

Book and media reviews

A vision for advancing children's rights education in classrooms and communities

Jerome, L. & Starkey, H. (2021). *Children's rights education in diverse classrooms: Pedagogy, principles and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 289pp., £81.00 (hardcover) ISBN: 978-1-3500-6281-8; £64.80 (ebook) ISBN: 978-1-3500-6284-9.

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Children's rights in diverse classrooms: Pedagogy, principles and practice starts from a seemingly simple question: what implications follow for teaching in schools if our starting point is that children are rights holders and teachers are duty bearers? The book addresses this question through exploring different approaches to teaching and learning about children's rights in different countries. In doing so, Jerome and Starkey present a vision for what focused children's rights education (CRE) might look like and provide scholarly insights into the tensions and challenges that emerge when working to develop practices aimed at advancing CRE in schools.

The book is divided into three sections. The first starts with a general introduction to human rights and the principles which underpin these. It then focuses on the establishment of rights designed specifically for children and the development of CRE, particularly school-based CRE. This section also includes an in-depth look at ways in which human rights education and CRE have been implemented across various cultures and contexts globally, and highlights the central role of teachers in this endeavour. Jerome and Starkey articulate how the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) provides a set of principles and standards that can be used as a basis for developing policy and practice around CRE pedagogy.

In section two the authors discuss different forms of CRE and demonstrate how different approaches to CRE place different requirements on teachers. Some approaches to CRE position the teacher as having a passive role, for example, where teachers are expected to simply implement standards, while other forms of CRE position the teacher as having more of an advocacy role. The authors argue, however, that for CRE to be effective and meaningful for children, teachers need to see themselves as agents of change and be committed to CRE, which leads to tackling systemic inequalities. As part of this, children also need to have agency and feel empowered to take action in situations where their rights are not respected. This section illuminates some of the competing tensions at play when teachers attempt to take on the role as agents of change, while simultaneously feeling constrained by systems and structures which dictate major elements of their practice on a day-to-day basis. Thus teachers may find themselves having to grapple with external and contextual pressures relating to their professional role being at odds with their own beliefs and values relating to CRE practices.

The authors present a scholarly and insightful discussion around the complexity of the challenges faced by teachers who encounter such situations. They also provide research-informed suggestions on how teachers can resist some of the constraining effects imposed on them by professional expectations ingrained within policy, processes and structures which curtail the development of their own agency and prevent them from promoting CRE in ways which align to their personal beliefs. Jerome and Starkey draw on the work of three educational theorists, Freire, Dewey and Freinet, to extend the discussion of teacher agency and critically explore different aspects of CRE pedagogy. Through focusing on the work of Freire, attention is given to the relationship between learners and teachers, and to the significance of the role teachers can play in developing education which is transformational and empowering for individuals and communities. Furthermore, through drawing on theories developed by Dewey and Freinet, a robust framework based on the concepts of communication, democracy, and cooperation is used to consider factors that can inform the development of a CRE pedagogy grounded in social justice.

Within section three the authors explore, from theoretical and pragmatic perspectives, what it means to learn about children's rights and what constitutes valuable knowledge in relation to children's rights. They also outline factors to consider when working to create inclusive classrooms and to establish a child rights approach to behaviour management. Throughout this final section, real-life examples of practices and approaches to CRE which have been implemented by others and at the whole school level and in the community are presented,

thus providing ideas that can be adopted to support teachers developing their own CRE-focused pedagogy.

A major strength of the book is that discussions around effective CRE pedagogy are substantiated through drawing on expansive reviews of evidence from international studies of practices relating to supporting human rights education and CRE. Many of these studies are presented as case studies throughout the book and illuminate a wide range of creative and inspirational ways in which CRE can be built into pedagogical practices and support in establishing a rights-respecting school culture. The case studies also illustrate practical implications associated with embedding a child-rights focused ethos in schools, along with some of the potential pitfalls and challenges which teachers may encounter. The book is, therefore, of great value to teachers and practitioners in schools and early years settings as well as other professionals with responsibility for children's rights education.

References

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 20 November 1989. U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>