

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of Education

What is education for? What kind of human beings and what kind of society do we want to produce? What methods of instruction and classroom organization, as well as what subject matter, do we need to produce these results? What knowledge is of most worth? (Silberman 1970, 182).

What *is* the purpose of education? Such a seemingly simple question has long been a matter of concern and debate among educators. Clearly, it is a question to which there is no one answer. Education has undoubtedly been established and institutionalized to serve particular *societal goals*. However, consensus on what those goals are, or should be, remains elusive.

“Implicit in many general statements on the purposes of schooling is that education will result in changing the human, physical, social and economic environment for the better” (McElroy 1988, 31). Indeed, this notion that education can, or should, solve social problems has long been a primary force in curriculum development. This view has been articulated by many prominent educators, who have reinforced the notion that “schools have responsibilities...beyond preparing [students] for the business world” (*Educational Psychology* 1973, 21). Some of education’s greatest thinkers, including prominent philosopher and educator John Dewey, have championed the idea of education *for* democracy and social reconstruction, asserting that education “should shape a

democratic society” and “be made more directly relevant to the world beyond the classroom” (*Educational Psychology* 1973, 19, 40). Influential contemporary educators, such as Geoff Whitty, Herbert Kohl, and Michael Apple, have further strengthened this vision, asserting that one of education’s main goals should be the promotion of peace, cooperation, and social development (Fien and Gerber 1988, 8).

Numerous international organizations also share this view of the purpose of education. The United Nations has affirmed that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and...shall promote understanding [and] tolerance...” (United Nations 1948, 26.2). UNESCO calls for an educational curriculum aimed at

the eradication of conditions which perpetuate and aggravate major problems affecting human survival and well-being—inequality, injustice, international relations based on the use of force—and towards a measure of international cooperation likely to help solve them (UNESCO 1974 , V.18)

Indeed, UNESCO stated *raison d'être*—“to contribute to peace and security in the world... *through education*”—in itself clearly reflects the belief that one of education’s inherent aims *is* to affect change in society (UNESCO 1945, 1.1, emphasis mine).¹ The Council of Europe has likewise stressed the need for an educational curriculum that will

reaffirm democratic values in the face of: intolerance, acts of violence and terrorism; the re-emergence of the public expression of racist and xenophobic attitudes; [and] the disillusionment of many young people...who are...aware of the continuing poverty and inequality in the world (Council of Europe 1985).

Other international and domestic governmental bodies have similarly expressed this belief on the purpose of education.²

Clearly, many scholars and international organizations are enthusiastic in their endorsement of the vital role of education in promoting peace, cooperation, and social

development. However, is this view also shared by prominent geographers? What is the purpose of *geographic* education? One of the earliest voices to address this question was Peter Kropotkin, the prominent anarchist and geographer who, at the turn of the twentieth century, wrote the notable and still influential essay ‘What geography ought to be.’ In his essay, Kropotkin argues that

[g]eography must render, moreover, another far more important service. It must teach us, from our earliest childhood, that we are all brethren, whatever our nationality. In our time of wars, of national self-conceit, of national jealousies and hatreds ably nourished by people who pursue their own egotistic, personal or class interests, geography must be--in so far as the school may do anything to counterbalance hostile influence--a means of dissipating these prejudices and of creating other feeling more worthy of humanity. It must show that each nationality brings its own precious building-stone for the general development of the commonwealth (Kropotkin 1996 [1885], 141).

Geographers today continue Kropotkin’s call. Stoddart, for example, shares his vision of a “*committed geography*, seeking to honor Kropotkin’s resolve. It is a geography which reaches out to the future...It is a geography which will teach us the realities of the world in which we live, how we can live better on it and with each other” (Stoddart 1987, 333). Likewise, geographer R. J. Johnston stresses that geography “must promote knowledge, understanding and trust,” and reminds geographers of the discipline’s role as “a major educational path to international awareness and peace” (Johnston 1985, 334).

World understanding is fundamental to world peace, and ultimately to world survival. Ignorance leads to the development of stereotypes, negative reactions to other peoples and cultures which breeds hostility. Geography must be used to break down these ignorance barriers (Johnston 1984, 458).

A major role of education must be to dispel the misunderstanding and mistrust. Education must pull people out of their cells...its goal must be to advance understanding both of others and of self. It must promote awareness, and the end of stereotypes (Johnston 1990, 127).

