference, more reflection on this chapter by the editors would have been pertinent. Chapter 20 by Maria Lucia Uribe Torres suggests an evaluation model that places the educator at the heart of the evaluation process and proposes self-reflection as a tool to encourage transformations at individual and organisational levels. This last chapter is particularly strong for shedding light on a crucial element to the success of all educational activities in general. Therefore, peace education evaluation should extend to encompass the skills, values, attitudes and behaviours of educators as well.

In conclusion, the volume could benefit from a reconsideration of its structuring and from further editorial reflection, specifically on a few chapters that seem to deviate away from the main argument of the volume and trigger some tangential questions (chapter 15 and 19 for example). Despite this, the book is a significant contribution to the field. As a peace education scholar who is designing a peace education intervention, I found it greatly helpful. It equipped me with a rich understanding of existing critiques, tensions, complications and practices of evaluation. It also inspired me with ideas towards developing a methodology for the evaluation of my intervention. By spanning a multitude of existing evaluation practices on a global scale and opening up novel avenues and possibilities, *Peace Education Evaluation* is undoubtedly a useful resource for a wide range of audiences.