

## Book reviews

McLeod, J. & Reynolds, R. (2010). *Peaceful pedagogy: Teaching human rights through the curriculum*. Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing

Once again, Julie McLeod and Ruth Reynolds have collaborated to write their latest book, *Peaceful Pedagogy: Teaching human rights through the curriculum*. This collaboration was designed 'to bring peacebuilding to the fore of teaching' (p. v) through a human rights approach to curriculum. While this book would be useful for pre-service teacher education lecturers, tutors, pre-service teacher education students, practising teachers, principals, administrators and school communities; it provides an interesting insight into the enactment of peacebuilding in schools that is likely to interest a much wider professional and community audience. McLeod and Reynolds present case studies of five different schools in the book. They demonstrate how peacebuilding takes place in school contexts, about issues arising from children's experiences in their schools, their lives and their wider communities.

Teaching is presented by McLeod and Reynolds in *Peaceful Pedagogy* as an 'honourable endeavour' (p. v) that has much potential for promoting human rights. Philosophically the authors take the position that the promotion and enactment of human rights in schooling contexts can occur at two levels. Firstly, but not more importantly, at an individual intra-personal level and secondly, at a local inter-personal level with class groups, school groups, families and community groups interacting to build peace through human rights. The authors present a model of curriculum that makes this interaction for peacebuilding possible in schools. This curriculum model presents a way forward for pre-service and in-service teachers by offering a practical model to guide planning and enactment of human rights in classrooms across the nation. As exemplars of practice, the case study approach illustrates teachers and learners engaged in the actual process of peacebuilding through this curriculum model. These case studies help to bridge the theory-practice divide.

This book is organised with nine chapters and two appendices. The chapter arrangement clarifies the authors' main ideas and their development. This results in a book structure that allows for logical advancement of the main argument. The first three chapters explain the theory practice nexus of human rights and are developed topically. Chapter 1 provides a succinct historical overview and aims to make the case for peacebuilding as an essential component in school curricula. It is here that the authors acknowledge the differing theoretical perspectives on Peace Education:

- Transformative
- Caring
- Invite emotions
- Value laden
- Build intercultural understanding
- Global.

They maintain that these differing theoretical perspectives have a common uniting goal, which is the aim for peacebuilding through human rights. Human rights, the

authors suggest, are best taught in schools as they are well positioned to become agencies of peacebuilding. This is a powerful, yet feasible suggestion but one that may require some significant cultural shifts by stakeholders. Initiatives such as legislation, teacher training, textbooks and resources all have potential to help move the curriculum in this direction. I agree completely when McLeod and Reynolds (2010) state that, 'it will always be the individual teacher who is the key to peaceful learning' (p.41). However, teacher disposition, while crucial, is limited by the support or otherwise of the school executive and principal and so it is in this area that specific initiatives are required.

Chapter 2 provides an explanation of curriculum planning for peaceful pedagogy and it is at this point that three powerful tenets have been adopted and adapted from Halliday (1985) and used by the authors to organise their peaceful pedagogy model of curriculum: learning about, learning through and learning to. Learning about involves 'content transmission' of knowledge, learning through involves the experiences students are exposed to that enable them to apply human rights principles and learning to involves students learning to enact what they have learnt. These three tenets provide a framework on which schools and teachers can build their own model of peaceful pedagogy.

Chapter 3 demonstrates an approach to the implementation of a human rights curriculum in schools. Teaching the knowledge and the skills required for peaceful learning is enhanced by a reflective process where teachers and students are encouraged to engage in reflection: in action- while the learning is taking place, on action- after the learning period has occurred, and for action- directions to take for the next period of learning.

The following five chapters exemplify how different schools have enacted a human rights curriculum with the final chapter devoted to exploring how various schools globally are enacting such curricula. The appendices are a particularly useful inclusion for the in-service and pre-service teacher practitioners as they contain the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and a list of resources aimed at supporting a Human Rights Curriculum in schools. This resource, while not complete, should however prove a useful starting point for principals and teachers considering the implementation of a human rights curriculum in their schools.

Learning occurs in many contexts other than schools and although the language used in the text is teacher education specific, this book would have very wide appeal for those interested in social justice, cultural studies, human rights, citizenship education, critical pedagogy, values education and transformative action. However, the specific use of educational settings in the text is particularly suited to teacher educators, practitioners and undergraduate audiences.

As a teacher educator, and previously a teacher for 25 years in K-6 schools, this book has particular interest for me. I have had an increasing interest in human rights, social justice, sustainability, peace and harmony amongst the worlds' people and these interests naturally permeates my teaching. What is often lacking in pre-service teacher

education to support my teaching is provision of sufficient opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience the real world of the classroom, the school corridors and playgrounds. The case study approach used in *Peaceful Pedagogy* has enabled McLeod and Reynolds to bring to life the experiences of five different educational settings that allows pre-service teachers the opportunity to consider the following questions without physically being in school classrooms, playgrounds and corridors:

Why is learning about human rights of value? What human rights skills may be needed to address particular issues? How will I model human rights knowledge, values and skills to my students? and Where will learning about human rights take place for my students? (McLeod and Reynolds, 2010)

### *References*

- Halliday, M. and Hussain, R. (1985). *Language, context and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. Burwood: Deakin.
- McLeod, J. & Reynolds, R. (2010). *Peaceful pedagogy: Teaching human rights through the curriculum*. Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing

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Morris, I. (2009). *Teaching happiness and well-being in schools: Learning to ride elephants*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

This book sheds light upon the remarkable characteristic of human nature, that is, everyone wants to be happy! But how do we get that happiness? Is it in the materialistic things that we hoard day after day? Is it something that lies within the individual? Or is it a subjective experience that can be facilitated when children are at school? The author, Ian Morris aims to provide a framework for a new perspective in which the progress of our society is measured by the calibre of our experience. At a time, when an avid interest in positive psychology and teaching of happiness and well-being is blossoming, this book provides a pragmatic introduction to the theory and specific advice on how to implement the potentially life-changing and human-flourishing ideas in the classroom. It introduces middle and high school teachers to a curriculum of happiness and well-being which is developed by the author and is being taught at Wellington College in Berkshire where he is employed.

