Book Review

Education for peace: the politics of adopting and mainstreaming peace education programs in a post-conflict setting, by Vanessa Tinker, Bethesda, Academica Press, 2015, 262 pp., US $74.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-68053-007-0.

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Set up in the aftermath of the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Education for Peace (EFP) program is among the longest running and largest projects within the field of peace education. It started as a small pilot project in six primary and secondary schools in the country and soon developed into a nationally implemented curriculum for primary and secondary school pupils. Rather than the result of reflection and careful consideration, Tinker describes the decision to adopt EFP as an 'unexpected outcome' and its mainstreaming as 'accidental and contingent' in nature (15-16). Indeed, the political success of EFP is somewhat startling: Centered on the philosophical foundations of the Bahá'í faith, first, the choice for a religiously inspired program seems counterintuitive in a context where religious differences fueled identity politics and violence. Second, with the exception of a single funder-commissioned report, EFP was never systematically evaluated – at least not by an independent research team. The aim of the book is therefore to uncover the factors that can help to explain how EFP succeeded in scaling up from a small pilot project to a nationwide curriculum without any systematic independent impact evaluations, and in spite of its religious character. Based on a critical analysis of the decision-

making process, interviews with key policy-makers and the program contributors, as well as participant observations, Tinker puts forth six elements that contributed to the program's political success: (1) the novelty of peace education as a peace-building tool in post-conflict societies, (2) the desire for peace in war-torn BiH, (3) the seeming correspondence between the program's discourse and the objectives of the international community, (4) the unfamiliarity with the Bahá'í faith, (5) the disconnect between EFP's content and the political process of its adoption, and (6) the lack of independent systematic evaluations – which, like the funder-commissioned report, would likely problematize some of the preceding elements.

The book is structured in a clear and traditional manner. Chapter 1 sets the stage, introducing the theoretical framework and methodological research design, as well as summarizing the main findings of the study. In chapter 2, Tinker introduces the concept of peace education and discusses its potential utility in post-conflict settings. Next, Chapter 3 introduces the origins and philosophical underpinnings of the Bahá'í faith given that the founding father of EFP, H.B. Danesh, is a Bahá'í follower. The crucial role played by Danesh's faith in the shaping of EFP is explained in Chapter 4: the Bahá'í faith laid the foundations of the EFP worldview and determined the structures within which EFP developed. From Chapter 5 onwards, Tinker takes the reader back in time and guides him/her through the underlying decision-making process that led to the mainstreaming of EFP. This process started in 2000 with the introduction of a pilot project (Chapter 5), and was subsequently scaled up as from 2002 (Chapter 6). Once it was consolidated at the primary and secondary levels, efforts were undertaken to integrate the EFP project at the tertiary level (Chapter 7).

Tinker's book stands out in a number of ways. First of all, the perspective of the book is innovative within the literature on peace education: so far, relatively little studies have focused on the politics of mainstreaming peace education. Second, Tinker's writings are bold and critical: While generally assumed to be in correspondence, she exposes the discrepancy between the program's aims and the objectives of the international community, and problematizes the religious foundations of EFP in the context of BiH's history of ethno-religious conflict. The theoretical chapter on peace education, thirdly, is truly elucidating. It offers a clear and to-the-point discussion of the concept, its limitations and its challenges. Overall, the concise and clear style in which the book is written turn it into a pleasant and accessible read.

While the rich description of EFP contributes to the literature on peace education, its theoretical contribution remains rather underdeveloped. The book takes a hermeneutic-constructivist theoretical approach, which combines a hermeneutic epistemology with a constructivist framework. According to this framework, people's 'actions and beliefs are understood to be situated in, but not socially and culturally determined by, their inherent normative structures' (3). Whereas the framework, as explicated in the introduction, seems promising, it is further on not used to interpret and reflect on the research findings and results. On the empirical level as well, more could have been done. Apart from document analysis, Tinker conducted interviews with policy makers and EFP program designers, and participated in one EFP seminar. Most interviews took place via email, however, limiting the possibility to probe and analyze non-verbal behavior. Moreover, more extended participant observation could have provided for thicker information. Also, in spite of the critical tone, the book itself misses at times some critical edge. The chapter on the Bahá'í faith, for example, seems to be informed by very few sources and fails to critically discuss the religion and its underpinnings. Lastly, while easy to read, the book arguably contains now and again too much factual information regarding the implementation of EFP that is not relevant to the research question. In sum, the book could have gained from stronger theoretical reflections and more critical edge, omitting the nitty-gritty of logistic program details.

Education for peace: the politics of adopting and mainstreaming peace education programs in a post-conflict setting is among the first to analyze the politics of mainstreaming peace education, making it a must-read for scholars of peace education. Furthermore, it is a valuable resource for policy makers, detailing the decision-making and implementation process of one of the oldest and largest peace education projects. The conclusions are eye-opening and call for rigorous evaluations and thorough reflection in the process of adopting and mainstreaming future peace education projects. Whereas some readers may not hold their attention throughout the series of program details, peace education scholars and policy makers should make sure to read the insightful introductory and concluding chapters attentively.