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Book Review: The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education: Developing Compassion, Understanding, and Advocacy

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Book Review

***The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education:
Developing Compassion, Understanding,
and Advocacy***

By Gloria T. Alter & William R. Fernekes (Eds.)

Rowan & Littlefield, 2023, 314 pages.

\$95 (Hardback), \$39 (Paperback), \$37 (eBook).

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We have a responsibility as educators to help students make sense of what is happening around them and give them tools to transform the world they live in. We must build educational spaces that uphold and promote peace and human rights. Educators across the globe have a moral imperative to help students develop compassion, understanding, and advocacy. Teachers, in particular, are uniquely positioned to inspire students and instill a sense of responsibility to fight for the rights of others. It is, therefore, critical that teachers begin to see themselves as human rights educators and “develop a common responsibility to make human rights a reality” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 73).

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Gloria T. Alter, Associate Professor at Northern Illinois University, and William R. Fernekes, founding member of Human Rights Educators USA, take on the groundbreaking task of making human rights education (HRE) a central focus of global teacher education in their book, *The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education: Developing Compassion, Understanding, and Advocacy* (2023). The editors bring together prominent scholars in the field of HRE to offer teacher educators, researchers, and students an essential resource to transform teacher education and place human rights at the center of educational settings. This book is an essential contribution to the field of human rights, providing teacher education programs and their students with opportunities to understand the theoretical foundations of HRE and offering resources for practicing teachers who desire to integrate HRE into their daily practice.

Section I: Human Rights Education and Global Teacher Education

The first section places the development of HRE within the global movement for human rights and discusses how HRE can transform existing global teacher education (GTE) by integrating critical and decolonial perspectives. Chapter 1 authors Felisa Tibbitts and Sandra Sirota set the stage by defining HRE and its three essential dimensions – education *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights. They argue for an HRE-integrated teacher education curriculum that critically examines oppressive systems and structures limiting human rights. The authors propose that teacher education institutions take on the responsibility of including HRE in their curriculum and advocating for “HRE that is current and relevant for classrooms across the globe” (p. 21).

In Chapter 2, Nancy Flowers and Abraham Magendzo provide an extensive historical and global overview of HRE. The authors provide an overview of HRE in Latin America, Europe, and the United States (U.S.), drawing attention to recent HRE developments. Notably, HRE in the United States has received hardly any support from the public school establishment and thus continues to have little impact on U.S. schooling. The authors outline critical factors for the appropriate development of HRE: (1) an urgent

need to train more human rights educators, (2) furthering research in the field, (3) building networks, and (4) maintaining integrity.

Chapter 3 reviews the interconnections between global citizenship education and HRE. Authors Osler and Hugh Starkey provide an overview of citizenship education and elaborate on education for cosmopolitan citizenship. They proceed to a discussion of children as citizens, arguing for recognition that “children are equal political beings with political rights...this includes a right to ‘participate in procedures whereby order is constructed, maintained, and changed’” (p. 65). The chapter concludes with a proposal for how schools can become sites for the renewal of a democratic process through their commitment to human rights and citizenship education.

In Chapter 4, Adaobiagu Obiagu highlights the importance of reassessing GTE using critical and decolonial perspectives, particularly from the Global South and the field of HRE. Obiagu discusses how GTE is tied to neoliberalism and Western-Eurocentric perspectives. The author emphasizes that decolonial perspectives can help transform GTE by interrupting Western ideas of individualism, along with addressing the goals, principles, and challenges of implementing HRE. Obiagu concludes by providing an example of global education content in teacher education curricula.

Section II: Teaching About Global Human Rights—Applying Principles and Practice

The second section discusses rights-based education for children and the applications of HRE at all grade levels. Chapter 5 authors Katherine Covell and R. Brian Howe incorporate human rights documents and related resources to provide unit examples addressing critical current human rights issues. They provide a conceptual foundation for how human rights can frame K-12 teaching and learning and discuss the guiding principles of provision, protection, and participation embedded in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child. The authors highlight the obligations of school authorities responsible for children’s education: ensuring for every child (1) the right to education, (2) rights in education, and (3) rights through education. The lessons of this chapter are critical for

teachers and school administrators to understand so that they can uphold their responsibilities as educators.

In Chapter 6, Alter offers resources for LGBTQ+ education and advocacy. The author examines worldwide data that suggests the increased population and growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ people; yet, LGBTQ+ people continue to face discrimination in schools. Alter points out how this reality is both critical and alarming since teachers should know how to protect and support LGBTQ+ students. The chapter offers teachers opportunities to learn how to teach about LGBTQ+ human rights through an inclusive curriculum and supportive school policies. It concludes with unit examples of elementary school scope and sequence.

Chapter 7 authors Kristi Rudelius-Palmer and Page Hersey focus on teaching and learning about global migration from an HRE perspective. They offer seven guidelines for teaching and learning about global migration that are helpful for all teachers, especially preservice teachers learning new skills. The authors provide a unit on the United States-Mexico border that applies these guidelines as well as ideas for instruction and resources for teachers. They conclude with four recommendations for teacher preparation programs: (1) developing and adopting program guidelines; (2) providing mentorship programs; (3) fostering training and experience in collective action with human rights organizations; and (4) offering ongoing fellowships to reinforce personal and collective learning.

In the last chapter in section two, Fernekes offers pathways for the curricular integration of HRE within existing programs in U.S. public schools. Addressing the challenges of integrating HRE in public school curricula, he offers different pathways educators can take, such as a district/community-wide initiative and/or an individual classroom-based approach. Fernekes presents readers with an overview of International Human Rights Curriculum Unit Objectives that teachers can adopt as a model for curriculum development. The chapter closes with suggestions for teacher education programs to consider if they want to prepare preservice teachers to meet the current needs of students.

Section III: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the final section, Glenn Mitoma and Sandra Sirota discuss the future of HRE in GTE and offer sound recommendations for teacher educators, teachers, researchers, and advocates committed to HRE. The authors call for fostering a broad professional, personal, and civic identity for teachers rooted in human rights by looking at the lessons learned throughout the text. Based upon the shared understanding of HRE as developed in UN international standards among all contributors to this book, the authors recommend a variety of practices that can help pre-service (and veteran) teachers meet the challenges of our time. They also suggest introducing HRE to future school administrators through their university's educational leadership program. As a current assistant principal in a predominantly low-income and immigrant community, I found this chapter especially helpful since HRE is fundamental to my work and commitment to my students and their families. It is imperative that school administrators truly understand HRE so that they can support teachers in implementing HRE practices.

The last chapter provides readers with application strategies and activities for advocacy in conjunction with the book or in professional development for HRE. The authors end by centering HRE as critical to the support of human life and the survival of the planet. We must, as the authors suggest, "create a less individualistic, more caring society" (p. 243).

As I conclude this review, I'd like to take us to the core of this book which is to reimagine new possibilities for the future of teacher education and the future of our children. It is our responsibility as educators to inspire our students and instill a sense of responsibility to fight for the rights of others. We cannot simply sit by while hospitals, universities, and entire communities continue to be bombed. We must stand in solidarity with communities across the globe, such as in Palestine, in their struggle for human rights and liberation. As educators, we have a responsibility to help students uphold peace, and protect and promote human rights.

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