

RADICAL TEACHER

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Mainstreaming Human Rights Education: What's Radical About That?

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Introduction

This article approaches the place of human rights education in radical pedagogy from a perspective that is both radical and mainstream. For many years, I have promoted the modest proposal that the fundamental principles of human rights and international humanitarian law become a part of every child's educational experience, particularly through the core social studies curriculum offered at every grade level of public school education. The reasons for this proposal and the steps undertaken to date to help bring it to reality provide the basic subject of this report. Initially, however, I want to explore some of the concerns and even the urban legends that tend to hover around human rights education (HRE) within the minefield that is social studies education in the United States.

The first *Radical Teacher* issue on HRE (Vol 103, 2015) has provided a range of approaches for this exploration, looking at the global movement for universalizing human rights education, strategies for using the human rights framework and discourse as emancipatory educational models, and the challenges to authentically liberating education through the HRE lens in a society which so often links HRE and humanitarian discourse to global and domestic policies that are hegemonic, power-driven, and coercive. As Nancy Flowers noted in her review of the global HRE movement, "propaganda can easily disguise itself as HRE" (11). Of course it can. This paper argues, however, that a more universal familiarity with human rights concepts, language, and development is far more useful in resisting such propaganda than the near universal ignorance of HRE and humanitarian law that prevails in American civil society.

Human Rights – the Bastard Stepchild of Civic Education

In its initial call for papers exploring human rights education from a radical pedagogical perspective, *Radical Teacher* posed important foundational questions about the whole enterprise of human rights education. The call posed generative questions designed to explore the opportunities for both emancipatory engagement and co-opting oppression within the same identified categories of educational content and method, namely human rights education (HRE). The CFP problematized HRE as a possible vehicle for western hegemony and potentially an excuse for "humanitarian intervention," etc., a very legitimate concern given the selective references to "protecting human rights" that so often embellish U.S. military policy. Yet, in referencing the supposed relationship between HRE and the Common Core State Standards, the CFP repeated a claim dear to the hearts of many far-right-wing critics of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. This is the claim that "The Common Core has developed a human rights component." (*Radical Teacher* website, CFP)

In researching this claim (which is, in fact, not true of the Common Core State Standards interstate document, whatever individual states may or may not have mandated in their own CC-related laws and regulations¹), I encountered a truly amazing number of articles, blogs, and dire warnings that the "Common Core" was actually the United Nations Common Core and was mandating a UN-based common education that included United Nations-controlled human rights curricula. Emblematic of this claim was an article by a leading Federalist Society writer presenting human rights education as "the United Nations takeover of K-12 education in America" (from an article by Jim Kelly, Director of International Affairs for the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies²).

Like any value-based construct, human rights education and the very phrase "human rights" can be co-opted in support of a variety of political/social/cultural/economic agendas.

These dire warnings and conspiracies were quite familiar to me. I have been dealing with them for several years in trying to bring human rights education and humanitarian law education into the mainstream of American social studies. Colleagues more experienced than I have struggled against the "foreign takeover" gremlin for decades.

During the latter half of the 20th Century, significant historical and cultural developments of international and domestic law and policy occurred through which precepts of universal human rights became more generally recognized and mechanisms for their expression developed. Yet, given both the politics of human rights and the politics of public education in the United States, reflected both in the concerns expressed in the *Radical Teacher* CFP and the concerns of the Federalist Society writer, these historical trends and their expression in treaty, policy, and practice have too often found no acceptable niche in U.S. civic and history education. The phrase "human rights" has been contested far more than the concepts included within that phrase have been studied.

Like any value-based construct, human rights education and the very phrase "human rights" can be co-opted in support of a variety of political/social/cultural/economic agendas. We live in an interdependent world in which the United States, through its military and economic power, has a forceful and often destabilizing impact on various cultures, communities, nations, and peoples. This interdependence, combined with the predictable hegemonic cooptation of the language of international law, certainly has led to a virtual codebook of "human rights" and "humanitarian" terms justifying military interventions, economic models of dominance, and culturally oblivious invasions of non-Western community systems. And yet, examined through the lens of fundamental respect for the human worth of individuals—

and the validity of the lifeways of families, groups, and peoples, which forms the essential human rights framework—this hegemonic “Newspeak” is incapable of integrating its own internal contradictions. Indeed, it self-deconstructs.

