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Book Review

Human Rights and Schooling: An Ethical Framework for Teaching Social Justice by Audrey Osler

Teachers College Press, 2016. 177 pages.

\$88 (Hardcover), \$40.95 (Paperback), \$32.76 (E-book)

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At a time when the world is facing an enormous refugee crisis with the highest numbers of displaced people on record, millions of whom are children (UNHCR, 2017), and xenophobia is on the rise across the globe, we must urgently look for ethical, social justice-minded solutions to these international problems. Long considered a potential vehicle for social change, education is a clearly defined human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” (UDHR, 1948). Despite the active involvement of the United States in the development of the UDHR, imple-

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menting human rights education (HRE) in the US has been a challenge. One of the main obstacles is the prevalence of US exceptionalism, where the US often critiques other nations for human rights violations but rarely holds itself accountable to the same international norms. US exceptionalism has been a key factor in preventing the United States from ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, both of which would help to establish human rights education as a fundamental right.

In 2011, the United Nations adopted the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (DHRET), which specifies that human rights education should include education *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights (UN, 2012). Especially now, it is necessary to provide engaging and empowering education to teach students about human rights, to model respect for all learners and educators through human rights, and to create opportunities for all people to exercise their rights and uphold those of others. Formally integrating human rights education into our society will help us continue to participate in the global community as a diverse and just nation and as a proponent of democracy and freedom. The excellent 2016 book, *Human Rights and Schooling: An Ethical Framework for Teaching Social Justice*, has great immediate value in that the author, Audrey Osler, Professor Emerita at the University of Leeds and Professor of Education at the University College of Southeast Norway, presents us with a timely and constructive foundation upon which to develop human rights education.

Throughout the book, Osler (2016) emphasizes linking HRE to everyday struggles and injustices within local communities, in keeping with Eleanor Roosevelt's statement about universal human rights beginning "in small places, close to home... the world of the individual person" (Roosevelt, as cited in Osler, 2016, p. 1). Approached in this way, HRE can be used to raise the critical consciousness of learners within their own homes, schools, and communities and provide them with the skills to work toward social justice according to their respective sociopolitical contexts and needs. Thereby, HRE can help empower students to impact and shape their own communities.

This purpose, however, is one piece of a larger goal, which Osler refers to as “cosmopolitan citizenship” (p. 48). Learners can be encouraged “to think of themselves as global or cosmopolitan citizens, who do not have an exclusive affinity to their fellow nationals but to all humanity, regardless of where they live” (Osler, 2016, p. 29).

Having worked as an educator and administrator with a wide range of young people from around the world for nearly 20 years, cultivating a compassionate global mindset in learners is of particular significance to me. Though it is natural for students to be drawn to others who speak their language and have similar identities, I believe it is part of our responsibility as transformative educators to help them go beyond what is familiar and comfortable in order to grow. Creating opportunities to build diverse relationships not only broadens learners’ minds, but also helps them to enter the world and navigate their lives as open-minded, caring global citizens. I greatly appreciate Osler’s emphasis on the potential of HRE to provide people with a perspective that fosters solidarity across cultures and beyond borders.

Osler (2016) advocates applying intersectionality theory to human rights so that multiple identities are acknowledged and a simplistic analysis is avoided. She points out that “while human rights acknowledge the whole person, the human rights framework does not necessarily invite consideration of how various elements of human identity interact and interweave” (Osler, 2016, pp. 35-36). Similarly, intersectional analysis is not typically part of educator training in the US, though it should be. When used in an educational setting, intersectional analysis can help learners to understand the complexities that shape people’s experiences and how these are connected to larger political systems. Developing a comprehensive and nuanced perspective of both their own and others’ identities can help students to recognize different struggles and build solidarity within and across differences. Focusing on broad and inclusive concerns rather than exclusive, group-specific issues brings learners closer to becoming cosmopolitan citizens.

Osler (2016) provides several useful resources, such as films and guides, to explore human rights. An entire chapter is dedicated to using narrative as a pedagogical tool for teaching human rights and social justice.

She proposes that “personal narratives serve to counterbalance a nationalistic discourse that is characterized by an uncritical identification with a monolithic national culture and history” (Osler, 2016, p. 58), which is particularly timely. During my many years in classrooms, I have observed the power of personal narratives to evoke empathy in students and broaden their perspectives. When incorporated into school curricula, these stories can be used as an effective tool for social justice by exposing oppression and generating meaningful conversation. I have also seen that teachers are better able to understand the cultures in their classrooms through personal narratives. This, in turn, facilitates the creation of inclusive, mutually respectful learning environments.

In our increasingly diverse classrooms, it is especially important to introduce multiple voices with varying perspectives. As Osler (2016) suggests, if we cling solely to the dominant narrative, we are not truly engaging in democratic principles and are excluding those who are already experiencing injustice, thereby contributing to the problem. She reveals that even in Nordic countries, which are considered exemplary in their commitment to human rights, indigenous people, minoritized groups, and migrants have historically remained outside of national identities and their struggles have often been overlooked. In the United States, though there has been a push for multicultural education, we continue to use a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum across subjects. As someone who works with teachers to integrate social justice into their curricula, I find Osler’s suggestions to be very useful. Her book provides both broad and detailed information that can serve as an entry point for a wide range of educators at different stages of implementing HRE.

Osler (2016) reminds us that as educators, we are involved in an inherently political arena, and our actions—or inactions—are political acts. We are all “implicated in processes that either support or undermine struggles for justice” (Osler, 2016, p. 18). We must reflect upon our own positions in our communities and classrooms, as well as consider those of our students. Rather than thinking about human rights as a set of issues for people in other places to contend with, she consistently reinforces the idea that we are all part of our local and global communities. As such, it is our responsi-

bility to care for one another, build solidarity, and work toward social justice for everyone. Human rights education provides a means by which to produce and sustain cultural change in order to achieve these goals. Osler's (2016) book equips educators with a historical and theoretical foundation along with a toolkit to help make HRE practical, accessible, and engaging for all learners.

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