John Sibley also urges greater focus on this purpose, arguing that geographic education needs to be “very outgoing and outward looking,” and has called for a geography that is “out there mixing it in society—in the real world—in real issues...[and] concerned with social, economic and environmental justice” (Fien and Gerber 1998, 8). Likewise, Stoddart urges geographers “to claim the high ground back: to tackle the real problems, to take the broader view: to speak out across our subject boundaries on the great issues of the day” (Stoddart 1987, 334).

I do not...think that regional description is necessarily the goal of our endeavors, as it is usually said to be...I think we have a more important job to do, for which such regional accounts really serve as an ordering framework. The task is to identify geographical problems... and to use our skills to work to alleviate them, perhaps to solve them. Regional geography helps to identify and specify such problems—it is, however, the beginning rather than the end (Stoddart 1987, 331).

Therefore, “...as geographers we need to do more: it is not enough to stand by and describe. We need to ask what can be done” (Stoddart 1987, 332). This view was even espoused by the Commission on Geographic Education in the 1992 *International Charter on Geographical Education*, in which the commission reminds educators of the necessity of intertwining *behavior* with knowledge in geographic education (Catling 1993). Thus, perhaps one of the main purposes of geographic education as well is the promotion of world cooperation and international understanding.

Accomplishing the Goal—Human Rights Education

Clearly there *is* a general agreement among prominent educators, international organizations, and noted geographers on at least *one* of the purposes of education. Therefore, we are left with just one remaining question of the four with which we began this study—“What methods of instruction and classroom organization, as well as what

subject matter, do we need to produce these results?” (Silberman 1970, 182) Research findings have suggested that “merely exhorting... students to act in a democratic and humane manner does little to reduce prejudice and discrimination” (Schwartz 1990, 103). Consequently, educational agendas must incorporate proactive steps if the promotion of a just society is held of one of education’s goals. Evidence suggests that students “respond more positively to lessons on prejudice reduction if [studying the] behavior from the viewpoint of an objective outsider” (Schwartz 1990, 103). Human rights education provides just such an opportunity.

In fact, the realization that human rights discussions possess a tremendous power to help reach this educational goal has led to a common call for greater integration of human rights issues into the educational curriculum. Scholars, educators, and international bodies alike have articulated the belief “that throughout their school career, all young people should learn about human rights as part of their preparation for life in a pluralistic democracy” (Council of Europe 1985). This conviction is founded on the notion that schools are the ideal environment in which to

strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; fully develop the human personality and sense of dignity; promote understanding, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups; enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society; and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (United Nations Center for Human Rights 1995).

In fact, the push for greater integration of human rights issues into the classroom has led to the naming of 1995-2004 as “The Decade for Human Rights Education.”

The need for such a curriculum has become especially evident to many American educators, as recent surveys indicate that most Americans today know very little about

human rights issues.³ Thus, to support and further encourage the implementation of human rights education, scholars and organizations have provided a tremendous amount of direction and guidance on effective methods of interweaving human rights discussions into the existing curriculum.⁴

Not surprisingly, many progressive geographers have joined international organizations and prominent educators in calling specifically for greater integration of human rights issues into geographic education. Simon Catling, former president of the Geographic Association, has been a strong advocate of this movement, stressing the need to “develop a geography which sees at its center values and attitudes founded on international understanding, environmental ethics, justice and human rights” (Catling 1993, 356).

In fact, many of the discipline’s inherent qualities make human rights education and geographic education a natural marriage. The very definition of geography seems to require that the well-being of the members of a society be *one* the focal points of geographic enquiry. This notion “simply requires recognition of what is surely the self-evident truth that if human beings are the object of our curiosity . . . then the *quality* of their lives is of paramount importance” (Hicks 1988, 16). Moreover, most geographers would agree that “the development of respect for others is at the heart of the study of the lives of people and of the places in which they live” (Catling 1993, 351). Human rights discussions provide geographic education with an effective means for encouraging students to internalize these important attitudes.