The “Newspeak” of human rights and humanitarian law survives, I would argue, because most adults (and school children) in the United States know so little about what the various international human rights documents and humanitarian law treaties actually say (and even less about their theoretical frames) that they have no basis for evaluating the truth or falsity value of the HR-toned propaganda that surrounds them. Nor have they, in most instances, any practice in applying an HR analysis domestically—to issues like universal health care, police violence in minority communities, punitive discipline of children in schools, etc. This interplay of citizen human rights illiteracy with hegemonic use of HR code phrases and international expectations make it particularly urgent, and particularly difficult, to introduce the concepts, values, historical developments, etc. of human rights and humanitarian standards into the core experience of education in U.S. public schools.

I have introduced themes from universal human rights and humanitarian law to younger children as the occasional class guest and more professionally in college and university courses, which I have created and taught. What I hear from the students at every level (especially those in postsecondary education) is “I had no idea.” “I’ve never heard that the Geneva Conventions say that.” “You mean, the United States doesn’t recognize a constitutional right to education, but the UDHR does?!” And, especially, “Why didn’t anybody teach us anything about this when we were in grade school?” Why, indeed?

A Personal Path to Human Rights Education Advocacy

I am retired from an eclectic set of careers that included college and university teaching, practicing law, disability rights advocacy, and working for the Navajo Nation in its education division. At the point of retirement, however, the opportunity arose to pursue my consuming interest in bringing the study of human rights and humanitarian law into the mainstream of American social studies. I will explain what has arisen from this opportunity a little later in this piece. Just now, I want to describe two categories of seminal events that drove me from interested bystander to passionate advocate where human rights and humanitarian law education are concerned.

My interest was initially piqued in the 1980s and 1990s when I worked for the Navajo Nation on a number of education-related issues that involved engaging with the Congress, state legislatures, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and various state departments of education. Earlier research into international education law had revealed that the right to education in one’s national or indigenous language was recognized by countries all over the world and that preservation and development of the Navajo language was itself protected by international treaties.

Indeed, during my years working with the Navajo Nation and Navajo educational bodies, one of these treaties with particular relevance to indigenous education in the United States was ratified by the United States with approval of the U.S. Senate—the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In its approval, the U.S. Senate solemnly promised that the ICCPR would be implemented not only at the federal level but at every level of the federal system, including state and local government levels (Congressional Record 102nd Congress, Senate, April 02, 1992, Page: S4781).

This interplay of citizen human rights illiteracy with hegemonic use of HR code phrases and international expectations make it particularly urgent, and particularly difficult, to introduce the concepts, values, historical developments, etc. of human rights and humanitarian standards into the core experience of education in U.S. public schools.

Of course nobody had told the states or the school districts or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (as it was characterized at that time) or the tribal governments. Therefore, despite the Presidential approval of the ICCPR in 1977 and its full ratification in 1992, neither proponents nor opponents of Navajo control of Navajo education or education for Navajo fluency even considered the implications of Article 27 of the ICCPR³, which recognizes a right to culture for ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities.¹ Indeed, on all sides, reference to international human rights agreements appeared to be way outside the zone of legitimate discourse about American Indian education (a situation which has been transformed for American indigenous educators by the critical consciousness [*conscientização*] surrounding the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).

A few years after my direct employment by the Navajo Nation, but while I was still very involved in Navajo education, I attended a public hearing with Arizona state officials regarding state and tribal cooperation in education. I raised a question about how the right to culture under the ICCPR might inform Arizona’s relationship with the various American Indian nations situated in the state and was informed (by the Governor, no less) that this was an “American” question, and only “American” law was needed to deal with it. Interestingly, the Arizona official’s position was accepted by all sides, including tribal representatives. Yet special rapporteurs appointed by the UN Human Rights Commission to study the meaning of the “Right to Culture” under the ICCPR had concluded several years previous that Indigenous peoples had an absolute right to control the education of their children, to have that education provided in their own language, and to rely upon the nation states in which they were situated to provide the structures and resources to assure such a tribally-grounded education

(Francisco Caportorti, 1979; Miguel Martinez Cobo, 1986). I wondered: If a human right collapsed in a forest and nobody knew about it, would it ever have existed? Apparently not.

