

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Abdi, Ali A. & Shultz, Lynette. (Eds.) *Educating for Human Rights and Global Citizenship*. (2008). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 252 pages, ISBN 978-0-7914-7373-3

Nancy E. MacIntosh, Sessional Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Prince Edward Island

Education is powerful on many levels, but especially in that it has the potential to provide a universal understanding of the rights that people should possess. Abdi and Shultz (2008) held a conference on the premise that educators can make a significant impact when it comes to getting the word out about global human rights and citizenship. They invited scholars and those in the field to submit papers and projects for this conference, held at the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. The enthusiasm was remarkable with many delegates attending from around the world. Abdi and Shultz found that the enthusiasm did not wane after the conference ended, and the remaining energy resulted in this book.

As stated by the editors, the aim of this book is not “to itemize the articles constituted in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and prescribe institutional or socio-legalistic remedies,” but instead for the collective group of authors to contribute to what they feel is a deeper probe into how human rights can be available to all (p. 5). This book gives global human rights and citizenship a strong voice. Each chapter presents the story of a differing perspective on global citizenship and belonging.

Throughout the sixteen chapters of this book, the struggles and complexities that comprise the drive for global citizenship and human rights are explicated. Each contributor brings his or her own flavour of best practices and experiences involved in educating the multitudes about what chaos exists in the world and what educated people can do to help. Global citizenship is the vehicle used to get the points across regarding people’s struggle for dignity and belonging around the world.

Hiliaria Suba Huaman, a Quechua (Peru) indigenous leader, and Shulamith Koenig, a New Yorker and founder of the People’s Decade of Human Rights Education, open the book with personal experiences that impact our global quest for human rights. Huaman opens with her call for equilibrium. She explains that equilibrium involves love, respect and self-esteem. We educate our young with stories that involve developing equilibrium for their futures. She tells the story of a family in Peru and the fateful situation in which they found themselves because their human rights were denied. Both Huaman and Koenig promote the value of projects across the world that work toward human rights and dignity.

The chapters that follow fall into place as the various authors work through the “four generations of human rights practice” (p.6) as outlined by Evans, and the politics involved in various human rights’ organizations. One of the main questions is posed by Nigel Dower. In his chapter he asks “are we all global citizens or are only some of us

global citizens?” (p.6). He goes on to place this question in the arms of educators. He posits that as educators, we are not educating our students to become global citizens rather we are unwrapping how our students can use their global citizenship to better the world (p. 39).

Ratna Ghosh quotes from Article 1 in the Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” In quoting from this article, Ghosh purports that we really do not have a definitive answer to what constitutes a right and who gets to make that definitive claim. She argues that the UN answers Kant’s (1795) claims in his work titled *Perpetual Peace* to some degree, but we have not really figured out a world system that meets the needs of all its citizens.

Others, for example Carl E. James, Shibao Guo, Makere Stewart-Harawire, Jerrold L. Kachur, Lynette Shultz and Cora Weber-Pillwax present stories and images of such things as the “impact of Legal Definitions on Metis Peoples(s) of Canada” (p. 193); the notion that “culture cannot be conceptualized in terms of unified systems of meanings” alone, there are far more complex issues involved (p. 99), and the fact that we have failed and are failing the children of our world on many levels, especially with regards to child slavery (p. 129). Graham Pike and Toni Samek present two ideas that are not new, but that are vital to the education of our children so they will be engaged in the world around them (p. 223).

Personal narratives and nationalistic viewpoints of what it means to have human rights and to be treated humanely are the threads that tie the contributions together. There are various organizations outlined and criticized in terms of their political ties and their call for the recasting of how the world collectively works toward the goal of inclusion for all. Both historical and present-day viewpoints are expressed.

The editors purport that this book will be useful for “students, teachers and researchers in all areas of education and international development” (p.4). They also claim that this book will help “those in the social sciences, legal and public policy researchers and practitioners, as well as to specialized interest groups and the general public” (p.4).

There is no doubt that those reading this book will be compelled to rekindle the conversation about human rights and global citizenship. The book may also contribute to the “shaping of a more humane global agenda in the coming years and decades” (p.4). But, the language of the book is not universal to all. Scholars, researchers, even those who are in the legal and political domains would benefit greatly from the chapters. The general public, however, would need a schema for this information prior to reading. The fact that many of the articles (not all) read like a dissertation project is the book’s greatest weakness, although the editors do provide a lengthy overview of the chapters in the Introduction, which does situate them well. Abdi and Shultz provide a genuine platform for presenting storied research on global issues. This book makes an important contribution to scholars and educators involved with global citizenship and human rights education.