



Volume 1, No 2 (2018)
Date of publication: 20-12-2018

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer./hrer.3088>
ISSN 2535-5406

EDITORIAL

Embodying human rights in formal education: an ongoing challenge

Audrey Osler
University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
University of Leeds, UK.

A.H.Osler@leeds.ac.uk

EDITORIAL

Embodying human rights in formal education: an ongoing challenge

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3088>

ISSN 2535-5406

Audrey Osler
University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
University of Leeds, UK.
A.H.Osler@leeds.ac.uk

This second edition of Human Rights Education Review went into production as the international community celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948) on 10 December 2018. This landmark document, which underpins all subsequent human rights law, remains an inspiration to countless educators and scholar-activists struggling to realise freedom, equality and dignity for learners at all stages of life - from early years settings, schools, through to colleges and universities, as well as in various non-formal and community settings.

Across the globe, many groups continue to draw on the UDHR in struggles for justice. Contemporary examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, originating among African Americans - a campaign against systemic racism and police violence in the US (<https://blacklivesmatter.com>). Black Lives Matter has inspired parallel initiatives and resistance to state violence and state racism in other jurisdictions, enabling a broader global conversation about racist injustice. Other struggles, including those for women's rights and LGBTQ rights, have also frequently been articulated as human rights struggles.

At the same time, other movements for freedom, equality and dignity have shown ambivalence about the possibilities of a human rights framework, because the very humanity of those engaged in resisting oppression has been denied by those exercising power and authority. I was reminded of this earlier in the year while spending a short period as a visiting scholar at Monash University, Australia. During my stay, I visited the First Peoples Gallery at Melbourne Museum. The gallery introduces the visitor to the diverse languages, cultures and traditions of Victoria's First Peoples, said to represent the longest continuous culture in the history of the world. The exhibition includes a section on the difficult and violent history of European colonisation. It explores the ongoing impact and consequences of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children through the narratives and voices of those living in Victoria (<https://museums victoria.com.au/website/bunjilaka/visiting/first-peoples/>).

From 1910, many Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families as a result of various government policies. Although Australia was a founding member of the United Nations and played a significant role in the drafting of the UDHR, these government policies were pursued until 1970, long after the UDHR was adopted. The children, known as the Stolen Generations, often lacked knowledge of their true families and identities. The stories of individuals caught up in such government-induced violence are inevitably harrowing. These policies continue to impact on individuals and communities in many profound ways (<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/a-guide-to-australias-stolen-generations>).

Effectively, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, women and men have been denied human rights because their very humanity was called into question. Yet the overall message of the First Peoples gallery is not one of passivity in the face of ill-treatment. It illustrates qualities of resilience and various forms of resistance to oppression. For example, a photographic exhibition entitled 'Because of Her, We Can' highlights the leadership of a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in twentieth century struggles to achieve recognition, equality and freedom for their communities, struggles which are ongoing (<https://www.naidoc.org.au/news/2018-national-naidoc-theme-announced>).

Effectively, the women featured in this exhibition, such as Fannie Cochrane-Smith, Gladys Nicholls, Flo Kennedy and Essie Coffey, have challenged, and continue to challenge, the authorities to live up to the ideals of human rights they claim to hold.

In this edition of HRER, the focus is firmly on schools. Each of the articles addresses human rights education (HRE) in formal settings, in spaces where there are often tensions between the duty of the state to guarantee rights, including the right to human rights education, and the power of the state to deny those same rights. They explore both the promises of human rights through education and the ways in which such promises have yet to be realised. Laura Lundy and Gabriela Martínez Sainz examine violations of children's human rights; they focus on school access, the curriculum, testing and assessment, discipline, and respect for children's views. Drawing on a wide range of examples from diverse national contexts, including Bulgaria, Canada, Cameroon, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Fiji, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the UK and the USA, they consider how children's rights are frequently, and sometimes routinely, violated at school. Effectively, the nation-state that has a duty to guarantee children's human rights is violating them.

Laura Lundy and Gabriela Martínez Sainz argue that within human rights education 'we need to engage with the dark side of human rights breaches as well as the positive, aspirational vision that a human rights framework offers' if children are to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to challenge and prevent such abuses. They argue that this is a prerequisite for a genuinely transformative education. This requires that adults engaged in children's education, including school administrators and teachers, are 'legally literate'. In other words, they need a sound understanding and education in both domestic law and international human rights law.

In her paper examining Norwegian education policy, Kristin Gregers Eriksen examines some of the tensions that exist in the ways in which Norwegian national identity is constructed both generally, and in relation to indigenous Sami citizens. She considers the ideals of an inclusive practice presented in policy and contrasts this with what she identifies as a lack of knowledge and understanding of Sami culture and identities among policy-makers and educators. Just as Lundy and Martínez Sainz argue that an effective human rights education needs to engage with breaches of human rights, she discusses the question of what non-indigenous Norwegian students learn about the oppression of the Sami. She emphasises the responsibility of the Norwegian state in addressing this question within the school curriculum as a key element of effective education for human rights. Acknowledging the favourable position of Norwegian Sami citizens as a group, in relation to that of indigenous people in many other jurisdictions, she nevertheless cautions against the simple narrative of a Norwegian success story, advocating a more nuanced approach. Eriksen suggests that a focus on Norway's success not only risks disguising ongoing

epistemic violence and tacit exclusion; it also contributes to an inadequate human rights education for the country's mainstream population. Effectively, Eriksen's scholarship encourages educators to consider tensions that indigeneity raises about universalism and recognition in education for inclusive citizenship and human rights.

Lee Jerome focuses on the ideals of HRE and on what he terms the 'optimistic' vision that it offers. He critically examines the role of the teacher, drawing on a broad range of international research. While acknowledging the ways in which schools routinely reproduce inequality, he invites teachers and teacher educators to critically interrogate their own actions and beliefs. Jerome identifies and discusses four different teacher responses to the challenge of teaching for human rights and social justice in schools. The 'ignorant teacher' lacks the specific interdisciplinary curriculum knowledge about human rights. Secondly, there is the teacher who acts as an obstacle to HRE, because s/he chooses to prioritise other concerns. The third response is that of the conservative teacher who avoids a HRE agenda, perhaps because it threatens the teacher's own conceptions of adult-child relationships, or because an agenda addressing current societal inequalities and transformation is contrary to his or her own world view. Finally, there is the 'hypocritical teacher', who claims to be engaging in a transformatory approach while following a significantly different path. Jerome contrasts these four positions with that of the 'heroic teacher' who champions HRE, in large part because of particular life experiences and a political commitment to justice. Jerome's analysis may prove a powerful tool in enabling new teachers to reflect on their own positionality. Set alongside the legal obligations that teachers have in relation to HRE, those responsible for teacher education are challenged to look afresh at curriculum, pedagogy and, perhaps most importantly, the purposes of human rights education.

Set together, these papers present not only diverse perspectives, but also new challenges to all responsible for HRE in schools, including policy-makers, teacher educators, and teachers themselves.

References

United Nations (UN) (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. General Assembly resolution General Assembly resolution 217 A). 10 December. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>