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Book Review

Educating Children in Conflict Zones: Research, Policy and Practice for Systemic Change: A Tribute to Jackie Kirk. Edited by Kirk, J., Mundy, K. E. & Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). New York: Teachers College Press.
Reviewed by Allyson Larkin, University of Western Ontario.

Jackie Kirk's death in 2008 while working as a consultant to International Rescue Committee (IRC) underscores the very real violence and danger that plagues attempts by educators, local and international, to sustain opportunities for learning in the midst of conflict. Her contributions to the field of education, development and conflict studies are internationally recognized for their depth of understanding of the complexities that challenge efforts to bring education to regions engulfed in violence. This current volume under review, *Educating children in conflict zones: Research, policy and practice for systemic change* edited by Karen Mundy and Sarah Dryden-Peterson, is a significant contribution to the field of education, conflict and development studies as it brings together key conceptual and methodological opportunities for future research.

The opening section of the book foregrounds Jackie Kirk's seminal article on education and fragile states, laying out the pragmatic challenges education poses to areas in conflict. This chapter sets the framework for the articles that follow; organized into four thematic sections, Kirk's lead article establishes the current conceptual, programmatic, political, and research trends in the field. It is a complicated field and one that requires detailed and thorough analysis of the social, economic, historic and political contingencies that exist in each case. One of the most ironic insights from her article is the possibility that education occasionally functions as a root cause of conflict and instability. Ideological differences between ethnic, religious or gendered groups are exacerbated by educators' attempts to redress discrimination or to privilege one group over another. Her analysis details the intersections between policy and practice that potentially support or subvert educational initiatives in situations experiencing conflict.

The following chapter by Lyn Davies focuses on the potential for education to 'interrupt' the social conditions that contribute to fragility and conflict. Her analysis points to the creation of educational systems that promote resilience and adaptability among a state's citizenry, "to create a generation of learners" (p. 47) who are able to think critically about extremist or oppressive movements or governments.

Part II of this volume brings together a collection of essays highlighting the voices and insights of local participants of education in conflict zones. One of the most interesting insights in this collection is how children perceive conflict and violence in the context of their education. Pedagogy, policy and perceptions in education are often at odds with one another, both in conflict and post-conflict settings. Sarah Dryden-Peterson's study on refugee children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo living in Uganda illustrates the role that education plays in providing children with hope for a secure future. Articles by Rebecca Winthrop and Elisabeth King focus on the needs expressed by children and teachers in schools and the gaps that exist between policies designed to rebuild communities and their recognition of local needs.

In the field of international development and education, aid and aid agencies play a key role, both politically and practically. Clearly the art of providing aid in situations

of conflict is a complicated endeavour. In many cases multiple aid agencies are devoted to supporting educational endeavours, yet as Peter Buckland points out in his article, "Alphabet soup: Making sense of the emerging global architecture of aid to education in fragile and conflict-affected situations," whether it is large-scale international conferences committing themselves to educational targets or localized initiatives suffer from a lack of sustainable resources and expertise on the local level to manage diverse challenges that affect education and conflict. Victoria Turrent further argues in her article, "Aid and education in fragile states", that in areas experiencing conflict, education is often low on the list of priorities for donor agencies as the focus remains on ending conflict and containing violence.

Conducting research in conflict and post-conflict settings presents unique methodological challenges for researchers. The fourth and final section of this volume considers methodological approaches to working with children and teachers visual and creative writing exercises; the 'child friendly' methods explored in Stephanie Bengtsson and Lesley Bartlett's study suggests that significant insights can be gained from working with such methods, often contradicting information collected from traditional sources. The emphasis on local participation and the cultural context of the research setting are areas they target for emphasis in future research projects.

In contrast to the qualitative approaches advocated by Bengtsson, Bartlett and Mitchell, Dana Burde's work on randomized trials to assess community-based schools in Afghanistan explores the opportunities and limitations of evidence based approaches to research. She addresses critics of such an approach up front; issues surrounding the ethics and ability of randomized trials to adequately account for and analyze the myriad influences that shape particular cases of education in conflict was not completely convincing but in my reading, when taken alongside other studies, randomized trials may provide a broader context within which to frame more specific inquiries.

If there is an area of this volume that was not addressed in balance to education and conflict, it is the role that development, poverty and the role that other social factors play that lead to conflict. In the current context of globalization and development, social factors are being minimized to emphasize trade relations and political alliance. Jackie Kirk's analyses underscored the complex geopolitical relationship between social development, fragility and education. This volume is a significant tribute to honour her efforts to bring attention to the challenges of education in conflict and to move the field forward with calls for further research.