

Book and media reviews

Diverse international perspectives on the value of human rights and human rights education

Roux, C & Becker, A. (Eds.) (2019) Human rights literacies: Future directions. Cham: Springer; 311 pp., ISSN 2509-2960 ISSN 2509-2979 (electronic); Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Rights; ISBN 978-3-319-99566-3; ISBN 978-3-319-99567-0 (eBook); <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99567-0>

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This edited collection by Roux and Becker (2019) critically examines differences between human rights philosophies and how human rights play out in practice. It looks at human rights education (HRE) and human rights literacies in diverse contexts and geographical spaces in South Africa, Germany, The Netherlands, the UK, Israel and India.

The book comprises 12 chapters that are explored in three sections. The first section, 'Setting the scene', prepares readers for understanding the various ways in which diverse groups of people/cultures have been included, excluded and marginalised in society. The introductory opening chapter examines 'Boschi's (2016) 'culture of remembrance', which argues for 'a culture of remembering of the suffering of others, not only those for one's own ethnic group or nation' (p. 9). Such remembrance draws attention to power relations: between colonisers and colonised in western, Asian and European empires; between slaves and slave owners; and between developing and developed countries. Pertinently, in 'Setting the scene' readers are reminded that a change of status, such as from being colonised to self-governance, does not

mean that everyone has access to the same human rights or human rights education. The chapter explores how individuals can be empowered to explore 'human rights education/pedagogical knowledge - with insights derived from e.g., United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s policy on education, re-imagining epistemological/transformation and working in circles or searching for new beginnings' in human rights. Further, the chapter reveals the dissonance between how human rights education is interpreted and the situation of the recipients of human rights education, whilst outlining the possibilities of human rights literacies and consequent pedagogical implications.

Chapter 2 examines ontological/epistemological in/exclusion through the Declaration of the Rights of Man (sic) and the work of theorists such as Kant, Descartes and Derrida, while Chapter 3 draws on critical race theory to examine decoloniality vis-à-vis race, gender and disability, decolonising student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall, human inclusion and power relationships. Chapter 4 covers human rights, human rights education and gaps in HRE, linking these issues to poverty, the Holocaust, peace education, global citizenship education, colonial and post-colonial discourses, and critical approaches and methodologies.

The six chapters in the second section, 'Possibilities and probabilities', are devoted to human rights and human rights education research projects undertaken in schools, universities and teacher education. Areas covered include research design, data collection, methodological and analytical approaches, and the perspectives of educators, students and families. The projects studied are located in diverse geographical, spatial and educational contexts. They vividly demonstrate that the need for human rights education is not confined to non-western countries, and that student teachers/ the teaching profession are not exempt from the need for such knowledge-building. A pertinent example here is a longitudinal South African research study entitled '*Human rights literacy: Quest for meaning*'. This was conducted in two phases between 2012 and 2016, with an additional focus group discussion in 2017 conducted by researchers in the Netherlands. The project combines national and international perspectives whilst exploring meaning-making in time, place and space. What is interesting about this study is the collaboration of researchers in South Africa, Norway, the Netherlands, Israel and India, which speaks to the ability of researchers with different ethnic, cultural and class backgrounds and educational experiences to coalesce around HRE. Another project worth noting is '*Sectarian violence and ethnic conflict in India: Issues and challenges*'. Although this is the only project in this section which does not mention human rights in its title, it examines a serious human rights issue - the impact of cultural traditions on religion and caste violence. It brings attention to the salience of human rights education in conflict resolution and peacemaking.

There are two chapters in the final section, 'Unpacking future directions: Critiques and conversations'. '*Human rights RIP: Human rights literacies—critique and possibilities*' offers a critique of and possibilities for human rights literacies and curriculum development while

'(Re)capturing human rights literacies: Starting conversations' highlights the importance of positioning human rights literacies in time, space and place. The latter chapter discusses a human rights literacies framework developed to create a 'literacy turn' (p. 295) alongside bottom-up strategies in different countries that are designed to create 'liberation possibilities' by addressing issues of 'diversity, difference, othering, marginalisation and violence' (p. 296). Global issues of exclusion, inclusion, marginalisation and social justice are key areas addressed in this text. The book's foreword highlights the following central questions:

- How can the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 become a reality for human beings globally?
- What role could human rights education play to make these rights more of a reality worldwide as well as in local situations?
- How are they to be re-formed to be efficient?
- And what new thinking could guide the way forward in the further development of human rights education, not least given the post-colonial critique of universalism and other renewing contemporary philosophical trends?

The role of compulsory education and higher education knowledge systems in maintaining silence around systemic and epistemic violence is also questioned, together with how human rights education can contribute to peace and social justice, and thereby eliminate inequality.

The book is decolonial in its approach and this is evident from the outset. For example, it highlights the western lack of knowledge about The African Charter of Human and People's Rights (1981, 1986) and its contribution to human rights education and philosophies. However, with its emphasis on family, community and liberation from colonialism for the whole African continent, the African Charter continues to be important to its signatories in the 21st century and 'constitutes a different and comparable approach towards the virtues and values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948)' (p.11). The book is rich in detail (literature and empirical studies) and has a strong knowledge base. It is theoretically informed, applies intersectional analyses and through its criticality offers a wealth of opportunities to challenge deficit discourses (including those of student teachers) about African countries/peoples and minority ethnic communities more broadly, alongside interrogating religious differences and mis/understandings.

Reading the book, I was struck by how much its first part (Setting the scene) reminded me of the address Haile Selassie I delivered at the United Nations. The Emperor of Ethiopia critiqued the 'subhuman bondage' that African people suffered under colonialism and called for 'basic human rights' to be 'equally guaranteed to all', without regard to race (Selassie, 1967 p374). Fifty-six years later Roux and Becker's collection has drawn attention to criticisms of the

ontology and epistemology of the universality of western thought and human rights. Selassie's hope for the future was one of 'world citizenship' and 'lasting peace' where 'Africans' are able to 'stand and speak as free beings, equal in the eyes of all men (sic)' (Selassie, 1967, p. 374). Just as Selassie called for recognition of Black peoples' human rights, this book seeks a future whereby all people are/become knowledgeable about human rights and have the freedom and ability to access human rights education as part of this process. Indeed, *Human rights literacies* is a hopeful text with future possibilities for liberation and mechanisms for achieving world peace.

This book will be a key contributor to human rights education. It will be invaluable to school/university educators, researchers and policymakers alike.

References

- Selassie, H. (1967). Selected speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I (1918-1967). Ethiopia: Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Information. Retrieved from <https://www.worldcat.org/title/selected-speeches-of-his-imperial-majesty-haile-selassie-first-1918-1967/oclc/758016>