

CHAPTER II: THE BENEFITS OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

“Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.”
--Lord Henry Peter Brougham

When human rights discussions are interwoven throughout educational curriculum, the positive implications are far reaching. The benefits to society as a whole are tremendous, as a citizenry educated in human rights is perhaps the most fundamental criteria for a civil society. Likewise, the learning process is enhanced when human rights discussions are integrated into the classroom, as such discussions provide an engaging and effective means of encouraging all levels of both cognitive and affective learning. This ability to enhance the learning process also helps students of geographic education. Through “compelling images which...capture students and to which students see themselves connected and interdependent,” students of geographic education gain a deeper understanding of geographic concepts and principles and are more engaged in the learning about their world (Jennings 1994, 293).

Benefits to Society

“Human rights provide an ethical and moral framework for living in a community, whether [it] be a class, a school, a village, a city, a nation state, a continent or the global village itself” (Osler and Starkey 1994, 349). Indeed, in a democracy, basic human rights are the basis of relationships within and between groups, as effective communication and cooperation require the cultivation of respect for others and tolerance for divergent views. Students who are truly prepared for life in modern society will be those students who acquire an understanding of these customs and procedures. Consequently, the “understanding and experience of human rights is an important element of the preparation of all young people for life in a democratic and pluralistic society” (Council of Europe 1985, 102).

Undoubtedly, society as a whole benefits when human rights values and concepts are incorporated into educational settings. Human rights education not only helps create an educated citizenry with the communication skills and informed critical thinking essential to a democracy, but also provides the populace with global historical perspectives on the universal struggle for dignity and justice. Moreover,

Education for human rights also gives people a sense of responsibility for respecting and defending human rights and empowers them through skills to take appropriate action. These skills for action include: recognizing that human rights may be promoted and defended on an individual, collective and institutional level, developing critical understanding of life situations, ...[and] realizing that unjust situations can be improved...(Human Rights Resource Center n.d.a)

Human rights education is “based on the premise that an educated citizenry is the greatest guarantee and ultimate sanction of human rights” (Tarrow 1990, 12). This crucial benefit of human rights education in creating a just society is reinforced by studies which show that students who have not had the opportunity to learn about human rights and democracy are more apt to adopt authoritarian or simplistic racist views (Huckle 1998). In fact, several “studies have shown

that under certain circumstances, Americans have proven vulnerable to blind obedience” (Schwartz 1990, 104). A society that is educated in human rights is not only less likely to accept simplistic justifications for violations committed against others, but also will be less apt to participate in the carrying out the acts themselves.

Additionally, “those who do not know their rights are more vulnerable to having them abused and often lack the language and conceptual framework to effectively advocate for them” (Human Rights Resource Center n.d.a). Unfortunately, this relationship has been amply proven throughout history as time and again situations of considerable repression have led ordinary citizens to lose their sense of possessing inalienable rights. “Gradually, violation of legal rights becomes something that belongs to the nature of things” (Zakaria 1986, 240). Recent events in Latin America have proven this causal relationship, as

...educators in several countries agree on the following point of departure: the vast number of human rights violations during the last decades (up to the late 1980s and into the 1990s) was possible because there was a high degree of social acceptance of such violations. To put it in a different way: resistance to the practice of organized terror was weak because a civic culture providing support to this resistance was insufficiently developed (Misgeld 1994, 242).

Whereas human rights education necessarily requires familiarizing students with the domain of human rights legislation and jurisprudence, students also gain insight and commitment to those factors that help create and maintain “a non-violent society, a society of peaceful and open interaction and association, in which citizens have the certainty that their fundamental rights are protected. This is the domain of the common, every-day practical knowledge of human rights” (Misgeld 1994, 244-245).