Some years after United Nations-supported "special rapporteurs" Caportorti and Martinez Cobo wrote their expansive studies of the minimum requirements for protecting the right to culture among ethnic and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples under the ICCPR, and two years after the U.S. ratification of the ICCPR, the *Journal of American Indian Education* published a special edition devoted posthumously to the writings of Dr. G. Mike Charleston, a Choctaw Indian, professor of educational administration, and the project director of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force under the U.S. Department of Education. Charleston had issued a passionate final report to the INAR Task Force study, *Toward True Native Education: A Treaty of 1992*, in which he called for a new "Treaty of 1992 to end the secret war of assimilation waged against Native peoples through public schools and other means"⁴. An introduction to Charleston's article in the *JAIE* recounted that despite his position as project director, Charleston's report was withdrawn as too "radical" by Education Department managers and even some prominent Native American members of the Task Force. If the *Journal of American Indian Education*, under Dr. Karen Swisher's leadership, had not published Charleston's call for "True Native Education" it would be utterly lost to us. As it is, Charleston's vision is very difficult to locate, especially if you don't already know that it exists. It is particularly ironic that Charleston's "Treaty of 1992" was disappeared the very year that the ICCPR, with its Article 27 protection of the Right to Culture was finally ratified by the United States.

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Charleston's call for "True Native Education" was actually not as far-reaching as the conclusions of the two special rapporteurs regarding the plain meaning of the right to culture, as enshrined in Article 27 of the ICCPR for indigenous peoples. Yet Charleston's heroic call for authentic native-led and culturally grounded education of American indigenous children was squelched by both colonizer and colonized as too "radical" to even be printed. No reference was made by Charleston or his later defenders to the international consensus on the rights of indigenous peoples in regard to education of their own children or to the legal enshrinement of that right in the ICCPR. My own experiences at that time would suggest that neither proponent nor opponent was aware of the connection. After all, where in the education of any of the participants in this drama would the subject of culturally-protected education as a human right ever have arisen?

A couple of career turns later and post 9-11, I was teaching school law to future school administrators at Sacramento State University when I read a *Newsweek* article about U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The soldiers' quoted language and conduct were troubling because they were so insulting toward Iraqi families and their Muslim religion. At the time, I was less familiar with the Geneva Conventions than I was with the human rights treaties based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But I did know where to look for answers to my discomfort. When Iraqi men were insulted by being called "Hadji" by American soldiers, this insult stood in clear contravention of Articles 5 and 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the convention regarding the treatment of civilians by occupying military forces⁵, which require respect for the local religion and culture. Who knew? The soldiers? Their commanding officers? The International Committee of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies knew (Schmitt, 2003; Stahelin, 2003); Amnesty International knew (AI, 2003); The Secretary General of the United Nations knew (Fowler, 2003). And they said so. However, their warnings were dismissed by American officials and were certainly missing from American media and discourse. So, I was worried and I wrote a paper for a civics conference saying I was worried (Blanchard, 2003). Then Abu Ghraib happened.

The young Americans who bore the brunt of prosecutions for the crimes of Abu Ghraib and other sites of torture were in many cases recently out of high school. They were thrown into a culture of authoritarianism and violence (the military) and socialized to the world of soldiering in an occupying army. What did these young soldiers know, understand, and believe before they were thrust into the maelstrom of Iraq and Afghanistan that might have provided them with some awareness of the standards that should apply to treatment of Iraqi civilians? What did they learn in school? They may have had lessons in character education and been socialized to accept the importance of racial harmony within the United States, but what did they learn that they could take with them into a hostile environment in an unfamiliar culture, that they could take into combat?

An article published in an online edition of *The Nation* in 2007⁶ sheds disturbing light on this question. What American troops did hear once they arrived in Iraq or Afghanistan was often brazenly hostile:

Spc. Patrick Resta, 29 . . . recalled his supervisor telling his platoon point-blank, "The Geneva Conventions don't exist at all in Iraq, and that's in writing if you want to see it." (The Nation, supra)

What did Spc. Resta or most of the other troops know that could allow them even internally to question such a claim? Again, what had they learned in school?

One thing that was notable, at least to me, in the *Nation* article was the absence of human rights vocabulary, even in the case of those troops who were repulsed by what they saw and refused to take part in it. They could describe what they saw; they could describe their personal

feelings of revulsion. However, they could not access the discourse of human rights and humanitarian law standards to help them characterize what they had seen through terms for which both international and domestic law provides specific definitions and remedies. In one case, a soldier described the scenes he observed at Abu Ghraib prison, which eventually led to his seeking and obtaining conscientious objector status. His vocabulary in this account was very generic as he described the wrongdoing he observed:

Prisoners at the notorious facility [Abu Ghraib] rioted on November 24, 2003, to protest their living conditions, and Army Reserve Spc. Aidan Delgado, 25 . . . was there. Unlike the other troops in his unit, he did not respond to the riot. Four months earlier he had decided to stop carrying a loaded weapon.

