

Book Review

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Del Felice, C., Karako, A., & Wisler, A. (Eds.). (2015).

Peace education evaluation: Learning from experience and exploring

prospects. Charlotte, NC: Information Age. 329 pp. \$45.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781623969738.

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As I sit down to write this review of *Peace Education Evaluation*, an edited volume by Celina Del Felice, Aaron Karako, and Andria Wisler, I am acutely aware of the context in which I find myself writing. Just a few days ago, a young Black man was shot and killed by a White police officer during an arrest in Minneapolis, the city I call home. His death was preceded just a few days by terrorist attacks in Lebanon and France and followed by bombings in Yemen and Iraq and a mass shooting in Southern California. It also took place in the midst of a massive refugee crisis, resulting from the ongoing civil war in Syria. By the time this review is published, these events will be yesterday's news and countless more lives will have been lost to violence.

Within this context of violence, fear, racism, and xenophobia, peace education offers some hope for the future. Indeed, in the book's foreword, Federico Mayor Zaragoza sets a tone of optimism and expectation, suggesting the potential of peace education to create a more democratic and just society. If peace education offers possibility for a more peaceful future, the question then becomes: how do we know whether peace education can deliver on such lofty promises? In this volume, the editors attempt to capture the opportunities, challenges, assets, and barriers to evaluating peace education. The book is an important field-building effort that offers a wealth of examples and case studies from across the wide range of peace education programs. Despite this value, it would have benefited from a stronger editorial stance that offered more analysis and direction for the field.

This book is the result of a 10-year project on the part of the editors to respond to three identified gaps: a dearth of examples and models of peace education evaluation, a set of common challenges in evaluating peace education, and the need for peace education-specific evaluation frameworks and tools. The volume is intended to provide information for "the many varied actors in the field of peace education," including practitioners, funders, policy makers, evaluators, researchers, and students. Ultimately, the editors wanted to show that peace education can be evaluated in a way that supports the development of the field. In this aim, I believe they were successful, despite one chapter that completely misses the mark. More on that later.

Peace Education Evaluation is organized into three sections with three "interrelated objectives." In the first section, the editors gathered what they call "critical reflections" on theoretical and methodological issues related to the evaluation of peace education programs and interventions. The objective of this section was to offer insight into "the nature of peace and the principles guiding peace education, as well as governing theories and assumptions of change, transformation, and complexity" (p. xviii). This section is composed of four chapters,¹ which form a compelling narrative that the traditional "business of evaluation" as top-down, donor-driven, and summative is neither aligned with the principles of peace education nor appropriate, given the complexity and

importance of context in peace education. In Chapter 3, Rodney K. Hopson and Helga Stokes capture the sentiment well:

Outcomes-based evaluation with pre- and post-tests or the use of control groups is made difficult by fluid and changing environments, confounding variables, hard to quantify outcomes, and often subtle changes that are unique for individual participants. Formative and summative evaluation might shed some light on program implementation, but it would be beneficial if such evaluations go together with an understanding of a larger context and the lived experience of participants and demonstrate cultural responsiveness. (p. 41)

As an evaluator with a background in peace and conflict resolution, I personally think Hopson and Stokes are holding back. I received my master's in peace and conflict resolution from American University in 2007 and have been working as a program manager and evaluator of youth civic engagement and global education programs for the past 9 years. During that time, I came face to face with many attempts to evaluate complex, nonlinear programs with rigid evaluation designs. It is not simply "difficult" but all too often detrimental and inappropriate. In Chapter 2, Werner Wintersteiner takes a harder stance, suggesting the field "reject standardized evaluation criteria and methods coming from outside . . . [and] develop genuine ways of evaluation for such a special field as peace education, based on ethical principles" (p. 24). While I would challenge the suggestion that peace education is "special" in its need to align evaluation with ethical principles, I believe the sentiment is right on.

Indeed, most of the challenges to peace education described in these chapters are not unique to the field but are faced by many related fields. In the Introduction, the editors acknowledge that ". . . the literature and experience of related fields, such as development education, civic education, and comparative and international education, must be utilized for comparison, adaptation, and inspiration" (p. xviii). Yet many of the challenges highlighted throughout the book seem to suggest that they are unique to peace education. For example, several authors write about the mistrust of evaluation in the peace education community. I think many evaluators might agree that this field is not alone in this mistrust, which comes from years of evaluation being used in a top-down manner that reinforces unequal power dynamics and can do more harm than good. Wintersteiner describes this history well in Chapter 2 in his discussion of the "business of evaluation." Still, the reality of mistrust among peace education practitioners remain a critical issue that I believe was addressed well throughout most of the volume.

After setting the stage with some principles for evaluation of peace education programs, namely that they be participatory, consider power dynamics, and use culturally responsive and appropriate language and methods, Section 2 provides case studies and examples of existing evaluation practices of peace education to identify existing needs and promising practices. This section includes 11 chapters, each of which describes an evaluation of a specific peace education program. The chapters vary with regard to program, evaluation approach, and evaluand—ranging from school-based programs in relatively peaceful countries and communities to community-based programs in conflict zones.

