

Simon, M. (2016). Review of the book *The language of peace: Communicating to create harmony*, by Rebecca L. Oxford. In *Factis Peace*, 10 (1), 29-31.
<http://www.infactispax.org/journal>

The Language of Peace, Communicating to Create Harmony, edited by Rebecca L. Oxford. A volume in the series: Peace Education, editors Laura Finley & Robin Cooper, Information Age Publishing, 2013, 355pp. US \$39.09 (soft cover), US \$73.09 (hardcover), ISBN 1623960940

Editors note: This review is one in a series co-published by the Global Campaign for Peace Education and In Factis Pax: Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice toward promoting peace education scholarship. These reviews are of Information Age Publishing's Peace Education series. Established in 2006 by Founding Editors Ian Harris and Edward Brantmeier, IAP's peace education series offers diverse perspectives on peace education theory, research, curriculum development and practice. It is the only series focused on peace education offered by any major publisher.

The Language of Peace, Communicating to Create Harmony is divided into four parts, each with varied chapters. Part one runs through four chapters; the first chapter dedicated to detailing six principles that lead to a discovery of a language of peace. The first principle outlines the belief that peace is attainable. Citing several sources of evidence including *The Seville Statement on Violence* (1986), this first principle contrasts a contention from some experts that peace is impossible due to a biologically inherited aggressive nature in both humans and animals. The other five principles briefly include: Human beings can/must decide to choose peace; the verbal and nonverbal forms of peace language; the multiple dimensions addressed by peace language ranging from inner, interpersonal, intergroup; and the language of peace is not always simple. Combined, these six principles offer a comprehensive framework through which to postulate the possibility of peace through language.

The language of peace is put into action in chapter two. Three peace processes are identified: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. Among the three actions, peacebuilding is given more focus in the discussion and six strategies for peace identified. These six strategies include peace through: strength, justice, politics, sustainability, education, and transformation. The background of non-violent action and virtues employed by some known non-violent leaders, such as Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., are elaborated and a brief history of peace studies and peace research from the 1950s introduced.

Conflict is discussed in detail in chapter three: its definition; key aspects, and root causes including needs, interests, identity, values and actions are introduced. The author, Oxford, then provides some key elements in a conflict mapping and common conflict styles for example, refusing to get involved, compromising, and collaboration. The last chapter in Part One elaborates on violence putting it into five clusters: genocide, war, terrorism, misogyny, and bullying. In each of these strata, the foundation of the society is wounded.

Part Two covers four chapters that avail tools for transforming a society wounded and torn by conflict and violence. The major tool used here is `discourse` - language in action (p. 147). Using

critical discourse analysis, Oxford categorically pierces through the “I have a dream” speech of Dr. King Jr. to show how the speech was/is pregnant with peaceful communication. She further analyzes peace poetry and visual images in chapters six and seven respectively with questions to stimulate ideas and discussions about peace to learners. The last chapter of Part Two compares and contrasts war and peace journalism, and circus versus balanced journalism, where she posits that war and circus journalism have a `civic responsibility not to throw gasoline onto a small fire` (p. 239).

Oxford then offers some tips to help strike a balance: the use of proportionality, avoiding publication of hate-mongering material, analyzing the causes and outcomes and not just reporting the first impression. According to her, modern social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube could offer peace or violence. She contends they are a tool for peace if they examine the many sides of an issue and allow many voices to be heard, and a tool for violence if it portrays images with potential to stimulate revenge.

Part Three explains the use of verbal and non-verbal languages. The first chapter in this section defines the process involved in using language to create enemies and some metaphoric names used to describe them (enemies) - barbaric, death. Citing reasons for creating enemies, Oxford highlights some dangerous steps towards creating enemies that overlap with the stages of genocide. She advocates for some transformative uses of language in order to create unity and understanding but not enemies. To this end she explores the communication skills used by two dominant cultures - collectivism and individualism. These are compared and contrasted in depth and mechanisms to improve them in order to create harmony are addressed.

The last chapter in this section counts on understanding body language and gestures from diverse cultures as a good effort towards creating unity and harmony among different cultures. Peace educators are commissioned to make this happen through teaching. The final chapter of the book then gives a summary of how professionals including Johan Galtung and Linda Groff perceive peace as a multidimensional concept and the absence of various forms of violence respectively. Importantly, the author touches on areas never thought of in Chapter 11, such as body language. This chapter deals with a common yet often overlooked source of conflict. Furthermore, at the end of each chapter, the author provides exercises and ideas for peace educators to draw from in their peace teaching, thus the book offers some practical examples for teachers to draw on.

Also, one area for improvement would be for peacemaking and peacekeeping to be given more attention in the discussion. These areas of peace work help stop the escalation of violence, so perhaps they should receive as much attention as peacebuilding.

Finally, the book is a vital contribution to the literature in the field. It is not only a book for peace educators but also for peace studies teachers and students. The book is pregnant with conflict and conflict resolution research and teaching suggestions, and would be a useful companion for new and old peace scholars and practitioners alike.

References

Oxford R. L. 2013. The language of peace, communicating to create harmony. A volume in Peace Education. Charlotte: Information Age.

Spanish National Commission. (1986). Seville statement on violence. Seville, Spain: UNESCO

Mumbua Simon is affiliated with the United Nations-mandated University for Peace.
msimon@doctorate.upeace.org