Many contemporary geographers are presently immersed in studying human rights issues in various specialty fields of the discipline. Indeed, some have asserted that

the increased interest in human rights issues in these and other sub-disciplines demonstrates that “social justice is firmly back on the geographical agenda” (Johnston, Gregory and Smith 1994, 566). In reflecting on this resurgence of human rights issues in geographic thought, Heater has remarked

It is interesting to notice, indeed, how the style of geography as a subject has changed over recent decades; from the rote learning of ‘capes and bays,’ through skills and techniques, to the recent acceptance that human and consequently politically controversial issues represent much of the real stuff of the discipline (Heater 1991, 240).

Assessing Human Rights Discussions in Geography Textbooks

The purpose of this thesis is to explore university-level, introductory geographic education is indeed incorporating the ‘human and consequently politically controversial issues’ which Heater refers to simply as ‘the real stuff of the discipline.’ Are textbooks used in university-level introductory geography courses presenting students with a discipline that incorporates human rights issues into geographic learning? When concepts are presented, do human geography texts also discuss the related human rights issues? Likewise, do regional geography texts discuss pressing human rights issues in regions in which the denial of a particular right is one of the defining characteristics of a significant segment of the population? This thesis will address these questions, as well as providing a review of both the challenges and advantages of incorporating human rights discussion into geographic education.

To accomplish this task, this thesis is organized into eight chapters, with this section concluding the first. The remaining chapters are as follows:

- The second chapter details the benefits of human rights education, not only to society and to the learning process in general, but also specifically to geographic education.

- The third chapter examines and resolves a number of common objections to the integration of human rights discussions into the classroom, including an in-depth analysis of the objection that is the most serious and difficult to overcome—the lack of unanimous consensus on what constitutes a human right.
- The fourth chapter details the methodology used in analyzing the texts for human rights content, and provides an introduction to the topics selected for this study.
- The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters address coverage of selected human rights issues in the eight textbooks examined, with each chapter addressing a different category of rights. A brief description of each right is provided, followed immediately by an assessment of the amount of discussion and quality of content for that right in the textbooks in general.
- The eighth and final chapter reviews the findings of this study and their implications for geographic education.

Notes

¹ Not surprisingly, UNESCO has been one of the most vocal international organizations to promote the idea of an education aimed at promoting peace, cooperation, and social development, particularly in its *Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*. The following statement from the *Recommendation* illustrates the organizations view on the purpose of education:

- IV. . . . [T]he following objectives should be regarded as major guiding principles of educational policy:
- (a) An international dimension and a global perspective in education at all levels and in all its forms;
 - (b) Understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of other nations;
 - (c) Awareness of the increasing global interdependence between peoples and nations;
 - (d) Abilities to communicate with others;
 - (e) Awareness not only of the rights but also of the duties incumbent upon individuals, social groups and nations towards each other;
 - (f) Understanding of the necessity for international solidarity and co-operation
 - (g) Readiness on the part of the individual to participate in solving the problems of his community, his country and the world at large.
- V. . . . [E]ducation should further the appropriate intellectual and emotional development of the individual. It should develop a sense of social responsibility and of solidarity with less privileged groups and should lead to observance of the principles of equality in everyday conduct. It should also help to develop qualities, aptitudes and abilities which enable the individual to acquire a critical understanding of problems at the national and the international level (UNESCO 1974, III).

² The Brandt Commission echoes this plea, reminding educators of the need to “pay more attention to international problems so that young people will see more clearly the dangers they are facing, their own responsibilities and the opportunities for co-operation—globally and regionally as well as within their own neighborhood” (Dunlop 1984, 132).

Likewise, numerous statements by the United States Supreme Court concur with this view that the promotion of peace, cooperation, and democratic ideals should be one of the main goals of education. In 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren, in *Brown vs. Board of Education* stated that “today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. . . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship” (United States Supreme Court 1954).

Moreover, Justice William Brennan has stated

We have recognized the public schools as the most vital civic institution for the preservation of our democratic values on which our society rests... education is necessary to prepare citizens to participate effectively and intelligently in our open political system if we are to preserve freedom and independence (United States Supreme Court 1982).

³ Although the media refers to human rights issues daily, and most Americans are familiar with the existence of a U.S. “Bill of Rights,” human rights literacy is not common. In fact, a 1997 Human Rights USA survey showed that only 8% of all adult Americans—and only 4% of those under 25—had ever heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Ross and Gulpa 1998).

⁴ For example, see UNESCO’s *Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* and the Council of Europe’s *Recommendation on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights in Schools*.