The ‘innovative learning’ approach inherent in human rights education also benefits society as it “encourage[s] students to take action where appropriate to formulate and evaluate alternative solutions and remedy the problems” (Cox 1988, 183). Indeed, as innovative learning involves more than mere transference of knowledge, human rights education does more than simply prepare students to meet the existing conditions of society. Education in human rights leads to a critical awareness of the *real* world—the social, cultural, political and economic real world in which we all live and interact (Burnley 1988, 61). Thus, the knowledge, skills, values, and understandings gained through such learning help prepare students for the complex problems of the twenty-first century and empower them to tackle some of the real problems plaguing society. Indeed, students today

will be going into a world in which contacts across national boundaries will be much more numerous than in the past and in which international institutions and arrangements will need to be understood and helped to work. Should we not look at our existing programs of studies to see if they do enough to give information and the mental outlook that the young will need? (Mertineit 1984, 19)

The benefits to society of this style of innovative learning has been reinforced by the Club of Rome. In *No Limits to Learning*, the Club identifies the two main types of learning styles—‘maintenance learning’ and ‘innovative learning’—and details the predominance of the maintenance learning style, “which is designed solely to maintain the existing system, and the established way of life; it does not prepare for changing situations, nor does it act as an agency of

change.” The concluding recommendations of the report exhort educators that “under current conditions of global uncertainty...it is imperative to move to innovative leaning, which encourages change, renewal, restructuring and problem identification” (Pietila 1984, 158).

Many progressive educators have already made this move, incorporating human rights discussions into the curriculum in order to balance what they view as a lopsided curriculum—one in which a student

will be provided with knowledge about others, but will not be taught to care about their welfare or to act kindly toward them. That person will be given some understanding of society, but will not be taught to feel its injustices or even to be concerned over its fate...[He or she will be] one who can reason but has no desire to solve real problems in the real world—or else a technical person who likes to solve real problems but does not care about the solutions’ consequences for real people and for the earth itself (Martin 1985, 73).

Human rights education, however, is an effective way to combat this tendency. Indeed, by fostering in students the ability to understand and relate to people—a skill often referred to as ‘social intelligence’—human rights education complements the more commonly emphasized ‘concrete intelligence’ (the ability to understand and manipulate with objects) and ‘abstract intelligence’ (the ability to understand and manipulate with verbal and mathematical symbols). This emphasis has tremendous benefits to society, as instilling social intelligence enables students “to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them” (Watson and Greer 1983, 299). Clearly, human rights education is beneficial to society in many ways, not only by educating students about human rights, but also by fostering the growth of a student’s social intelligence. However, does human rights education promote ‘concrete intelligence’ and ‘abstract intelligence’ as well?

Promotion of Higher Level Learning

Few would dispute the societal benefits of educating students in human rights. However, some critics assert that human rights education is ‘goal rich and content poor’—lacking the educational rigor required for inclusion in an already overcrowded educational curriculum (Mehlinger, 1981). One effective and well-respected method for measuring the effectiveness of a particular curriculum in attaining higher-level thinking is Bloom’s Taxonomy, which provides a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. An analysis of human rights education utilizing the learning structure of Bloom’s Taxonomy reveals that human rights education not only promotes higher-level *cognitive* learning, but also effectively encourages the often-neglected *affective* domain of learning.

Fostering cognitive learning

Human rights education is an effective means of encouraging all levels of cognitive learning. From simple recall or recognition of facts, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order of cognitive learning, that of evaluation, human rights education encompasses all levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. (See Appendix A for a chart of the Cognitive Domain).

As with virtually every academic endeavor, human rights education requires the acquisition and recall of information. Throughout education, these foundational levels of cognitive learning—referred to as *knowledge* and *comprehension*—are essential, as they form a foundation for deeper, more complex learning. “Knowledge is...quite frequently regarded as basic to all the other ends or purposes of education. Problem solving or thinking cannot be carried out in a vacuum, but must be based upon knowledge of some of the ‘realities’” (Bloom et al. 1956, 33). Students of human rights education are required to strengthen their *knowledge* and *comprehension* of foundational human rights principles through discussions and exercises that require students to: name, describe, identify, list, define, tell, label, collect, summarize, contrast, distinguish, and associate (University of Victoria 2000).

