Book and media reviews

A fruitful banyan tree of peace and human rights

Reviewed by
Nomisha Kurian
University of Cambridge, UK, nck28@cam.ac.uk

Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction represents another rich and complex work by renowned peace educators Maria Hantzopoulous and Monisha Bajaj. In this book, Monisha and Maria draw on their wealth of academic and practitioner experience to draw transdisciplinary connections between human rights education and peace education. Their work provides a thoughtful and concise overview of both fields, flagging their differences and similarities as well as evolutions and contestations across the past few decades. It is thus a valuable text for scholars, practitioners and educators at all stages of their journey in peace education, human rights education, and related fields.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 traces the origin and evolution of peace education, shining a light on pressing debates in the field. Chapter 2 animates the theories introduced in the previous chapter with two formal and non-formal examples of peace education in the United States. Chapter 3 turns to human rights education, charting the development of the field. Chapter 4 draws on two case studies of transformative human rights education from India and Bangladesh. Bridge-building begins in Chapter 5. This chapter charts the goals and approaches that both fields have in common and also discusses the concepts of dignity, agency and liberatory education. Lastly, Chapter 6 presents a dialogue between the

advisory board members of this Bloomsbury book series. This conversational format illustrates key debates, reflections, and guidance for researchers, practitioners and students. The book also includes an extensive annotated bibliography of important literature in both peace education and human rights education.

A major strength of the work is its close attention to the lived experience of students and communities engaging with peace and human rights education. The book's theoretical rigour is enhanced by a range of case studies showcasing practical examples of teaching and learning across diverse cultural contexts. This animation of theory helps make the work useful and accessible to academic and practitioner audiences alike. Moreover, the carefully contextualised explorations of critical consciousness help fulfil Monisha's own call for 'renewed attention to larger structural realities, particularly in the Global South' (Bajaj, 2008, p. 138). An ever-growing number of peace educators stress the importance of nuanced understandings of local contexts (Salomon & Nevo, 2002; Wessells, 2012; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013). Sensitivity to the lived experiences of peace praxis has been deemed 'absolutely imperative' (Call-Cummings & Hook 2015, p. 106). Maria and Monisha therefore make a significant contribution towards pushing both peace and human rights education to 're-engage intimately with structural analysis' (Kester & Cremin 2017, 1418). Notably, they accomplish this criticality while still centering the voices of students, teachers and families.

Another strength of the work is its creative distillation of complex conceptualisations. For example, the authors visualise a peace and human rights education 'possibility tree' which suggests how the two fields 'interlock foundationally - despite their distinct characteristics' (Hantzopoulos & Bajaj, 2021, p. 10). In doing so, they build on Paulo Freire's 'problem tree' (a visual conceptualisation of systemic oppression) and explore how 'dignity' and 'transformative agency' can conceptually 'provide some of the nourishing soil to the intertwined roots' of peace and human rights education (p. 115). They also provide a visual of a banyan tree with ever-expanding roots (p. 97) to show the emergent and process-driven nature of the two fields. The tree takes on symbolic life as 'the pedagogy of peace and human rights education in action, both in process and as a 'work-in-progress' product' (p. 10). This aligns with a growing number of studies that employ the aesthetics of peace to craft hopeful responses to direct and indirect violence (Cremin, 2018; Bevington, Kurian & Cremin, 2019). Using ecological metaphors also conveys Monisha and Maria's commitment to praxis that is organic, dynamic and sustainable rather than stagnant. Their 'visual catalyst for imagining new worlds and possibilities' (p. 6) is thus highly effective.

The dialogical nature of the final chapter also shows the work 'walking the talk' – by adopting a polyvocality that reflects the inclusive aims of peace and human rights education. In a time when academics are increasingly cognisant of the need for accessible and engaging research, creative and personal approaches to writing and thinking about peace and justice are

flourishing (e.g., Cremin et al, 2021; Cremin, 2018). Maria and Monisha's choice to foreground personal communication with other scholars in their closing chapter is thus admirable. The reader interacts with leading voices such as Nancy Flowers, Asha Hans, Michalinos Zembylas, and Margo Okazawa-Rey, thereby benefiting from Monisha and Maria's generosity of spirit in a way that seems fitting for peace and human rights scholarship. Their choice may encourage scholars who are interested in departing from the solipsistic conventions of academic writing and adopting fresh dialogical approaches.

