

Wang, H. (2015, June 25). Review of the book *Understanding peace cultures*, edited by Rebecca Oxford. Teachers College Record. <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=18007>

Understanding Peace Cultures, edited by Rebecca L. Oxford, is a collection of 15 chapters that discuss creating small and large peace cultures in various dimensions of education, including schools, universities, meditation centers, and teacher preparation classrooms. By defining peace as *multidimensional*— including inner peace, interpersonal peace, intergroup peace, international peace, and ecological peace—and by framing peace as "a dynamic, active process of developing harmony" (p. 5), Oxford presents an outstanding collection of work that is simultaneously theoretical and practical, individual and cultural, and local and international in its ability to enable personal, social, and cultural transformation. Teachers, students, instructors, and activists alike will find this book inspiring and informative in their efforts to educate about and for peace.

This book is divided into five parts, with different yet intersecting themes. Part A introduces the book and highlights important world leaders in peace and peace education and their messages that resonate in later chapters. Part B examines curriculum design, teaching strategies, and learning activities for peacemaking and peacebuilding, both from a learner's perspective, as well as instructors' perspectives. The focus on creating small peace cultures in the classroom in order to create larger peace cultures is much needed in peace education. Closely related to international studies as a field, peace education has from its origin focused mostly on inter-ethnic, intercultural, and international relationships in conflict and war. However, peaceful relationships cannot be developed without proactively transforming daily educational practices. Based upon womanist and critical race theory, biblical interpretation, and holistic peace education theory, descriptions of three distinctive efforts to challenge social injustice, search for peace language, and design peace strategies in curriculum and pedagogy provide details of what educators can do in their everyday engagement.

Part C draws upon spiritual, philosophical, linguistic, and literary insights for creating peace cultures. International wisdom resources such as Buddhism, Islam, and Confucianism are evoked to convey the central message of interdependence and peace. For instance, Sister Jewel discusses a Buddhist approach to peace language within the self, in relationships, and in the world, and describes a series of mindful practices she learned in Plum Village, many of which can be used in the classroom. I have already followed her guide in using specific exercises in my teacher education classes. Wisdom is not only historical, but also appears in an unlikely place as Lois P. Liggett takes us on an amazing journey of creating peace talk in a prison to transform its culture.

Part D addresses the relationship between the performing arts and peace education. If inner peace is developed through going beyond dualism to integrate the body and the mind, the arts, and aesthetics become an integral vehicle for peace education. While African performing art is demonstrated as a medium of social

connectivity and harmony, gangsta rap's potentiality, beneath its controversial surface, for youth to understand social issues is revealed. Part E addresses the challenges to peace builders in the context of international conflicts, including Israel and Palestine and North and South Korea. The stories in this part also highlight the importance of ongoing self-education, encountering the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity of international peace efforts.

While this edited book is comprehensive in its scope, it has several outstanding features that appeal to me as a teacher educator and curriculum theorist. This book highlights the role of peace language. Here, peace language is defined both in a linguistic and a cultural sense: Chinese ideographic language, the Biblical text, children's literature, visual language, music lyrics, and meditative language are all examined to reveal shared meanings of peace. From linguistic hermeneutics to cultural interpretation, from artistic demonstration to curriculum language, peace in and through language is mined from various sources. We need to learn to *speak* peace in order to practice it, and learning the peace language "requires awareness, careful listening, self-reflection, self-correction, and repeated practice" (p. 23).

The book also explicitly draws upon international wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Islam, and African arts. The intercultural dialogues on these traditions can take us to the shared root of nonviolence and peace in human life to embrace and develop humane and ecological interconnections at a deeper level. Related to these traditions, the notion of inner peace as the foundation for outer peace is an important thread throughout the book. It is also the site where education can play a most profound role. The inner work for personal growth and the outer work for educational activism come full circle in Yingji Wang's question: "Can I transcend my own fear to create a peaceful educational experience for students?" (p. 87). Without experiencing inner transformation themselves, teachers and educators cannot foster peace cultures among students who are also expected to work from their own inner landscapes.

In addition, this book integrates theory and practice organically and embodies the unity of thought and action in contributors' writings. Authors incorporate a variety of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge in their efforts to create peace cultures. The language of this book is highly accessible while presenting complicated ideas. The list of activities for exploring and practicing peace at the end of each chapter also provides useful guidance.

One critical question is about the role of difference. Consistent with much of the literature in peace education, difference is mostly approached as something to overcome in order to build peace cultures in this book. Can difference be highlighted as a potentially positive force in building connections in peace cultures? After all, various forms of social and political exclusion are built upon seeing others who are different as a problem rather than an asset. As long as difference is *for one another* to create an inclusive community (Hershock, 2009; Wang, 2014), it can play a positive role in forming peace cultures.

Thich Nhat Hanh (quoted in Quinn, 2014) describes the current human condition as a small boat on the stormy sea in which “we need people who can sit still and be able to smile, who can walk peacefully... [and] each of you is that person” (p. 1). The stillness inside can settle the turbulence outside, but this stillness must be cultivated in each particular person through education. *Understanding Peace Cultures* answers the call to demonstrate the craft of nurturing inner peace and creating peace cultures, inviting all to become that person.

References

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