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Book Review: The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education

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A Timely Addition to the Discussion on Human Rights Education

The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education: Developing Compassion, Understanding, and Advocacy, edited by Gloria T. Alter and William R. Fernekes (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), is eye-opening and informative. The contributing authors clearly outline how the U.S. has fallen behind in incorporating human rights education (HRE) in teacher education programs, much less in state curricula. Framed by the fundamentals associated with the United Nations instruments, this book is ideal for preservice teachers, graduate students (in teacher education programs), and any youth-serving professional eager to learn more about HRE.

In Chapter One, the authors define HRE and explain its key components. The discussion pivots to why HRE is important in teacher preparation and references how HRE is carried out globally. The authors pose the question, “Why human rights education?” which is fitting considering that teacher preparation programs nationwide already offer courses devoted to diverse and special populations, social and emotional learning, and education philosophy courses to name a few, all of which address some aspects of human rights.

The authors argue that pre-service teachers have to know and understand human rights before they can teach about them. Therefore, teacher preparation programs should explicitly integrate HRE and how to teach it using developmentally appropriate practices. Preservice teachers who graduate from such programs can also learn how to depoliticize HRE as they use/teach inquiry and analysis skills to examine what it means to respect and observe all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Latter sections of the chapter briefly discuss positive outcomes from graduates who took courses or workshops at specific universities, suggesting the effectiveness of their training and its influence on the human rights education of children and adolescents. A supplemental box or figure showcasing the components of these courses/workshops would also have been of value to readers.

Chapter Two is a comprehensive chapter that serves as an excellent orientation to HRE. The authors begin with a history lesson on HRE and emphasize that despite its foundational roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (adopted in the late 1940s), the movement was slow to start. Much of HRE originated in Latin America where the citizens used

it to resist oppressive dictators, which inspired Filipinos to use HRE to overthrow the Marcos regime, and later roused South Africa to develop the Action Plan for Human Rights Education. The authors also address issue-specific HRE groups that have endured exclusion and discrimination, and showcase various organizations that promote HRE.

A more inclusive history of HRE in Latin America, Europe, and the U.S. follows, with attention focused on recent HRE developments (1980s to the present). In the U.S., for example, HRE has received very little support from the public-school establishment. These historical and contemporary references promote the author's key point about HRE: most U.S. teachers do not have formal training in HRE and need it if it is expected that future generations commit to and defend human rights. A discussion ensues about the influence of critical pedagogy on HRE, which is insightful. Latter sections of the chapter are devoted to the obstacles and challenges HRE faces, globally and in the U.S., that lead to the argument that teachers need to see themselves as human rights educators and advocates. Overall, the chapter is an excellent primer on HRE fundamentals.

In Chapter Three, readers learn more about global citizenship education and the characteristics that correspond to HRE. A good portion of the chapter addresses the emergence of global citizenship, which is the basis of the argument for why nations should collectively embrace UDHR principles. The authors then define citizenship education and elaborate on the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship (i.e., a global society where humans are one family). Examples of global citizenship education would have been helpful additions, although readers can easily visit the websites of Childhood Education International and the Global Citizens' Initiative for implementation ideas and practical resources. The authors segue to a discussion on children as a vulnerable population who need protection but also need to exercise agency. This is a powerful section that can help school practitioners structure how to address power imbalances between school authorities and students. Additional guidelines would have been helpful here, especially with examples of real school leadership teams that do this well.

In Chapter Four, the author examines teacher education content and pedagogy and the purpose of producing teachers who are informed about global perspectives. The chapter begins with a lengthy discussion on global teacher education (GTE) and its ties to global education, global citizenship education, and HRE. The author discusses human rights principles relative to colonial and post-colonial times leading up to decolonizing global teacher education through HRE. As the author emphasizes, "Decolonizing GTE allows teacher educators and teachers to question the narrative of the powerful, seek out narratives of the excluded, and stand in solidarity with them, advocating on their behalf" (p. 79).

A large section of the chapter addresses HRE: definition, goals, principles, and challenges, which may seem redundant after reading the prior chapters, but the author crafts well the high stakes of effective HRE implementation

by addressing the epistemology of HRE, HRE pedagogies, and its ecological dimension. The chapter closes with a discussion on the challenges—epistemological and practical—for global teacher education. A bonus feature of the chapter is a table that presents global education content in teacher education curricula, which allows readers to explore types of global content integration, prevailing content/perspectives, and challenges to program integration in the related disciplines.

Chapter Five kicks off Section II, which explores teaching about global human rights. The chapter addresses children's human rights with attention focused on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A history lesson ensues on the origins of the CRC and follows with an in-depth discussion of its guiding principles, CRC practices, and children's rights "to," "in," and "through" education. This discussion is a must-read for pre-service teachers and anyone who works with children to fully understand the wide reach of the UN's concept of children's rights. "Children's rights education requires the school culture to be infused with the values and beliefs of the CRC, and to have children's rights as its overarching framework" (p. 121). Additionally, the authors discuss criticisms of children's rights and argue against the claims that children lack the cognitive and emotional skills to exercise rights; that their rights infringe on parental rights; and that these rights reflect Western cultural values.