Nine prisoners were killed and three wounded after soldiers opened fire during the riot, and Specialist Delgado's fellow soldiers returned with photographs of the events. The images [including one of a soldier appearing to scoop out some of a dead prisoner's brains with his mess kit spoon] . . . shocked him. "It was very graphic," he said. . . . "And I said, 'These are some of our soldiers desecrating somebody's body. Something is seriously amiss.' I became convinced that this was excessive force, and this was brutality."(The Nation, supra)

It was also a "crime against humanity" under the Nuremberg principles and a clear violation of General Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, but these landmark advances in international humanitarian law were apparently unknown to Spc. Delgado or his unit or its immediate commanders.

Meanwhile, on the home front, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzalez advised President Bush that:

In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions.⁷

Mr. Gonzalez' memorandum was leaked to *Newsweek* magazine, which published it in an edition dedicated to exploring "The Roots of Torture" in May of 2004, after Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* (Hersh, 2004) and the television news program *60 Minutes* (CBS News, 2004) had each released photographs revealing gross abuses of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by American military personnel (and, quite likely, civilian intelligence personnel as well). By now, the pictures from Abu Ghraib should have focused national attention on the need to apply recognized humanitarian standards in the treatment of Iraqis. Sadly, the response was and continues to be surprisingly muted.

As an educator and advocate I was appalled, not by what had been done in Abu Ghraib, not even by the

Orwellian justifications from the White House, but by what had not been done in years and years of public education for which I, as a teacher of school administrators, bore at least some responsibility.

These stories highlight the essence of my rationale for working to bring human rights and international humanitarian law education into the mainstream social studies core. The fundamental concepts of HRE and IHL need to be introduced starting in the elementary grades and increasing in complexity of presentation and engagement as students progress through school (Blanchard, Senesh and Patterson-Black, 1999).

The United States, for all its ambivalence, has actually ratified some important human rights treaties and approved some important declarations. Sometimes, the United States has played a major role in constructing these statements of international law. For example, the American delegation to the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949 proposed specific language regarding abuse of "protected persons" in the power of an occupying civilian or military authority:

The contracting parties specifically agree that each of them is prohibited from taking any measure, which has as an object the physical suffering or extermination of protected persons in its power. The prohibition of this Article extends not only to murder, torture, corporal punishment, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not related to the necessary medical treatment of the protected person, but also to any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military administrators. (Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949, Vol. II, p. 647, 2004)

This American language became Article 32 of the 4th Geneva Convention. Yet the American population has been kept in such profound ignorance about these agreements and about the active part their own government has played in their development that on the whole the populace has had no foundation for assessing the truth or falsity value of statements like that of Mr. Gonzalez. When it comes to human rights and humanitarian law, we are uneducated as a people.

In 2011, the American Red Cross commissioned a survey of knowledge and attitudes toward the Geneva Conventions. Their findings illuminate the gap in basic knowledge of humanitarian law and suggest that it may be becoming worse:

- More than half of adults (55 percent) feel they are familiar with the Geneva Conventions and IHL. For youth 12-17 years old, one in five feel familiar with these rules and laws.
- Veterans, reservists, or active duty military are more familiar with Geneva Conventions and IHL than those with no military experience.
- Adults (55 percent) are more likely than youth (44 percent) to believe that rules and laws governing

actions in war are a good way to reduce human suffering.

- Youth are more likely than adults to believe that torturing captured enemy soldiers is either always acceptable or acceptable in some circumstances.
- Youth are more likely than adults to believe that the torture of a captured American soldier is either always acceptable or acceptable in some circumstances.
- Adults are more likely than youth to believe that those who break the rules of war should be put on trial and punished.
- Nearly 8 in 10 youth believe that the U.S. should educate youth on the laws and rules of war. (American Red Cross, 2011)

My own experience suggests that the Red Cross figures are optimistic. In many years of teaching at the university level, including two years since retirement teaching about human rights and international humanitarian law as part of a peace studies program, I rarely find even one student who knows what the Geneva Conventions require or who knows what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights actually addresses, let alone the role of Americans like Eleanor Roosevelt in its adoption or the rights protected either by the HR treaties that the United States has since ratified or in the many still under review. The origins of some of the UDHR language in the programme of the French Resistance in WWII (Hessel, 2010, 2011) and the decolonizing participation of non-Western diplomats (Glendon, 2002) are totally outside their experience. "Why am I just learning this now?" is a consistent student comment when they encounter the basic story of Universal Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

