

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

Review by Anne M. Dolan

Human Rights Education Reflections on Theory and Practice is a comprehensive, insightful book about human rights education. It presents the proceedings of a conference *Human Rights Education for a Sustainable Future* which took place in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra in September 2008. Organised by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education located at the college and in association with Amnesty International, the conference was organised to celebrate sixty years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The conference brought together human rights educators from a range of formal and non-formal education settings, from theoretical and practical perspectives and from a range of local, national and international agencies. The book captures the essence of the conference (which I attended) efficiently and effectively and represents an excellent overview of the proceedings.

A central aim of the book is to explore the idea of human rights education as a situated practice in Ireland, and to extend its research base which the contributors acknowledge is in its infancy in terms of theory, research and dialogue with other disciplines. The book achieves this aim coherently and persuasively while addressing three interrelated themes: the role of human rights teaching in citizenship education and education for sustainable development (ESD); the rights of children in education and the concept of 'voice'; and Human Rights Education in the context of curriculum design and school practice.

Topics covered include the historical and philosophical origins of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the concept of human rights itself (Starkey, Ch. 2); the relationship between the UDHR and the lived experiences of people in a multicultural society (Banks, Ch. 3); the relationship between human rights education and education for sustainable development (Kirchschlaeger, Ch. 4); children's rights and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Prunty, Ch. 5); the role of drama in human rights education (Murphy, Ch. 6); children's rights and local communities (Pike, Ch. 7); Irish teachers' understandings of human rights education (Ruane et al, Ch. 8); human rights and journalism education (Kenny, Ch. 9); and a practice perspective on citizenship and human rights education (McCutcheon, Ch. 10).

The reader is left with a well-rounded overview of human rights education, its origins, context and definition, its relationship with other educations, including development education, citizenship education, education for sustainable development and intercultural education. Human rights education and development education have much in common including methodologies, global and justice perspectives and theoretical frameworks making this book is a valuable resource for development educators. However, the book calls for greater dialogue between human rights education and other areas of education and education theories. Therefore continued reflections and research findings on the interface between development education and human rights education must be explicitly articulated rather than implicitly accepted.

Essentially, the book achieves a good balance between theoretical perspectives and practical examples, which showcase a variety of dimensions and interpretations of human rights such as the right of children to participate in the development of their locality (Pike, Ch. 7), and the importance of consulting children with special needs in the design and implementation of their IEP (Prunty, Ch. 5) . Hugh Starkey's chapter on the background of human rights and human rights education is particularly strong and it provides a useful first reading for any novice who would like a coherent overview of the area. A study conducted to assess Irish primary teachers' knowledge of and attitudes to human rights education (Ruane et al, Ch. 8) interestingly revealed a lack of conceptual clarity among teachers. In light of Starkey's assertion (Ch. 2) that knowledge of the UDHR is an important requirement for teachers and educators, this book has very important implications for colleges of education and teacher educators.

While all of the authors are united in their passion and commitment to human rights education and to the UDHR, the book misses an opportunity to illustrate the critiques of human rights which exist in the literature. For instance, there are debates about universality versus relativity of human rights in the context of different socio-political, cultural contexts. The relationship between human rights and culture has been raised. Enshrining rights without duties or obligations and the extent to which rights and duties are thought to be interdependent are common questions. The divergent interplay between individual and community rights and between liberal and socialist interpretation of human rights are key issues.

Notwithstanding this, the book is compulsory reading for all those with an interest in human rights education. It makes an important contribution

to our understanding of human rights education in the context of the UDHR, the Covenant on the Rights of the Child, education theory and its relationship with other educations including development education. The book is a well-researched contribution to human rights education and is particularly timely in the context of education reform which is currently taking place in Ireland. The publication will be of interest to teachers who are interested in promoting democratic models of education in their schools; teacher educators; non-governmental organisations and anyone who has an interest in the relationship between human rights education and general educational theories and ideas. In light of the new B.Ed. Degree Programme, which will be introduced in all colleges of education in Ireland from September 2012, this book should feature prominently on reading lists for all student teachers.

Brian Ruane & Fionnuala Waldron (eds.) (2011), *Human Rights Education: Reflections on Theory and Practice*, Dublin: The Liffey Press.

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