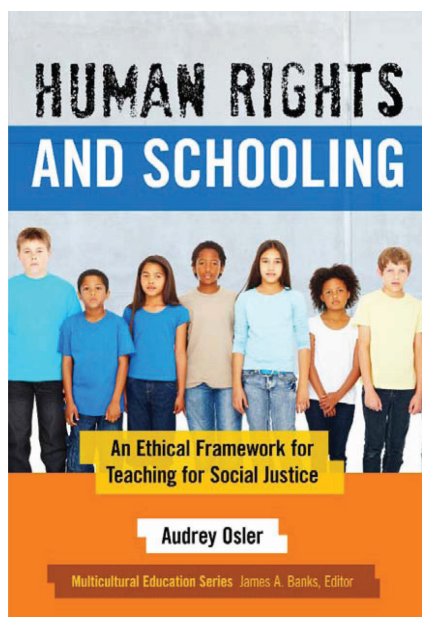


Human Rights and Schooling: An ethical framework for teaching for social justice,
by Audrey Osler

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Audrey Osler's new book, *Human Rights and Schooling*, explores the possibilities of education as a vehicle for building freedom, justice and peace at home and throughout the world. It makes a strong argument for including human rights in the social studies/citizenship curriculum of our schools. First, to cultivate 'cosmopolitan citizens', schools must develop values, skills and knowledge that are embedded in the field of human rights. Second, human rights education (HRE) strengthens efforts to teach responsively to diverse populations and for social justice. Third, young people have the right to receive HRE, as stated in the UN's Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Osler deepens this argument and the reader's understanding of human rights concepts in multiple ways. She explains the legal frameworks that underpin human rights and the moral principles and commitments they embody. She presents her own teaching experiences and research in contexts ranging

from the state of Utah to Norway. And she interweaves examples of human rights activism from both inside and outside schools. The book has great value for students of education and educators, especially those wanting to know more about connections among HRE, democracy education and anti-oppression education.

Osler emphasizes that HRE embodies knowledge and praxis – it teaches people about human rights, through participatory pedagogies and for social justice. It embraces critical pedagogy in the sense that learning and teaching is merged with action that disrupts power relations. It fights against sexism, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of oppression, so that all persons benefit from universal rights to freedom, well-being and dignity. In so doing, it requires grappling with the tensions of challenging the state in public institutions such as schools.

As a US citizen, I endorse Osler's claim that the human rights project is misunderstood and neglected by many in the United States. She points out that, in the US, people tend to think in terms of civil rights granted by the government rather than universal rights to which all are entitled in their personal and public lives. *Human Rights and Schooling* addresses the fact that the US is one of the only countries that has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a 'unique tool for positive change in children's lives' (117).

The author also makes the point that those of us in the Global North often think of human rights abuses occurring in the Global South rather than looking at everyday sociopolitical conditions in our own societies. She addresses increased intolerance among Europeans when faced with religious and cultural diversity, and she explains the Council of Europe's clarification of free speech limits that strengthen democracy. She references anti-radicalization school policies that create potential for abuse as they get interpreted in sometimes harmful ways.

Osler's book offers timely lessons. In fact, its relevance has increased since publication. The Brexit and US presidential votes have exposed deep divisions within our nations, and their

repercussions are being felt worldwide. We know that conflicts in the larger society inevitably penetrate the walls of schools and classrooms. The events of 2016 could motivate educators to address some of the consequential moral, social and political issues of our time, and the book provides tremendous support to do so.

At the same time, *Human Rights and Schooling* discusses the contradictions between educational realities, ranging from lack of access to schooling to high-stakes testing, and the conditions promised by human rights declarations. It delves into complexities that make it difficult to achieve the principles of HRE in contexts ranging from Norway to Iraqi Kurdistan. There is a wide gap between the call to educate about, through and for human rights and what I call 'the charged classroom' (Pace, 2015). The charged classroom is filled with longstanding tensions, magnified by current conditions in schools and in society, which coexist with democratic possibilities. For example, teachers confront competing curricular-instructional demands intensified under high-stakes accountability regimes. In US and UK primary schools, the timetable is dominated by literacy and mathematics, with other subjects competing for slots in the schedule. In secondary schools, the press for content coverage persists. On top of that, teachers are expected to close achievement gaps, address socio-emotional issues and explore controversial issues while ensuring pupils engage in civil discourse during politically contentious times. Adding HRE to the curriculum opens up possibilities but places greater burdens on teachers, who often lack adequate professional development, time to plan and high-quality materials.

Human Rights and Schooling challenges us to strive towards changing individual attitudes and even the culture itself – a very tall order. With political leaders threatening universal rights in the US and elsewhere, is it more important to focus on educating young people to hold governments accountable for protecting human and civil rights, especially for those most vulnerable? Or should grass-roots efforts aimed at local change be the priority? As Osler indicates, context matters. Pushing legislators at different levels of government to protect the rights of all is essential; however, engaging pupils in projects where they can work outside the constraints of government and see directly the impact of their efforts is likely to be more fruitful.

Certainly for teacher educators like myself, *Human Rights and Schooling* reminds us to make room for human rights in our courses, and gives us some excellent tools to do so. By implication, it also urges us to advocate for prioritizing social studies, citizenship and related disciplines. And it challenges us to look beyond our own national contexts to explore HRE models, ideologies and impacts in different parts of the world, to expand our vision of what is possible (see Bajaj, 2011).

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