Breaking Into the Mainstream— Normalization as a Radical Act

Recently a group of human rights educators and advocates came together to draw up some recommendations for the United States to better meet the human rights obligations it has agreed to in the world community. The occasion was the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process undertaken in a regular cycle by the United Nations Human Rights Council to review the human rights records of every country and to make recommendations for their improvement. 2014-15 was the United States' UPR season. In formulating the rationale for their recommendations the educators noted:

- Only 39 states even mention "human rights" in their social studies standards, and among them, only 22 contain the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Very few state standards include specific international human rights or humanitarian treaties, obligations, or mechanisms.
- Where implemented, human rights education tends to focus on civil and political rights and omit

or minimize references to the full range of human rights, including social, economic and cultural rights.

- The predominant historical content approach to teaching human rights does not facilitate connections between human rights responsibilities and personal behavior through social and emotional learning (SEL), such as critical thinking, inquiry, making connections, and learning about international affairs.⁸

What these educators proposed is that human rights education become so common that every child encounters it and that the methodologies through which human rights behaviors are developed and responsibilities undertaken become a standard and familiar part of every child's schoolhouse experience. This would be a significant change in the way in which social studies education is experienced by public school students. It would be radical in the definitional sense of affecting the fundamental nature of social education. At the same time it would be conventional in that it would integrate human rights education into the existing social studies and school environmental programs of the various schools.

For such a normalization of human rights education to take place, a number of things have to happen. Mainstream organizations that act as gatekeepers for so much of the content of public education need to accept human rights education into the fold of the recognized education core. This means that to the extent that content standards and performance standards govern public education, HRE needs to be there. It isn't a question of whether or not standards or particular configurations of standards are a good idea. Rather, the threshold requirement is that whatever standards exist or assessments of accomplishment are imposed, HRE has to be there. In the United Kingdom, questions about the Geneva Conventions appear on every comprehensive exit exam from the secondary education level⁹. Whether such exams are a progressive requirement or not, when they exist, they define "what matters." HRE and IHL need to be there.

I have been working since my retirement with a community of human rights educators and activists to bring about such a normalization of human rights education. One stage in the normalization process involved engaging with one of the mainstream educational associations that is considered a gatekeeper of sorts for the social studies field, the National Council for the Social Studies. Within the NCSS structure it is possible to establish "Communities." These are officially recognized special interest groups within the larger organization. They have no budget, but they do have voting membership in the NCSS House of Delegates and can recommend resolutions to the NCSS Board of Directors through that body.

Through informal networks and word of mouth, the necessary number of NCSS members petitioned for the establishment of a Human Rights Education Community. Early in 2013, the NCSS Board of Directors approved. By

the annual NCSS Fall Conference, the new HRE Community was represented in the House of Delegates. Next the HRE Community networked with a civil society organization outside of NCSS that was also just forming, Human Rights Educators USA. Together we drew on the collective expertise and experience of our newly connected members and drew up a resolution to the NCSS House of Delegates asking that NCSS adopt an official position statement endorsing human rights education as a necessary part of the social studies core. At the 2013 Annual Conference, the NCSS House of Delegates unanimously approved the resolution supporting human rights education as a core component of social studies education at all grade levels.

The House of Delegates resolution was really a request to the NCSS Board of Directors to adopt the resolution just approved by the Delegates. That was the next step. A few months later, the NCSS Board did approve the resolution sent to them by the Delegates. However, this was still not the official position statement we needed. The resolution only said that NCSS would adopt a position statement. The Board members asked the HRE Community to prepare a draft. Again, the network of human rights educators within and outside NCSS worked together to come up with a draft and to vet it through as many human rights educators as we could get to read, comment, edit, and propose. In September 2014, the NCSS Board of Directors adopted the Position Statement on Human Rights Education proposed by the HRE Community. It is now an official position of a major social studies association that:

The National Council for the Social Studies affirms that Human Rights Education, in both its civil and its humanitarian aspects, is a necessary element of social studies programs and should be integrated throughout the educational experience of all learners from early childhood through advanced education and lifelong learning.