In the first chapter of the book, Morris provides a justification for the metaphorical title, elucidating how teaching happiness and well-being is about trying to help children to bring the elephant and rider into one harmonious whole:

The aim of teaching happiness and well-being is to teach the rider, not only about himself, but also about the elephant that he rides. Many people go through life experiencing an antagonistic relationship between, metaphorically speaking, the elephant and the rider and this antagonism is the source of psychological and physiological problems. If we can provide young people with an elephant rider's manual, in other words, if we can teach them how they function as humans and then teach them how to be not just functioning humans, but excellent ones, we might be able to help them to avoid many of the pitfalls that arise either from a rider that tries to exert too much control, or from a runaway elephant (p.3).

The author denounces the 'full catastrophe teaching' (p.3) for its focus on preparing children for the worst-case scenario, neglecting to educate them in how to achieve the best-case scenario. He strongly recommends teaching children what it means to flourish and how to be excellent human beings. He suggests that the process of teaching well-being involves students in a simple three-stage, cyclical process: awareness (notice), intervention (act) and evaluation (reflect). He proposes a logical idea of how well-being of students is anchored upon teacher well-being and whole-school well-being. It is poised at the centre of education with the support of 'satellite principles' (p.15) of stillness, awareness, strengths, prudence, values and relationships.

In chapter 2, the nature and history of happiness and the need for teaching it in schools are explored methodically. Morris emphasises his argument that happiness could be considered as an attitude of mind that can be practised and it is possible to believe that people can be taught to be happy. In the following chapter, he makes his point clear about the importance of the well-being of human machine and its harmony with the outside world.

Starting from Chapters 4 through to 8, Morris elaborately explains each of the satellite principles in his fluent and captivating style of writing. He effortlessly captures the readers' attention and gears them to read further about how these pertinent principles could be imparted to students in a classroom situation. His systematic illustration and investigation of each of the principles, peppered with examples, case studies and readings from various sources, including Buddhism and Christianity would serve as an inspirational resource for teachers.

In the most arresting chapter titled, "Modern Life is rubbish", Morris delves into 'the idea that the modern Western society is often pressured and rushed and that we find ourselves charging from one thing to the next under constant pressure to maximise our productivity' (p.180). His approach to this idea strikes a very fine balance, cautiously complementing the advantages of science and technology while impartially criticising its misuse. He tenaciously advocates how 'delayed gratification' (p.165) could avoid 'anomie' (p.166) that can arise from modern day consumerism, challenging the teenagers' attitude and behaviour, indeed!

Morris adeptly concludes the book with a chapter on 'Mindfulness, meditation, spirituality and meaning', where he proposes the magnitude of the practice of mindfulness and the importance of encouraging spirituality in schools. When the educational system boasts of preparing the youth to be the worthy citizens of the world,

this initiative deserves attention. His argument for its need is well-documented by the positive feedback from his students who learnt about meditation in the well-being course. He affirms that the teaching of well-being helps to 'complete what is missing from education and it can transform the experience young people have of education and the experience that educators have of young people' (p.199).

The strengths of the book are multi-fold: chapter previews, lesson ideas and teacher resources for each chapter, provision of film suggestions to drive home the basic concepts, a number of case studies to reiterate the essence of each chapter content and an endnote section providing notes to references reflecting the author's wide reading and in-depth knowledge in the area of well-being. His meticulous recommendation of how a well-being curriculum could be designed reflects his proficiency and wisdom in teaching this subject. The author's expertise and thoroughness are exemplified through his suggestions regarding sources of information for help in devising a curriculum on well-being, for further reading and useful websites. I fully agree with Lord Richard Layard who, in his foreword, said, 'for teachers of that (well-being) curriculum, this book will be a godsend'.

While there is a plethora of information in the book on the significance and teaching of well-being in schools, which would definitely motivate the teachers to deliver the goods through a sound pedagogy, what I miss is a section on a systematic approach to course delivery. A progressive introduction of concepts and content of the well-being curriculum over a period of four years of high school is crucial for two reasons: i) the developmental changes that occur in adolescence, especially their mental abilities need consideration so that students would understand the abstract concepts like happiness, prudence and values ii) the curriculum content needs to be introduced gradually and methodically from Year 7 through to Year 10. The content for the final year students of high school could be much more rigorous and intense than that is for students who are in the first year of high school. It would be of enormous assistance to teachers if an exclusive section on suggestions for course framework and content for different year levels in high school could be included in the next edition of the book. This would strengthen the relevance and context of teaching this new subject to adolescents who are at the transitional stage of their lives in the changing world.

This diminutive shortcoming aside, the success of '*Teaching happiness and well-being in schools: Learning to ride elephants*' lies in its content and significance which are undoubtedly imperative in the lives of teenagers. This book is an epitome of Morris's passion in this subject where he gives a concrete compendium of resources for classroom practitioners to instil in students the skills related to their well-being not only through their school years but also throughout their lives.

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