However, it is important that students do not get lost in “the cross-fire of information”, as “the only way to get there is by doing your own thinking” (Silha and Silha 1995). This important truth is confirmed by Bloom, who maintains that “because of the simplicity of teaching and evaluating knowledge, it is frequently emphasized as an educational objective out of all proportion to its usefulness or its relevance for the development of the individual” (Bloom et al. 1956, 34). Therefore, while knowledge and comprehension are essential components of the learning process, educational curricula must build on these lower levels of cognition to encourage more complex learning. Above knowledge and comprehension in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Levels are the skills of *application* and *analysis*. Once again, human rights education encompasses the breadth and depth necessary to encourage these cognitive skills in students. As human rights education necessitates a focus on contemporary world conditions, students must *apply* principles and concepts of human rights to a wide variety of modern-day scenarios. Indeed, the inherent focus of human rights education on the *application* of principles and concepts inevitably leads students to convert abstract principles and concepts to concrete world situations and encourages students to anticipate problems and make inferences. Students of human rights education therefore often *apply* their knowledge and comprehension through discussions and exercises that require them to: demonstrate, complete, illustrate, show, solve, examine, relate, classify, and discover (University of Victoria 2000).

Moreover, through applying human rights concepts and principles into an exceedingly complex world—a world in which not only the respect for human rights but also the very definition of human rights varies from one locale to another—students are encouraged to further *analyze* a variety of contemporary situations. Such analyses require not only breaking down information on human rights issues into its integral parts and identifying the relationship of each part of the total situation, but also by recognizing the relevance and irrelevance of information, judging completeness of information, and perhaps most importantly, recognizing fallacies (Bloom et al. 1956). Therefore, students of human rights education *analyze* historical and contemporary human rights situations through discussions and exercises that require them to: separate, order, connect, classify, arrange, divide, compare, select, explain, and infer (University of Victoria 2000).

Studies reinforce the ability of human rights education to encourage this level of thinking. One study on the effectiveness of a human rights curriculum concluded that once

equipped with solid knowledge and expanded intellectual abilities, pupils... increasingly endeavor[ed] to analyze, compare and evaluate phenomena and events, to draw conclusions independently and to exchange their opinions with their classmates and with adults (Pfeifer 1984, 38).

Most importantly, however, is the unique and highly valuable power of human rights education in encouraging both *synthesis* and *evaluation*—the highest levels of cognitive learning. Discussions on human rights often necessitate the synthesis of information, compelling students to integrate disparate factors into a functional whole or an effective solution to solve a problem. Human rights education provides numerous situations without simple answers, as “in real life it is not always possible for every individual to claim his or her rights without running into conflict of rights with someone else. In fact, a full understanding of human rights means understanding their complexity and reciprocity” (Torney-Putra 1984, 69). Indeed, human rights become conflictive on many occasions, with tensions arising

between freedom and equality, between public and private interests, between public and individual welfare, between freedom and order, between justice and mercy, between life and suffering, between freedom of expression and security, between what is desirable and what is attainable (Magendzo 1994, 254).

Resolutions are seldom easy and, in fact, are sometimes impossible. In attempting to resolve such conflicts, students must *synthesize* information in order to formulate appropriate hypotheses, and then modify such hypotheses, if necessary, in light of new factors and considerations. Therefore, students are compelled to resolve these inherent tensions through cognitive means that strengthen their synthesis skills, such as combining, integrating, modifying, rearranging, substituting, designing, inventing, composing, formulating, and generalizing (University of Victoria 2000).

Human rights discussions also lead students to *evaluate* information, make generalizations, develop criteria, judge accuracy, and identify values (Bloom et al. 1956). The true, historical and contemporary human rights issues which are presented in human rights education are not intended as an exercise in relativism; instead, human rights discussions provide “practice in making judgments based on critical reflection and drawing conclusions based on careful examination of conflicting claims” (Brabeck et al. 1994, 334). Indeed, human rights discussions encourage “the use of criteria as well as standards for appraising the extent to which particulars are accurate, effective, economical, or satisfying” (Bloom et al. 1956, 185). Thus, students who are immersed in the study of human rights are actively engaged in appraising, assessing, deciding, defending, ranking, grading, testing, measuring, recommending, convincing, selecting, judging, supporting, concluding, valuing, and discriminating (University of Victoria 2000).

