



Volume 3, No 1 (2020)
Date of publication: 10-02-2020

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3574>
ISSN 2535-5406

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

From failed citizenship to functioning citizenship: a challenging agenda for human rights education

Kingston, L. N. (2019). *Fully Human: Personhood, Citizenship and Rights*. Oxford: OUP. 312pp. £41.99 (hardcover) ISBN 978-0-19-091826-2.

Reviewed by Hugh Starkey
UCL Institute of Education, UK.

Hugh Starkey: h.starkey@ucl.ac.uk

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

From failed citizenship to functioning citizenship: a challenging agenda for human rights education

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3574>

ISSN 2535-5406

Kingston, L. N. (2019). *Fully Human: Personhood, Citizenship and Rights*. Oxford: OUP. 312pp. £41.99 (hardcover) ISBN 978-0-19-091826-2

Reviewed by
Hugh Starkey
UCL Institute of Education, UK.
h.starkey@ucl.ac.uk

Human rights declarations and instruments assert that human beings are part of a 'human family' where inalienable rights and entitlement to be treated with dignity are birth rights, and not linked to nationality, ethnicity, religion or social status. However, in practice such guarantees depend on access to citizenship. Whilst citizenship is a concept much broader than nationality, with which is often conflated, it is nonetheless the case that, as James Banks (2017) has argued, many inhabitants within affluent and democratic countries experience 'failed citizenship'. That is to say that they are deprived of agency and of the social and economic structures that enable and protect a dignified and fulfilled life. The promise of justice and peace, the *raison d'être* of human rights, is effectively broken.

Lindsey Kingston examines the realities of various categories of people who are frequently unable to secure their rights and their dignity. These include increasing numbers of stateless people as well as those displaced by war, ethnic cleansing and natural disasters brought about by climate change. Her analysis also includes other migrants, nomadic peoples, indigenous nations, and citizens in the United States who still struggle for the most basic rights and dignity. The philosophical, ethical and moral question of an individual's status as human being, or person, is addressed in the context of the social and political concepts of citizenship and rights. The result is an argument about what it means, as the title of the book suggests, to be fully human, since anything less than full recognition of a person's humanity fails to guarantee access to human rights. Citizenship should no longer be seen in terms of opposition to noncitizenship, but rather in terms of its efficacy. Failed citizenship can be overcome, Kingston argues, if political attention is paid to ensuring 'functioning citizenship'.

Kingston's readable and challenging book is constructed in four parts and nine chapters. In Part 1 she examines the changing value and meaning of citizenship as it is politically constructed through a discourse of membership and worthiness. Part 2 looks at migration and arrivals who become noncitizens within nation states. Issues include statelessness, forced displacement and the creation of liminal spaces as a result of unregulated migration. The third part looks at failed citizenship for established groups within nation states, such as nomadic peoples, indigenous communities and what she calls second-class citizens. The final two chapters propose

solutions aimed at making the issue more salient. The first approach represents personhood and the conclusion argues for 'functioning citizenship'.

The observation of the ways in which denial of civic status to indigenous people in Thailand led to their extreme exploitation, including trafficking, was the starting point for Kingston's impressive intellectual journey and scholarly enquiries. If being stateless effectively disqualified people from the protection of human rights, how come the human rights community of UN organisations, academics, lawyers and activists did not address the issue? This book is perhaps the start of a campaign to put the issue of defining personhood and promoting functioning citizenship firmly on the academic agenda, with the intention that it should also figure highly on political agendas.

Kingston argues that the root of the problem of statelessness is nationalistic or nativist constructions of hierarchies of personhood. The act of ascribing identities of foreignness, illegality and noncitizenship perpetuates inequalities and renders some persons more worthy than others for protection and political membership. In other words, these discourses and regulations cause some individuals to be accepted as more fully human than others.

Another useful concept with potential for adaptation as an activity or framework in human rights education (HRE) is the attention to rights to place and purpose. In this sense place refers to a feeling of belonging whilst purpose is about achieving a sense of dignity. Right to purpose is similar to Nussbaum and Sen's capability approach (Nussbaum, 2006), though Kingston avoids this comparison. She shows how numerous articles of the Universal Declaration address place and belonging. These include article 9 outlawing exile; freedom of movement within a state (13); right to leave and return (13); asylum (14); nationality (15). Other articles address purpose, including: marriage and family (16); property (17); freedom of thought and religion (18); freedom of expression (19); assembly and association (20); and others, including education (26).

The central section of the book exemplifies, in considerable detail, ways and contexts in which people are deprived of their rights to be fully human. It includes many examples of resistance and solidarity.

It is in the concluding chapters that reference is made to HRE as part of a strategy to address the impacts of statelessness and noncitizenship. Kingston advocates expanding HRE, noting that it has achieved a 'newfound respect' over the past thirty years. To contribute to overcoming the assaults on human dignity documented in the book, she sees HRE as capable of uncovering hierarchies of personhood; fostering advocacy and making people aware of their rights and of the resources to claim them.

I think that this is a very important book that whilst being an impressive piece of scholarship, is also accessible to readers from undergraduate level up. It should certainly find its way onto the reading lists of many university courses, including education. That said, the work of translating this analysis into the conceptualisation and the content of HRE courses will be the responsibility of education practitioners such as the readers of this journal. Ensuring access for all to functional citizenship requires awareness within majority communities of the effects of officially sanctioned hostile environments on fellow inhabitants and their families. It also requires acts of solidarity and a willingness to name and confront dehumanising discourses. This is not a new agenda for HRE, but it is one that is still underdeveloped.

References

- Banks, J. A. (2017). Failed Citizenship and Transformative Civic Education. *Educational Researcher*, 46(7), 366-377.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726741>
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). Education and Democratic Citizenship: Capabilities and Quality Education. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 7(3), 385 - 395.