

Book Review by Seamus A. Power

Velez, G. (2025). *Making Meaning of Justice and Peace. A Developmental Lens to Restorative Justice and Peace Education*. Cambridge University Press.

Conceptualized peace is the core concept driving Dr. Gabriel Velez's important new book, *Making Meaning of Justice and Peace*. This theoretical innovation describes the way people, particularly youth, weave together social discourses and personal experiences to arrive at their own meaning of peace. Rather than treating peace as the absence of violence, conceptualized peace emphasizes how individuals construct peace—how they imagine what peace is, whether they see themselves as part of it, and whether they feel they can actively help build it.

The idea of conceptualized peace is simultaneously embedded in, and derived from, Velez's masterful engagement with theories and empirical evidence in restorative justice, peace education, and cultural-developmental psychology, which is the main thrust of Part I of the book. His innovation is to stand on the shoulders of giants to chart new terrains, centering the experiences of youth in the creation of more peaceful societies.

In this way, Velez is a world-maker, which, as my colleagues and I have articulated, is a critical role for psychology. His theoretical advances provide scaffolding for other researchers to engage with meaningful empirical work in diverse cultural contexts marked by conflict or transitioning toward more democratic and peaceful societies. And he also researches how the world is being remade. In Part II of the book, Velez details the utility of conceptualized peace in an in-depth case study of Colombian youth. Here he skillfully examines the ways in which a variety of young Colombians both experience and make meaning of the national peace process, the decommissioning of the FARC, and the key role youth play in shaping the future of their country.

In a second case study, this time located in the United States, Velez turns his analytic eye toward restorative justice in schools. He argues for the importance of restorative justice initiatives and processes, particularly for adolescents, because this key developmental stage is the ideal time to equip students with the necessary tools, mindsets, strategies, and sense of identity that can foster more harmonious social relations and more peaceful societies.

Like all world-making books, Part III looks to the future. Velez shifts away from his focus on theoretical and empirical investigations and provides an ontological and methodological basis for other researchers and scholars to study processes of peace education, restorative justice, and conceptualized peace. He advocates for a processual, ecologically grounded, and methodologically plural approach to researching experiences with, and meanings of, conceptualized peace. This approach is essential. With wars raging throughout the world and authoritarianism on the rise, psychologists, social scientists, policymakers, and students cannot afford to ignore this timely contribution.

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