

Book Review: *Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding* edited by Catherine Vanner, Spogmai Akseer, and Thursica Kivinthan Levi

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BOOK REVIEW

***TEACHING PEACE AND CONFLICT: THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF
SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS IN PEACEBUILDING***

**EDITED BY CATHERINE VANNER, SPOGMAI AKSEER,
AND THURSICA KOVINTHAN LEVI**

SPRINGER, 2022. XIV + 205 PAGES

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Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding is a cross-national analysis of the content and discourses contained in textbooks in conflict-affected societies, and the policies and actors that shape them. This analysis is presented to the reader with two basic premises: (1) education can be a victim, accomplice, or transformer of conflict, and it often plays multiple roles, as presented in the Intersecting Roles of Education in Conflict (IREC) framework; and (2) proposed changes in curricula or education policy with the aim of peacebuilding are disconnected from the way content is actually represented in textbooks. This is seen, for example, in the representation in textbooks—or the lack thereof—of class, gender, ideal citizenship, ethnolinguistic groups, and religious groups. This disconnected content often plays the “accomplice” role in situations of conflict.

This book makes three important contributions to the field of education in emergencies. First, it presents the IREC framework, which builds on Bush and Saltarelli’s (2000) seminal work on the two faces of education, in which they illustrate the positive and negative roles education plays in scenarios of ethnic conflict. The role of textbooks is expressly included in Bush and Saltarelli’s seven elements of the negative face of education, which point out “the role of textbooks in impoverishing the imagination of children and thereby inhibiting them from dealing with conflict constructively” (34). Although the negative face of education may be conflated with the IREC framework’s accomplice role, the latter is in fact more active, as it implicates actors who shape policy, curriculum, and pedagogical practices. The IREC framework could also be seen as building on Pherali’s (2016) work on education as victim and perpetrator, which similarly expands its negative face from passive to active.

These frameworks ultimately assert that the relationship of education to peace and conflict is as a victim, a perpetrator, and a transformer. IREC goes one step further in illustrating that this role is not static by suggesting that education, or textbooks in this volume, can oscillate between these roles, which contain

elements of transformation alongside perpetration and victimhood. In this volume, the IREC framework is used in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks employed in the education in emergencies field, notably Dunlop's use of Davies' (2005) passive and active elements of conflict, Kovinthan Levi's use of Davies' (2003) interruptive democracy, and Galtung's (1969) work on structural violence.

Second, it contributes to the scholarship that sees textbooks as a site of importance in peace and conflict studies. The role of textbooks—and of education in general—in national identity formation and in “legitimizing knowledge” (Russell and Tiplic 2014) makes them key targets during times of political volatility, as the content can be used to control and shape narratives. This includes textbooks as victims when they are destroyed (Kalhoro and Cromwell, this volume; Fishburn 2008; GCPEA 2022) or banned (Cole and Barsalou 2006; Bentrovato 2017); as accomplices to conflict, as they can help to define and exacerbate existing tensions, thereby reinforcing state authority and neglecting dissent and critical thinking (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Lall 2008); and, when textbooks interrogate the roots of conflict, violence, and inequality, as transformers (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Novelli and Smith 2011; Bajaj 2019; Knutzen and Smith 2012). This book's editors, Catherine Vanner, Spogmai Akseer, and Thursica Kovinthan Levi, provide a framework with which to analyze the multiple roles these textbooks play and where intended transformer roles have ultimately become accomplices to conflict.

Finally, it provides a concrete example of the role comparative analyses play in education in emergencies. Each of the nine case studies in this volume traces a curricular or policy change in response to conflict, with the aim of peacebuilding and social cohesion. Most of the case studies analyze the content of the textbook itself, notably in civic education and social studies (Levi, Nazari, Shahzadeh, Halilovic-Pastuovic, Akseer); representations of gender (Shahzadeh, Vanner et al.); and adapted courses focused on peacebuilding and equality (Dunlop, Akseer).

Readers also have the opportunity to compare the different ways in which textbooks play the accomplice role in one context, as subsequent chapters focus on Afghanistan (Nazari, Akseer) and South Sudan (Skårås, Vanner et al.). Skårås considers the absence of history textbooks to be an accomplice role, as it allows narratives to be shaped solely by teachers in education contexts and by the community outside of education. Vanner et al., by contrast, examine how primary school textbooks play the accomplice role by reproducing social norms, by neglecting the root causes of inequality, and by not allowing a critical interrogation of the ideas presented in the textbooks. Kalhoro and Cromwell do not analyze the content of the textbook itself, looking instead at the intersection

of curriculum, education governance, and pedagogy. There is the only case study to explicitly examine teacher training and pedagogical practices through the IREC lens. Halilovic-Pastuovic's study of segregated education in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides an analysis of the "two schools under one roof" policy, facilitated by the international community, which resulted in separate curricula and textbooks for the Bosnian population and the Croatian population. The aim was temporary postconflict stability, but this segregation has continued to do what the author describes as "extreme othering" (186).

An underexplored area in this volume, which is covered explicitly by Halilovic-Pastuovic and Akseer and noted in the concluding chapter, is a macro-analysis of the role international actors play in shaping the content of textbooks to reflect their own interests. Nazari's content analysis includes a discussion on government accountability, in particular the use of terms such as "insecurity" instead of "war" in order to "alleviate the government's responsibility in contributing to conflict" (97). A critical analysis of the international community's accountability is similarly important because key donors have increasingly been inserting military and security agendas into education and international assistance (Novelli 2010). If textbooks often play an accomplice role in conflict-affected societies, those that shape the content are also complicit. These motivations are investigated by Shahzadeh, who explores the role of education officials in shaping content in Jordan, and by Kalhor and Cromwell, who discuss the influence political religious groups in Pakistan have on Musharraf's curricular reforms.

This volume might have demonstrated the value of the IREC framework for analytic purposes by distinguishing itself more significantly from related theories (i.e., Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Pherali 2016). The IREC framework is presented as distinct, in that the intersecting victim, accomplice, and transformer roles exist simultaneously, whereas the victim and perpetrator roles of education have previously been presented as discrete and opposing. However, the transformer role is presented as an intention or a possibility, not as a role that has been actualized. For example, Nazari discusses the transformer role in abstract terms: "Social values are promoted at an abstract level, rendering education a transformer of conflict by encouraging concepts of peace, stability, and equality" (99). Shahzadeh speaks to the "transformative potential" of textbooks, in the event that they are eventually revised. To play a transformer role, a textbook would have to directly challenge inequality, injustice, and the roots of violence. However, in most of the cases in this volume, the textbooks played the accomplice role, thereby overshadowing and negating the possibilities of transformation. Some authors in this volume consider the transformer role somewhat differently, their views

being rooted in their varied conceptions of the relationship between conflict and peace. Kovinthan Levi, for example, argues that, if students are to challenge injustice with the aim of creating a more peaceful society, there is an inevitability of conflict. This contrasts with Nazari's definition of a transformer of conflict as that which "encourag[es] stability" (93).

This volume demonstrates that textbooks, and education more broadly, are crucial to the peacebuilding process in conflict-affected contexts. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the transformative role of education is prioritized and enabled in that process.

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