If one could ask for additions to this rich text, then attention to peace educators' own welfare might be a worthwhile extension of the banyan tree. It is understandable for an introductory text to centre around students and young people as the intended beneficiaries of peace and human rights education. There is increasing recognition, however, that educational innovations cannot achieve their intended effects without attention to educators' own struggles. A rising body of literature explores the vulnerability of peace educators as imperfect human beings who face their own psychic turmoil in unequal and conflict-ridden societies (Cremin & Kester, 2017; Kurian & Kester, 2019). For example, Kurian's (2020) case study of Indian teachers' 'everyday tensions and frustrations' suggests that 'moments of seeming failure might yield fresh understandings of sociocultural complexities' and reveals how peace educators struggle with the same social and structural barriers that hinder their students (p. 187). Moreover, the stories of Southern peace educators show that teachers carrying marginalised identities may battle the same oppression that their pedagogy tries to challenge (Kurian & Kester, 2019). Such struggles affect the sustainability of peace and human rights praxis. If the 'lifeblood' of educators goes unnurtured - that is, if they cannot feel safe, be well, or 'ask for help and support without fear of judgement' - then initiative for societal change may feel 'hollow and ineffective' (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021, p. 14). Perhaps future work could depict educator wellbeing as core to sustainable peace and human rights education.

Overall, *Educating for peace and human rights: An introduction* is an exceptional text from two luminaries of the field who skilfully synthesise and integrate two distinct yet interconnected fields. In building bridges and signposting new paths, it promises to serve as a valuable foundation for academics, students, school-based educators and practitioners across a range of fields directly, or indirectly, related to peace and human rights.

References

Bevington, T., Kurian, N., & Cremin, H. (2019). Peace education and citizenship education: Shared critiques. In Peterson, A., Stahl, G. & Soong, H. (Eds.), *Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67905-1_51-1

Call-Cummings, M. & M. R. Hook. (2015). Endorsing empowerment? A critical comparative study of peace education in Jamaica and Peru. *Journal of Peace Education*, 12(1), 92-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2014.970616

Cremin, H., Aryoubi, H., Hajir, B., Kurian, N., & Salem, H. (2021). Post-abyssal ethics in education research in settings of conflict and crisis: Stories from the field. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(4), 1102-1119. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3712

Cremin, H. (2018). An Autoethnography of a Peace Educator: Deepening Reflections on Research, Practice, and the Field. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 28, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.05.001

Cremin, H. & Kester, K. (2017). "Bare-foot Hope for Peace: Vulnerability in Peace Learning." In McKenna, M. & Brantmeier, E. (Eds.), *The Pedagogy of Vulnerability*. North Carolina: Information Age Publishing.

Culshaw, S. & Kurian, N. (2021). Love as the lifeblood of being-well: a call to care for teachers in England's schools. *Journal of Pastoral Care in Education*, 39(3), 269-290. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2021.1938647

Kurian, N. (2020) 'Kindness isn't important, we need to be scared': disruptions to the praxis of peace education in an Indian school. *Journal of Peace Education*, 17(2), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2020.1728237

Kurian, N. & Kester, K. (2019). Southern voices in peace education: interrogating race, marginalisation and cultural violence in the field. *Journal of Peace Education*, 16(1), 1-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2018.1546677

Salomon, G., & Nevo, B. (Eds.) (2002). *Peace Education: The Concepts, Principles, and Practices around the World*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Wessells, M. (2012). Cosmology, Context, and Peace Education: A View from War Zones. In P. Trifonas and B. Wright (Eds.), *Critical Peace Education: Difficult Dialogues* (pp. 89–99). Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-3945-3_6

Zembylas, M. & Z. Bekerman (2013). Peace Education in the Present: Dismantling and Reconstructing Some Fundamental Theoretical Premises. *Journal of Peace Education*, 10(2), 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2013.790253