The authors transition to the notion that to fulfill children's rights, teacher education must be transformed so that all teachers know, understand, and teach "about," "through," and "for" human rights. A plus for readers is that the authors provide many examples for how teachers can incorporate children's rights into various subjects with an emphasis on making instruction more engaging and constructivist-based. The closing sections are about implementing children's rights education with developmental considerations and a whole-school approach in mind (the key for success is appropriate training for teachers). Highlighted is an example of an English school considered an exemplar in children's rights education, although there is also much to learn from schools that struggled with adhering to the CRC. As a bonus, the chapter includes a separate section on classroom resources.

Chapter Six is a comprehensive chapter on teaching about LGBTQ+ rights. The author begins by examining worldwide data that suggests how the LGBTQ+ population is increasing just as its social acceptance rises. Most Americans, for example, believe in non-discriminatory laws for the LGBTQ+ community in areas such as housing, employment, and social services. Sidebars and figures, an asset to the scale of the data addressed, allow readers to deduce that despite this growing acceptance, strong opposition to some rights exists, as do discriminatory practices toward LGBTQ+ people. In the U.S., for example, 27 states have no discrimination protection for the LGBTQ+ persons. Much of the discussion is about the harmful effects of discrimination on LGBTQ+

people, which leads to the argument that all teachers should know about LGBTQ+ student needs, challenges, and rights, as well as the repercussions of hate.

The latter half of the chapter addresses LGBTQ+ students in the U.S. and schools worldwide. The author does a thorough job of first explaining how many LGBTQ+ students do not feel safe in their learning environments and follows with what is known to help the students feel protected, supported, and accepted, namely an inclusive curriculum that incorporates LGBTQ+ instructional resources, educator support, and inclusive school policies. A bonus of the chapter is the closing discussion on age-appropriate LGBTQ+ education, a how-to menu of what can be done to promote LGBTQ+ rights, and a scope and sequence and unit examples. Readers will find the chapter insightful, as well as practical, considering all the resources provided throughout the chapter. Consider this chapter an essential reading for anyone seeking to best serve LGBTQ+ students.

Chapter Seven is about teaching global migration specifically to middle school learners. The first half of the chapter orients readers to the three main causes of global migration and explores human rights protection instruments. As expected, migrants and refugees are a vulnerable population that has its rights and protections regularly violated, despite the United Nations' best efforts to prevent the articulated abuses. In the second half of the chapter, the authors present how to teach about global migration in the classroom. They offer seven guidelines for teaching and learning about global migration, which incorporate principles of culturally responsive teaching and social-emotional learning. The guidelines are easy to follow, but specific examples would have been helpful to readers. For instance, a brief how-to on discussing “faulty assumptions about migrants” (e.g., What are some assumptions? How do I counter them?) and real personal narratives would have enriched the discussion.

A practical instructional unit on the U.S.-Mexico border follows, which gives readers an understanding of how to teach about global migration. Readers can use the unit as an example of inquiry-based instruction and case study analysis. Readers can teach the unit easily given an array of practical resources located at the end of the chapter. The authors close with four recommendations for teacher education, which include emphasizing, developing, and adopting program guidelines; providing mentorship programs; fostering training and experience; and offering ongoing fellowships. A bonus is that each recommendation has an example that readers can explore on their own.

Chapter Eight explores the integration of HRE in secondary curricula, specifically programs that are: district/community-wide (*This Is My Home*); high school-based and focused on international human rights (a Comparative World Studies Program); and individual classroom-based. Readers will appreciate the discussion and complementary tables that showcase unit and learning objectives as a model for instructional delivery. Anecdotal evidence

is provided to show that HRE raised student awareness of human rights concerns. An outline of challenges surrounding the future of HRE is also included. The latter sections of the chapter comprise a blueprint using Engle and Ochoa-Becker's model in six steps, which serves to promote a think-tank approach to discuss and dissect issues. The highlight is the nature of the discourse that offers practical ideas, questions, and examples of instruction to engage the students. The author closes with implications for teacher education programs repeating the recurring—albeit critical—theme that teachers are not proficient in HRE.

Section III encompasses the concluding two chapters, which discuss the future of HRE in global teacher education and application strategies. In Chapter Nine, the authors offer sound recommendations for HRE based on the elements cultivated throughout the text, which include: inviting youth to learn about HRE as equal partners; creating partnerships between teachers and community-based organizations; considering long-term programming; creating brave spaces for students' emotional reactions; and using decolonizing and critical pedagogies. They also suggest introducing HRE to school administrators, showing teachers how to integrate HRE into their courses, and training them in how to manage the intense emotions that often materialize when students learn about human rights.

The book culminates with Chapter 10, which provides activities for readers to use with the book or in professional development for HRE. The author emphasizes that human rights topics should: be relevant to students; raise their awareness about human rights issues; provoke them to question assumptions and consider new perspectives; incorporate self-reflection/evaluation practices; and motivate them to become advocates. A focal point of the chapter is that the author skillfully presents practical ideas and questions for discussion using HRE fundamentals. A wide range of resources are also available in the appendices.

Coupled with the information presented in the ten chapters, the biggest asset of the book is its organization, with three broad sections that herald what is forthcoming. Well-constructed questions are provided that orient readers to specific HRE topics prior to reading the subsequent discussions. An added feature of the book is that each chapter has suggested resources, which can be used as classroom activities and further exploration. In all, *The Human Rights Imperative in Teacher Education* presents a fresh and thorough perspective on human rights education.

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