



Book Review / Compte rendu

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Constructive Conflict Pedagogies for Building Democratic Peace: Teaching Strategies from around the World by Kathy Bickmore (Ed.) Bloomsbury Academic, 2025, 328 pages, hardcover. ISBN: 1350519715

In an era marked by global conflict, polarization, and educational inequities, *Constructive Conflict Pedagogies for Building Democratic Peace*, edited by Kathy Bickmore, offers a timely and transformative contribution to peace-building education. Published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2025 as part of the Peace and Human Rights Education Series, the volume combines voices from Iran, Lebanon, Cyprus, South Africa, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, United States, and Canada, bridging perspectives from the global south and global north. This intentional inclusion reflects a commitment to transnational dialogue and pedagogical pluralism, resonating with scholarly calls to decolonize peace education and center diverse epistemologies (Bajaj, 2019; Bickmore, 2011; Hayhoe, 2021). Through rich case studies and commentaries, the book illustrates how educators can navigate fragmented, conflict affected contexts with relational, inclusive, and context sensitive pedagogies. In doing so, this scholarly contribution echoes Zakharia's (2016) and Bajaj's (2019) insights which emphasize grounding peace education in historical contexts, especially when working with communities divided by conflict. Structured into five thematic parts with 17 chapters, the book moves from foundational concepts to applied pedagogies, offering both

theoretical grounding and practical strategies for educators committed to fostering peace and justice through education. This review explores the book through three central themes: pedagogies of difficult histories and memory, inclusion and justice in conflict affected classrooms, and democratic dialogue and student agency.

Bickmore opens the volume by reminding readers that education, while not a panacea, carries transformative potential rooted in how classrooms handle conflict constructively and how teachers and students learn to name, analyze, and engage tensions without reproducing harm. Chapters in this volume collectively advance three interwoven themes: 1) teaching difficult histories and memory as a usable past, 2) promoting inclusion, language, and belonging in conflict-affected classrooms, and 3) advancing democratic dialogue and student agency through participatory pedagogies. This thematic lens reveals coherent repertoire with wide transferability across diverse sites.

Teaching difficult histories is not about recounting the past; it is about cultivating historical consciousness that connects legacies of injustice to present realities. Chapters (1-5) in part two illustrate this through case studies from South Africa and Columbia, showing how educators link apartheid and colonialism to contem-

porary inequities. This approach counters sanitized official narratives, such as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which Wassermann and Bentrovato (2018) critiqued for omitting real antagonists in favor of hero-centric history. Research in South African classrooms shows that when the legacy of injustice is narrated as temporally alive, students more readily recognize obligations toward redress and social change. By situating truth telling as constructive conflict pedagogy, authors argue that empathy becomes civic practice rather than a therapeutic gesture. Columbian case studies underscore moral tensions educators face when students perceive conflict as either “too close” or “too far”, echoing pedagogies of discomfort and affect (Zakharia, 2016). These insights resonate with Lederach’s (2005) concept of moral obligation, which called for ongoing relational work connecting memory, identity, and agency over time. Yet this moral horizon meets a pedagogical constraint, as Salomon (2004) cautioned, peace education often shifts surface-level attitudes more than deep conflict narratives tied to identity and systemic inequality. In response, part two chapters embed historical inquiry and dialogic processes within teacher education and community partnerships, aiming for durable transformation rather than episodic change.

Belonging and language justice emerge as cornerstones for nonviolent school cultures in conflict-affected contexts. Across Cyprus, Iran, and refugee hosting settings, part three chapters (6 - 9) reveal how educators dismantle silence and stigma through translanguaging practices and identity affirming practices. In Greek Cypriot schools, stigmatized Turkish identities lead to self-censorship, requiring pedagogies that address students’ feelings of insecurity alongside academic performance. In Iran (Chapter 9), dialogical approaches nurture democratic agency among youth despite authoritarian constraints, building empathy and critical thinking despite authoritarian constraints. Dryden-Peterson (Chapter 8) reframes schooling for Syrian refugees from education for return to rights-based inclusion in national systems, emphasizing predictability and adaptability for civic participation. These commitments align with democratic *convivenica* (Chapter 14), a

concept explored in Latin American and Canadian scholarship, in which peaceful coexistence is cultivated through recognition, equitable access, and dialogic conflict engagement (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2024). Yet, authors caution that *convivenica* risks being co-opted into compliance unless tethered to justice frameworks, particularly the three R’s —recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fraser, 2003)—and critical pedagogy that build agency and structural analysis. These chapters push beyond civility toward transformative inclusion, underscoring the need to interrogate how school governance and assessment systems reinforce or disrupt inequities.

Democratic dialogue and student agency, examined across Part 4 (Chapters 10-13) and Part 5 (Chapters 14-17), is more than classroom discussions; they mark a contested terrain where deliberation can either reproduce dominant norms or ignite structural transformation. This theme situates dialogue within a long-standing civic education debate: is deliberation primarily about teaching discussion skills, or it can serve as a vehicle for justice-oriented change? While Hess and McAvoy (2015) frame deliberation as essential to democratic life, critics argue that classroom discussions often mask power asymmetries unless paired with equity-oriented practices. Chapters from the U.S. and Canada operationalize what theorists call “thick democracy” by moving beyond talk to shared decision-making, through participatory budgeting, peer-led governance, and Montessori-inspired practices (Bartlett et al., 2020; Mayes, 2017). These institutional designs link deliberation to material power, shifting student voice from symbolic to substantive (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2024; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Sousa & Ferreira, 2024). Complementing chapter cases, systematic and conceptual reviews of school governance and student participation confirm that design features (who decides, what’s on the agenda, and how decisions bind) determine whether participation is tokenistic or transformative (Mifsud & Wilkins, 2025; Sousa & Ferreira, 2024). In practical terms, these contributions pivot from teaching discussion skills toward structuring schools as democratic spaces, aligning with Gutmann’s (1999) call for participatory governance in education, and cau-

tion against reducing democracy to discourse (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2024; Mifsud & Wilkins, 2025).

By bridging perspectives from the Global South and Global North, this volume acts as a form of pedagogical travel for educators. Vivid stories bring the frontlines of education into focus, and provide a necessary exposure to the unbearable weight of history and the radical resilience required to teach within it. This transnational lens effectively transforms distant geographies into shared classrooms, proving that classrooms are the soil where justice and democracy take root. Each chapter reveals that nurturing a sense of belonging, honoring language as a bridge, and inviting students into deliberative participatory learning are not isolated interventions, but interconnected pathways to durable peace. Within these contributions, I found hope: the vision of schools as sanctuaries for renewal. In a world aching for transformation, this book is an urgent, deeply human call, providing both the compass and the tools to navigate the storms of our time.

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