While it is beyond the scope of this review to summarize each chapter, I will highlight those I found most useful and aligned with the principles that the book offers. Rajashree Srinivasan explores the use of "authentic assessments in higher education" in Chapter 8. Srinivasan discusses how rubrics can be used to assess reflective inquiry and capture "the subtleties and complexities of human thinking and understanding" (p. 126). She drives home the assertion from Section 1 in writing that "the nature of peace education renders summative assessment practices obsolete. Authentic assessment of learning, its quality, significance and relevance is most truly and usefully performed by the learner, not the teacher or those who have authorized her" (p. 126).

Zulfiya Tursunova reports on use of the narrative method for evaluating transformative learning in Chapter 9. Ned Lazarus shares the successes and challenges of longitudinal evaluation of the well-known and long-standing Seeds of Peace program in Chapter 11. Cécile Barbeito Thonon and Johanna Ospina explore the possibility of using national indicators to assess peace education in Chapter 16. While several authors discuss the peace education evaluation challenge of identifying the appropriate focus of the evaluation within a theory of change that connects changes in individual behaviors to systems change, Barbeito Thonon and Ospina address this challenge head-on by walking readers through a review of complexity theory and highlighting the complex nature of peace education. But again, the description of peace education as complex gave the sense that it is somehow unique in this position. Many fields claim that individual-level outcomes contribute to systems-level outcomes in the long term but struggle to find appropriate methods to support this claim.

The objective of the third and final section is to propose ideas of evaluation, novel techniques for experimentation, and creative adaptation of tools from related fields. It includes chapters on using a social movement lens for evaluating peace education, peace education as inherently evaluative, using a counterfactual to evaluate peace education, and evaluating peace education training programs.

In Chapter 18, Naghmeh Yazdanpanah describes a “pedagogy of addressivity,” which sheds light on the “organic evaluative and educative quality of life” (p. 284). For Yazdanpanah, the inherently evaluative nature of life provides an opportunity for peace education programs to engage in evaluation for learning and accountability in a way that upholds their democratic principles and participatory ideals. I found this discussion compelling but a little too theoretical for my taste. Thankfully, it was complemented nicely by Chapter 20, in which Maria Lucia Uribe Torres provides a concrete example of a program that embedded evaluation in the design of a teacher training program. Together, these chapters build nicely on the framing offered in the first section and serve well to provide some concrete examples of how this type of evaluation can be carried out.

Chapter 19, an examination of counterfactual analyses by Thomas de Hoop and Annette N. Brown, is oddly placed between these two discussions of participatory and embedded evaluation. It promotes the use of quasi-experimental methods to answer the question: What would have happened with the beneficiaries of a peace education program in the absence of the program? The chapter provides a useful exploration of some of the methodological benefits and drawbacks of using a counterfactual analysis but completely ignores issues raised in the introductory section—namely, the importance of aligning evaluation with peace education values by making the evaluation participatory, embedded, and culturally responsive. De Hoop and Brown place the chapter within the context of the larger debate between “those who promote rigorous impact evaluation methods and those who call for a more pluralistic evaluation approach” (p. 287) and suggest that this debate has been less prevalent in the peace education field.

The inclusion of this chapter may have been an effort on the part of the editors to present different sides of this debate. However, neither the authors nor the editors took the opportunity to actually engage in the debate. In their concluding chapter, the editors assert that the “[a]uthors converge on the idea that any evaluation exercise related to peace education should remain loyal to the principles and values which inspire the field, namely respect for diversity and cultural responsiveness, critical awareness about power relations, and participation of all involved in the decision-making process” (p. 318). While this assertion was largely true, it ignores the stance taken by de Hoop and Brown in concentrating narrowly on experimental and quasi-experimental designs, which I believe is out of alignment with the principles and values of the field. The editors missed a valuable opportunity to highlight this debate by addressing the ways that Chapter 19 differs from the other chapters and offering some discussion of the competing perspectives that this chapter brings to light.

Overall, I found the examples provided in the book to be illuminating and the theories to be useful, but I would have liked dialogue and interaction between and among the various chapters, for example, in the form of an in-depth, substantive wrap-up by the editors. I felt that the chapters did not speak to one another. Perhaps the editors grew weary over the 10 years it took to complete the book, but it seemed that the conclusions drawn by the editors fell flat. They had the opportunity to take a stance on appropriate methods for peace education evaluation, but by including Chapter 19 without at least highlighting the debate and issues it raised, I believe they failed to do this. While this volume will help to move the field of peace education forward in important ways, it would have been stronger had the editors created more reflection and analysis across these chapters and taken a stance on the appropriateness of these methods for peace education programs.

Note

1. There are several discrepancies between the table of contents (ToC) and the editors' Introduction with regard to the book's structure and the chapters that comprise each of the three major sections. Chapter 5 is variously presented as being in Part 1 (Introduction) or Part 2 (ToC), and Chapter 15 is variously presented as being in Part 2 (ToC) or Part 3 (Introduction).