...Social studies educators in the United States have a special opportunity and a responsibility to contribute to this growing movement by integrating the fundamental concepts of universal human rights and international humanitarian law into a nurturing and yet rigorous education that prepares students to be compassionate, aware, and effective citizens and to work together to build a more livable world.¹⁰

When a professional education organization like NCSS takes a position on human rights education, the efforts of human rights educators and advocates receive a definite shot in the arm. However, for the NCSS position to have an actual impact on the educational experience of most public school students, a lot of other things need to happen. NCSS devoted the May/June issue of its journal *Social Education* (Vol. 79, No. 3) to the new HRE position statement and to practitioner articles on teaching and learning about human rights at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Clearly, however, a great deal more will have to happen if human rights education is to be integrated into the social studies core at every grade level.

NCSS is not set up to be a clearinghouse for the resources needed to carry out the very positive goals listed in its position statement. Nor does human rights education enjoy a status in state standards that would support its incorporation into the “approved” texts and supporting materials that can be purchased with state funds. This limitation may actually be a strength, since it is hard to imagine a standardized textbook doing justice to the rich and nuanced field of human rights education, particularly in



its economic, social, and cultural dimensions. What is needed is a school district commitment to include HRE in its curriculum and effective public domain materials, alignable with whatever content standards are currently in play, which can be easily put into the hands of classroom teachers.

Fortunately, a newly established civil society HRE advocacy organization, HRE USA¹¹ has been able to secure some limited funds for professional assistance and the support of some highly skilled volunteers to create a website with a capacity for gathering, cataloguing, and providing online access to a wide variety of human rights education curricula that address both the content and the social and emotional learning domains of HRE. The site also provides links to public domain materials and guides.¹² While still a work in progress, HRE USA and its website will hopefully become a place where educators of all sorts can contribute their own resources and network

with each other about creative and alternative ways of connecting HRE with students' lived experiences.

Inconclusive Conclusions, With More to Follow

Human rights education and humanitarian law education need to get inside the mainstream arena where core concepts are taught and learned. HRE strategies for acting with freedom and respect for others need to become a mainstream part of the experience of every child in school. At every step along the way, HRE can get sidelined. It can become last year's news that nobody remembers anymore. It can get co-opted. The vocabulary of HRE can be appropriated for some very inhumane purposes. But that's the nature of the field in which the game of public education is played in this country. It is not a reason to abandon the effort.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (A.D. c. 55 – 135) advised his students to face up to the various ways their best efforts could go wrong decide if it was worth it and proceed accordingly:

In every affair consider what precedes and what follows, and then...if your inclination still holds, set about the [act] (Enchiridion).

There is no question but that HRE initiatives risk being co-opted and turned into sophistic defenses of the status quo. Any humanistic endeavor or subject is at risk of being coopted as soon as it is introduced into the public education system. If radical educators and human rights activists let this happen, we will have ourselves to blame at least as much as the officious and official purveyors of canned curricula and sanitized learning. They are doing what it is their nature to do. What is it our nature to do?

Human Rights education is a part of the learning experience of students all over the world. Internet searches and social media can open up an extremely diverse world of ideas and experiences. If the "approved" materials become canned and sanitized, there will always be those research and writing assignments that draw students out of their comfort zone and into their communities, into the larger world of ideas and experience.

Students in an effectively facilitated human rights educational setting will be able to look beyond the limitations of mandated materials if they are encouraged to do so and supported in their explorations. That's our job. It's the job of the co-optors to co-opt. It's our job to outwit them and teach our students to do the same.

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Notes

- ¹ See <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>
- ² http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/docLib/20130429_The_Core_Problem_-_Preventing_the_United_Nations_Takeover_of_K-12_Education_in_America.pdf
- ³ *Article 27.* In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.
- ⁴ *Journal of American Indian Education*, 33(2), 1-56, 1994, ERIC Number: EJ491769
- ⁵ <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>
- ⁶ Hedges and Al-Arian, The Other War, <http://www.thenation.com/article/other-war-iraq-vets-bear-witness-0/>
- ⁷ *Gonzalez, 2002,* <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/torturingdemocracy/documents/20020125.pdf>
- ⁸ HRE USA and USHRN, Stakeholder Report, 2014, http://www.hreusa.net/upload_image/HRE_USA_-_USHRN_Stakeholder_Submission_US_UPR_Sept_2014.pdf
- ⁹ (British Red Cross, Justice and Fairness website, <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/Teaching-packages/Justice-and-Fairness/About-the-resource>
- ¹⁰ (NCSS, 2014, http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human_rights_education_2014
- ¹¹ See www.hreusa.net
- ¹² http://www.hreusa.net/materials_teaching.php.



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