



Volume 1, No 2 (2018)
Date of publication: 17-09-2018

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.2872>
ISSN 2535-5406

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

New research-based insights for human rights education

Bajaj, Monisha (Ed.) (2017) *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. 366 pp., US \$49.95 (Paperback) ISBN: 9780812249026; USD \$49.95(Ebook) ISBN: 9780812293890

Reviewed by
Mei-Ying Tang
University of Taipei, Taiwan
mying@utapei.edu.tw

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

New research-based insights for human rights education

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.2872>

Bajaj, Monisha (Ed.) (2017) *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. 366 pp., US \$49.95 (Paperback) ISBN: 9780812249026; USD \$49.95(Ebook) ISBN: 9780812293890

Reviewed by
Mei-Ying Tang
University of Taipei, Taiwan
mying@utapei.edu.tw

Since the founding of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, human rights education (HRE) has blossomed into a global movement, whose mission is to promote education about human rights and education for human rights through the process of teaching and learning. However, HRE has consistently faced challenges, both in theory and in practice, and many questions have been raised by those engaged in implementing HRE. How has HRE been perceived and how has it evolved? Is there a universally applicable form of HRE that can be followed in different parts of the world? How do educators apply and localize concepts of HRE in diverse contexts?

Monisha Bajaj has edited *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis*. Her book provides essential material and resources for scholars, practitioners, activists, and policymakers who wish to engage with this dynamic field, especially in response to the rising tides of neo-fascism, economic exploitation, and the many forms of violence and discrimination in a changing and turbulent world. Bajaj's compilation of studies by leaders and researchers in HRE has three parts: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of Human Rights Education, Global Research in Human Rights Education, and Transformative Human Rights Education Praxis. These three sections consist of 12 chapters, which interrelate and reinforce each other: this provides a comprehensive mapping of HRE from theoretical perspectives, research across the globe and practice in diverse contexts. The collection of essays in this book provides a solid foundation for people interested in engaging with this fast-emerging field, as well as presenting research-based insights into how HRE has been practiced over the last decades, the current state of complexity, and future challenges.

In the first section, the text provides conceptual perspectives on the rise of HRE as a global phenomenon, the significance of emotion and sentimentality in HRE, the evolution of HRE models for empowering various learners toward empowerment, and HRE's legal standing as defined in international law. Based on theoretical foundations, the chapters in the second part examine research from different regions, including Iraqi Kurdistan, India, London, and Senegal. Although these case studies may not give a complete picture of HRE practice, they point out the major challenges, complexities, and limitations facing HRE, especially in regions where it may be regarded as potentially disruptive or even opposed to existing educational and political systems. The third section highlights transformative HRE praxis, embedded in and responsive to the cultural and historical contexts of the

communities engaged in HRE programs. The chapters in this section explore tensions and struggles in conceptualizing education for human rights, and there are examples of how marginalized groups and communities employ HRE concepts of social justice and peace-building for purposes of resistance and empowerment. Echoing through many of the articles in this volume, transformative HRE praxis offers a broader yet holistic understanding of human rights knowledge, attitudes and actions for human rights activism and social change.

The blend of theory and research with compelling accounts of transformative praxis makes *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis* a comprehensive and cohesive body of work. However, inspiring as this collection may be, there is no model of HRE that can fit all contexts. As Nancy Flowers points out in the Afterword, “Whence: The Evolution of Human Rights Education”, educators around the globe need to have solid foundations and carry out the full spectrum of human rights education, while facing the challenges ahead. These challenges include: institutional integration into educational systems; insufficient teacher training; the culture of the school community; confusion with other educational topics, such as moral education, multicultural education and citizenship; and long-term commitments to implementing and sustaining HRE. One would imagine that such issues, and research related to them, might be included in subsequent editions. A critique of the current situation and proposals for alternative ways forward are essential, as HRE is recognized as an emerging field of study and its practitioners gain influence in educational policymaking.

The chapters of *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis* address the diversity and complexity of approaches and perspectives. There are exemplifications of various programs under the banner of HRE posited by different authors, while the definition of human rights education is based on the international standards set forward by the United Nations. There will be an inevitable, ongoing struggle to gain universality for HRE, while the hierarchical nature of the government institutions that sponsor HRE often increases tensions between local contexts and international standards. This book would have been strengthened if there had been a more detailed examination of how to adapt particular models to local idiosyncrasies. It would also be valuable if there were an examination of how to employ appropriate methods and strategies for designing, implementing and developing reliable means of evaluation, or benchmarks, by which progress in HRE could be assessed. And it is essential that practitioners be provided with reflections on how one HRE program or experience might be relevant to other ones, and how they can address the tensions and difficulties in carrying out HRE.

As HRE becomes widely accepted as a global force for educational and social transformation, its job is to not only to pursue equal access to education for all. HRE also embodies three interlinked and interdependent components: education about rights, through and for human rights. This collection of essays stresses transformative HRE praxis, and prioritises education *for* human rights. This emphasis may leave readers expecting more examples that show how to develop action plans that identify goals, strategies and responsibilities. Readers might also expect examples of advocacy skills for human rights engagement and educational transformation, such as the skills involved in winning community support and negotiating with authorities.

Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis provides an opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and administrators to reflect on their own

practice and helps readers to reimagine a common future for cherishing diversity, praising human dignity and promoting human rights. This is essential if an adequate HRE is to be achieved.