Marina Wagener

Review of *Child Sponsorship: Exploring pathways to a brighter future.* Watson, B., and Clarke, M. (eds). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014. ISBN 978-1-137-30959-4. 347 pages (hardcover).

'Child Sponsorship (CS) is a humanitarian phenomenon and its broad popularity combined with a prodigious ability to mobilize funds for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) is unique in the humanitarian aid sector' (p. 1). These are the opening words in the collected volume *Child Sponsorship: Exploring pathways to a brighter future*, which is the first of its kind and aims at the provision of a multi-perspective portrayal of this phenomenon.

In the introductory chapter Brad Watson and Matthew Clarke give an overview of key issues in CS and introduce the reader to different aspects that are addressed in greater detail in the subsequent contributions. The authors emphasize the gap between, on the one hand, CS's tremendous popularity, and, on the other, the scarcity of scholarly analysis of this phenomenon. With this 15-chapter volume they therefore attempt to provide a starting point for a more intense discussion on CS.

In chapter two Brad Watson illustrates the origins of CS in the 1920s (credit is given to the British Save the Children Fund for pioneering CS in 1919) and asserts that 'key ingredients […] continue in CS programmes 90 years later, including monthly payments for the support of individual identifiable children utilizing personal correspondence to encourage a sense of personal connection' (p. 38). That there has, however, been development within CS programmes and their marketing strategies, especially since the 1980s, becomes obvious in chapter three, in which Watson develops a typology of CS activity in the South and differentiates four types of CS programmes on a development vs welfare spectrum. He points out that, over the course of time, many CS international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have moved away from approaches that position individual children as beneficiaries and towards programmes focusing on community development and rights-based interventions. Central to these transition processes was heavy criticism that many CS INGOs had to face in the past and which is dealt with in chapter four of this volume. Taken as a whole, the first four chapters provide background upon which the subsequent contributions build.

The main body of the volume (chapters five to ten) is dedicated to the realization of CS programmes in the global South. In six chapters, authors from various CS INGOs (Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision International, Compassion International, Children International, and Baptist World Aid) illustrate their employers by detailing the current CS-related work of their organizations and

describing how it has developed over time. The focus here is on the aforementioned transition from individual to community and rights-based approaches. Different strategies for representing CS to donors in the North, as well as the overall structure of CS work in the North, are not taken into account.

Chapter 11 aims at including the hitherto neglected perspectives of the sponsored children, and consists of seven short contributions from formerly sponsored children and a brief discussion by Brad Watson and Anthony Ware. The authors themselves point out that the stories are not representative and do not cover the 'incredible diversity of experiences that millions of children have had' (p. 236). Overall the narratives form an affirmative and appreciative description of CS, since all children highlight the importance of sponsorship in their own development. The discussion does not include information on how the different stories were obtained.

From a development education perspective, chapter 14 is particularly interesting, although the educational influence of CS on sponsors in the North is mentioned also in the introduction and in chapter four. On the basis of research carried out for her dissertation in New Zealand, Rachel Tallon addresses possibilities and limits of the integration of CS in Northern classrooms. Although the number of schools actually involved in CS in her research is small, she gives interesting insights into problematic issues, such as the development of feelings of superiority among young people, and presents guidelines for CS INGOs to use in counteracting these. The findings of her study furthermore underline the strong effect of CS advertisements on young people who are not even directly involved in CS activities.

In chapter 13 Frances Rabbitts demonstrates how sponsors link their CS experiences to 'everyday spaces, relations and senses of identity' (p. 283) and argues, against accusations of egoism, neoliberal individualism, and neo-colonial patronage, that being charitable within CS is more complex than critics assume.

Despite sometimes heavy criticism CS remains a popular means of contributing to development efforts. Considering its vast popularity it is more than striking that CS has not been paid much attention by scholars in various areas of research. Since it is the first volume focusing exclusively on CS, the book is a significant contribution to the discourse on CS. Its specific value, however, might be that it reveals the fragmentarity of empirical knowledge with regard to CS in various respects. From a development education point of view the discussion of possible effects of CS on Northern sponsors could have taken a more prominent position in the volume, but this relative absence itself illustrates huge research gaps regarding CS and development education. Unfortunately the book does not succeed in including the perspective of sponsored children. Due to the complete absence of critical perspectives in the children's stories, chapter 11 does not read like a realistic depiction. Given this limitation, this section adds only a little to a multi-perspective portrayal of CS and does not help to answer

the question as to what effect CS has on beneficiaries in the South. Again, this points to future research needs. As is typical for under-researched areas that need at first to be approached descriptively, most authors in the volume position themselves as part of the CS movement. However, the overall portrayal of CS would have benefited from the inclusion of more critical perspectives. The editors of this volume aim at providing a starting point for further discussion and research: hopefully the book can succeed in being exactly that, and encourage further exploration.

Marina Wagener
Ph.D. student
University of Erlangen–Nuremberg
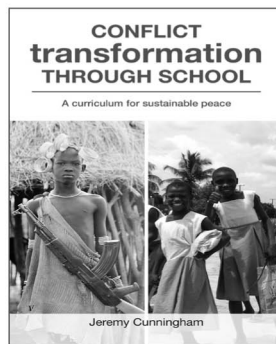
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Despite relatively little empirical evidence, the role of education is thought to be significant in building sustainable peace in areas torn apart by violent political conflict. Getting children into school is vitally important, but what do they learn once they get there? This book explores the ways in which the school curriculum can contribute to or impede conflict transformation.

Jeremy Cunningham was a headteacher and has a background in history, peace, human rights and citizenship education. He contributed to Amnesty International UK's first educational resources and was editor of the World Studies Journal. His PhD study is the basis for this book.

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