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Book Review

Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction

by Maria Hantzopoulos and Monisha Bajaj
Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2021, 192 pages.
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In *Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction*, the first of a new Bloomsbury series on peace education (PE) and human rights education (HRE), Hantzopoulos and Bajaj take on the groundbreaking task of thoroughly analyzing the history and evolution of each of these two fields, noting their intersections, and proposing future directions. This book is a timely and much-needed addition to scholarly work in both PE and HRE, as the authors highlight how the overlaps between PE and HRE can emerge as fertile ground for new thinking and action in the global fight for

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social justice. Accessible and relevant to beginners and seasoned human rights and peace educators alike, the authors demonstrate their conceptual expertise in these fields through the depth and breadth of their analysis. Of special note is the inclusion of an extensive annotated bibliography at the end of the book that offers multiple avenues for further study to those new to PE and HRE.

Throughout the text the authors extend their focus beyond a simple enumeration of normative discourses or mere histories in each of the two fields. As current trends in social justice movements and education have made evident, understanding geopolitical and historical contexts is critical to the evolution of social movements. The authors posit that as these fields continue to evolve, independently and in conjunction, they will become increasingly relevant in fights for equity, inclusion, and, most saliently, against all kinds of oppression.

Beyond the introduction, in Chapters 1 and 3 we find foundational knowledge for both PE and HRE, including critical, decolonial and transformative approaches. This allows the reader to understand why PE and HRE are so relevant to the struggles of our times, as they provide valuable frameworks to engage with current events and address structural inequities and cultural violence both inside and outside the classroom.

The examples provided in Chapter 2 are excellent illustrations of this approach. Using a restorative justice framework within community-based settings and schools, the two featured case studies illuminate how PE is manifested in localized actions to engage with the racism and structural violence that affect youth today. The first case is the Truth Telling Project, based in Ferguson, Missouri, which seeks to implement community-centered, truth-telling processes through storytelling in order to galvanize thoughtful, empathetic, and educated allyship for Black and other communities of color to lay a pathway towards comprehensive peace.

The second case, situated in New York City schools, is the Fairness Committee at Humanities Preparatory Academy. This project is designed to create safer school environments that move away from punitive measures towards forms of engagement that are dialogical and co-constructed when infractions to the community's core values occur. Again, PE's goal in this

context is to generate conditions that promote the skills and attitudes leading toward a co-created peaceful co-existence.

The inclusion of two case studies based in the United States to exemplify localized PE efforts is another aspect that makes this book unique. In addition to challenging U.S. exceptionalism, the examples show how small efforts with an immediate impact on people's lives can build towards larger-scale actions with more significant consequences. In other words, PE as a form of transformative justice must be part of the struggles against systemic racism. Each of these two cases complicates normative understandings of peace, providing nuanced definitions that depart from liberal conceptions that consider peace education relevant only for those living in conflict zones outside the United States. Peace, as we know, is more than the absence of war.

According to Hantzopoulos and Bajaj, HRE is also evolving to address changes in attitudes and values that can build towards concrete skills applied to actions. This assures that HRE becomes a strategy for transformative action and collective empowerment that moves beyond the discursive realm. The examples from South Asia provided by the authors in Chapter 4 demonstrate precisely that. The complex history of the region and diverse political conditions create opportunities to highlight local initiatives in order to deepen our understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of HRE.

Using a HRE framework, People's Watch in India works with school teachers who become agents of human rights through experiencing a transformative process themselves. Extensive training and new curricula result in more than an expanded acquisition of concepts. An increased capacity for empathy towards students and positive classroom relationships are key gains in this project, as strengthening the bonds of care and reciprocity facilitates collective action in the face of HR violations.

In another example, we learn about BRAC's Human Rights and Legal Services in Bangladesh (previously known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, and now simply called BRAC). Through a community-based HRE program, women are trained to act as a one-woman legal aid services clinic, becoming "barefoot lawyers" – or *shebikas* as they

are locally known. Here we learn how a transformative HRE approach with a holistic focus can promote self-knowledge and understanding of oppressive conditions in society to counter internalized forms of oppression. Both examples of HRE show how participatory pedagogical approaches that support drawing from the experiences of local educators and participants can result in models of active participation in democratic life.