The importance of achieving this level of cognitive learning is stressed by Bloom, who warns that

For the most part, the evaluations customarily made by an individual are quick decisions not preceded by very careful consideration of the various aspects of the object, idea or activity being judged...One major purpose of education is to broaden the foundation on which judgments are based[,...]take into consideration a greater variety of facets of the phenomena to be evaluated and . . . have in mind a clearer view of the criteria and frames of reference used in the evaluation (Bloom et al. 1956, 186).

In fact, one of the primary goals of human rights education is “to increase students’ abilities to take the perspectives of diverse people, to understand complex human rights issues from different perspectives” (Brabeck et al. 1994, 335). This is particularly crucial for students in industrialized nations, who often take for granted rights that “millions have never attained or even contemplated” (UNESCO 1968, 19). Research on the well-known human rights curriculum

Facing History and Ourselves indicates that students gained increased insight into the plight of others, and were "...more reflective, and less hasty in their judgments...more aware of others' problems and of the consequences of their own actions or inactions" (Bardige 1988, 92). Thus, human rights education encourages students to become 'empathetic learners', who are "able to view themselves and the world from perspectives other than their own, including perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. A major goal of thinking curricula in particular is to develop these qualities in all students" (Fennimore and Tinzmann 1990).

Fostering affective learning

In addition to promoting all levels of cognitive learning, human rights education is often extolled for its ability to encourage affective learning—the domain of learning that leads to increased "awareness, interest, attention, concern, and responsibility", as well as the "ability to listen and respond in interactions with others, and the ability to demonstrate those attitudinal characteristics or values appropriate to the test situation" (Lane n.d.). It has long been assumed that affective learning would naturally occur as a result of cognitive learning. However, numerous studies have shown that "relations between cognitive achievement and attitudes and values [are] statistically independent... [with] little relationship between attitude changes and growth of knowledge in a college course" (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia 1964, 7). Many educational psychologists have therefore stressed the importance of including affective goals as a *complement* to cognitive goals, rather than assuming an 'automatic' development. Thus, actively pursuing affective goals is crucial, as "evidence suggests that affective behaviors develop when appropriate learning experiences are provided for students much the same as cognitive behaviors develop from appropriate learning experiences" (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia 1964, 19-20).

Inherent in human rights education are numerous opportunities for affective learning. As with cognitive learning, human rights education is a valuable means of encouraging all levels of affective learning. From merely receiving and responding to information to valuing and internalizing new learnings, human rights education encompasses all levels of intellectual behavior important in affective learning. (See Appendix B for a chart of the Affective Domain). Human rights education, by its very definition, stresses the interconnectedness and interdependency of all peoples, thus encouraging both involvement and commitment from students. This level of affective learning, referred to as 'valuing', is especially crucial, as achieving involvement and commitment from students is a strong determinant in the development of interest or motivation to learn (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia 1964). 'Organization' and 'characterization by value'—the highest levels of affective learning—are also fostered by human rights education, as students increasingly endeavor to integrate human rights values into their general set of values (organization) and then strive to act consistently with those new values (characterization by value).

Again, studies show that students who are immersed in human rights discussions report becoming "more sensitive, more reflective, ...more aware of others' problems and of the consequences of their own actions or inactions" (Brabeck et al. 1994, 336). A student in one survey concluded that "The concepts studied... have made a lasting impression on my life and my way of thinking. In looking at all that I have learned, I've progressed from being apathetic and uncaring to very concerned and involved" (Bardige 1998, 92). And while human rights issues can be quite controversial, human rights education possesses an inherent ability to "attain affective objectives through challenging...students' fixed beliefs and getting them to discuss

issues,” a skill considered by Bloom to be one of the attributes of good education (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia 1964, 55).

Human rights education also achieves affective goals by balancing the ‘objectification’ of subjects that dominates curriculum content—an approach to education that many progressive educators fear severs emotion and subjective experience from formal education and socializes students into

believing that intellectual rigor requires objective knowing and necessitates the objectification of what/who is being studied. When classrooms value and emphasize the objective analysis of oppression, to the exclusion of subjective interpretation, students learn to overly emphasize an objective and dispassionate view of the curriculum and hence their world. Consequently, students more easily objectify and distance themselves from human oppression. The images of the oppressed become ‘objects’ of study rather than compelling images which are allowed to capture students and to which students see themselves connected and interdependent (Jennings 1994, 293).

In contrast, thoughtful human rights education requires the integration of affective domain learnings in tandem with cognitive, objective learning. Therefore, instead of severing emotion and subjective experiences from the curriculum, such affective learning attributes form an integral and positive part of the curriculum.

Benefits to Geography

There has been much debate on the future of geographic education in recent years. Fluctuations in enrollment in university geography courses have led some geographers to speculate on ways in which the discipline can be revitalized to garner the attention of more university students. In addressing the discipline’s current challenges, the Geographical Association’s Working Group, in a report entitled *Space, Place and Region: Towards a Transformed Regional Geography*, raised the following question: “Could it be that geography, now regarded as an abstracted form of discourse rather than a portrayal of the real world, is failing to capture the imagination of our pupils whose interest lies in real people who live in real places?” (Geographical Association Working Group 1985, 138). Likewise, Simon Catling, former President of the Geographical Association, asserts that geography “will give *credibility* to its assessment in the eyes of its students...when it is committed to geography *for* people, places and the environment” (Catling, 1993, 355-356).

Human rights discussions help accomplish these ends, as the very concept of human rights requires a focus on the individual. This focus helps ensure balance, providing compelling images that help bring geographic concepts and principles down to the level of *individuals*. This focus on the individual is indeed crucial, as it helps to bridge the ‘psychological divide’ faced by many geography students who have

...spen[t] most of their lives within a definable area, often one that is within a short distance of their home. This known world is the realm of direct experience in which meaningful relationships are established with others; the wider world ‘beyond the tree boundary’ remains largely unfamiliar and, apparently, in a state of disassociation (Dunlop 1984, 105).

Connecting with these far-off lands often means connecting with the individuals who live there. Human rights discussions help facilitate this crucial connection, encouraging students to ‘step into the skin of others’ and find ‘them’ in ‘us’ and ‘us’ in ‘them’ (Taylor 1991). “This consciousness of ‘the other’ shimmers with the realization of our similarities and our differences, and the discovery [that] our common dreams and our fears” are strikingly similar (Tibbitts 1996, 428).

R.J. Johnston has also posited a solution for the discipline’s declining enrollments, asserting that the

disciplines’ continued strength is increasingly predicated on their ability to meet external demands. [Geography] must be ‘sold’, though not necessarily in a crudely materialistic way: students must want to study them... Geographers must demonstrate that their understanding of the world is knowledge that others *need*; people must be convinced that they want geography—that indeed they cannot do without it (Johnston 1993, viii).

Yet how is the discipline to be ‘sold’? Johnston suggests that “geography must promote knowledge, understanding and trust...to *survive* in the world” (Johnston, 1985, 25, emphasis mine), and confirms that a geography which educates students to tackle real issues of conflict resolution and international cooperation will “prove the value of our discipline” (Johnston 1990, 137). Discussions on human rights issues are an effective method by which to encourage a wider awareness of pressing world issues and a deeper understanding of the key methods for overcoming such conflicts. Such a focus is especially effective in engaging the attention of students, as “tasks that involve ‘a moderate amount of discrepancy or incongruity’ are beneficial because they stimulate students’ curiosity, an intrinsic motivator” (Lepper 1988, 302). Indeed,

perhaps one of the greatest advantages of problem-based learning is that students genuinely enjoy their...education. [Such an education is] intriguing for students because they are motivated to learn by a need to understand real...problems. The relevance of the information learned is immediately apparent; students become aware of a need for knowledge as they work to resolve the problems (Southern Illinois University n.d.).

An Unqualified ‘Good’?

Thus, the integration of human rights issues into the classroom not only benefits society and encourages complex cognitive and affective learning, but also helps meet the challenges as put forth by some of the discipline’s greatest minds. In light of these successes, one might assume that the integration of human rights into the classroom would be widely embraced by all educators and creators of educational curriculum. Such is not the case. Several objections have been raised by critics who assert that human rights issues are not appropriate for an educational setting. Such objections must be addressed and overcome in order to successfully integrate human rights issues into the curriculum. We therefore turn our attention to these pressing concerns in the next chapter.