In Chapter 5, the authors introduce the image of a possibility tree, originally developed as an offshoot of the ‘problem tree’ – a Freirean popular education analytical tool that many scholars have also used in their work (e.g., Tuck, n.d.). Hantzopoulos and Bajaj’s symbolic tree is one in which the intertwined destinies and futures of PE and HRE are equally fed by the soil of dignity and agency. Using the heuristic of a banyan tree to illustrate how the fields of PE and HRE can remain intertwined and yet also grow distinctly, the authors invite us to think with more complexity about what each can offer towards global citizenship. Looking at this image as a reader I was able to grasp the vitality generated by placing the two fields in dialogue as well as the organic growth that naturally happens as a result. The image of branches growing into roots is one filled with possibilities of renewal.

What most distinguishes this book is Chapter 6, which introduces the voices of diverse contemporary scholars and offers exciting new directions to inspire individual and collective visioning.¹ For example, Margo Okazawa-Rey, a founding member of the Combahee River Collective and a transnational feminist and anti-militarism activist, invites us to consider what we want for PE and HRE, as opposed to what we are against, orienting our gaze away from damage and towards possibilities. Further thought-provoking questions and recommendations for future directions are offered by other noted scholar-activists, such as Asha Hans (co-chair of

¹ Some of these scholars also contributed to a conversation with the authors about the book in October 2021 which can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZGRR2JRjqQ>

Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy and women's rights activist), Nancy Flowers (co-founder of Human Rights Educators USA), Michalinos Zembylas (Professor at Open University in Cyprus, whose research explores the connections between emotions and PE and HRE), and the authors themselves. I am sure these questions will lead readers toward new insights and inspiration for their own future research.

I am hopeful this book will stimulate educators to adopt PE and HRE as foundational aspects of their praxis, and in turn, nourish new life and produce fruits year-round. I see PE and HRE becoming a bridge between disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. What new worlds can they lead us towards as we make new connections? What dangerous commonplaces of discourse or reification of power imbalances can they keep us from falling into?

Educating for Peace and Human Rights is an engaging introduction that will help readers understand what distinguishes each field, how the two disciplines are intertwined, and ways they can remain relevant and vigilant so their teachings are not co-opted by divergent agendas. The four cases examined are helpful to ground the foundational knowledge presented and to bring about understanding to PE and HRE practice. They are also reflections of how localized and contextualized PE and HRE programs and projects are fundamental for long-term sustainability and community engagement. Lastly, learning about such projects is helpful to inspire innovations in the field as well as a means to incorporate PE across contexts and disciplines. My only wish is that the authors had included more examples from a broader context of PE and HRE in action to distill how highly contextualized projects contribute to broader social justice goals for global peace.

Finally, from my vantage point as an educator of future mental health clinicians, I envision incorporating PE and HRE in my courses and workshops, particularly in moving away from individualized approaches to care and healing that psychology promotes. This book has reaffirmed my belief that HRE and PE frameworks can assist the mental health field towards a different outlook in which socio-political and historical contexts can inform a socially just praxis such as liberation psychology (Torres

Rivera, 2020). By bringing forth the anti-oppressive aspects of PE and HRE, a liberatory psychology can be strengthened as it de-ideologizes and contextualizes notions of health, wellness, and healing. By linking these fields into the training of mental health practitioners, we could broaden the scope of psychological and counseling disciplines to focus on healing from the damage generated by a culture of individualism and scarcity. To increase our capacity for empathy and care for others outside our immediate circles PE and HRE can serve to counter the pedagogies of cruelty (Segato, 2018) that attack our ability to see solidarity and care as forms to reaffirm our collective agency and dignity.

As I draw this review to a close, I would like to dwell a little longer and dream under the banyan tree, as offered by the authors. Originating from India and Pakistan, the banyan tree has a long presence and rich history from which we can draw for further inspiration. It is, I learned, a rich ecosystem in and of itself in which birds and insects nest and feed year-round. At times the roots “walk” and enlarge to create sturdy structures and footbridges for people to cross streams and raging rivers in monsoon times. It was under the banyan tree that the Buddha sat for seven years to meditate until his enlightenment – an enlightenment that exhorted us to focus on the timelessness of his teachings.

And so, it is my hope that this prolific image sustains us in the coming years as new branches become roots and roots tend bridges where we can stand the storms of political instability, exploitation, and violence. In these days of vitriol, may this tree be the bridge back to the teachings, the fertile ground of agency and dignity for all, from which all possibility trees must emerge.

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