

Preparing Global Citizens through the Study of Human Rights

Toni Fuss Kirkwood-Tucker

The preparation of students for global citizenship represents a central challenge to social studies educators in the twenty-first century. Two-thirds of the world's poor are steeped in abject poverty and its grim consequences. The world refugee problem has reached staggering proportions. There is an international epidemic of human trafficking, and a global crisis of abuse of children through child labor and forced recruitment into militias and armies. Many governments deny their citizens basic human and political rights. At times, the human condition appears to have reached the depths of despair.

Children under the age of five are dying prematurely on an average of 25,000 *each day*, mostly from causes preventable with low-cost interventions.¹ Over three million children under the age of five are dying *every year* largely as a result of under-nutrition. Of those children in the developing world who do survive, 130 million are underweight, and nearly 200 million suffer from stunting. “Stunting,” a chronic form of malnutrition, results in irreversible delays to a child’s mental and physical development, which inhibits the ability to learn and limits the possibilities for a good life.² “Wasting,” or acute malnutrition, affects approximately 78 million children of whom an estimated 26 million are considered severely wasted, destined to live a bleak and dismal life until their premature deaths.³

Forty-two million refugees have been forcibly displaced to different corners of the earth. Almost 7 million come from 23 countries, 26 million are internally displaced persons, and 827,000 are asy-

lum seekers.⁴

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), an estimated 12 million individuals are abused for profit through sexual and/or forced labor exploitation. Other sources estimate the number of abused laborers to be as high as 27 million.⁵ A 2002 ILO Report advised that 179 million children between 5–17 years of age were working in “hazardous” conditions, and 8 million children were working in what the ILO defines as “unconditionally the worst forms of forced labor.” These conditions include forced servitude, sexual exploitation, and the use of children in unlawful activities such as the recruitment of child soldiers.⁶ Child laborers are defined as children who are either under the minimum age for work; of age, but working in conditions that threaten their health and safety; and those engaged in forced labor.⁷ In terms of child combatants, the UN estimates that over 250,000 are forced into armed combat worldwide.⁸ They are presently

fighting in 19 countries around the world ranging from Colombia to Indonesia to Uganda.⁹ Robbed of their youth, their young lives are shattered, and when they escape, their integration into a normal way of life is nearly impossible.

It is my belief that teachers bear a *moral* responsibility to provide future generations with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are essential for competent citizenship in a global age. Since teachers are the ultimate curricular and instructional gatekeepers of what is being taught in the classroom, they have the opportunity to “infuse” or “posthole” prevailing global issues into the instructional process.

Infusion

Two pedagogical methods, “infusing” and “postholing,” are ideal strategies for bringing human rights and their violations to the attention of students. The infusion pedagogy involves the integration of global conditions into the traditional curriculum at the appropriate teachable moment.

In teaching world history, for example, when addressing the cause/effect relationship of colonialism, the teacher can demonstrate the connection between historical fact and present-day conditions by linking the effects of the past to the large number of people suffering from

hunger and malnutrition today. Teachers can point out the effects on children born to undernourished mothers, which results in an at-risk student population that suffers from mental, emotional, and physical ailments. The teacher can then probe:

- *What will be the future of these suffering children?*
- *How will it impact their country?*
- *How can this issue be remedied?*

In teaching U.S. history, a discussion of the Industrial Revolution and widespread child labor in the sweatshops of U.S. factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can provide understanding and bridge the distance between domestic and international issues. Teachers can help students wrestle with the similarities and differences in child labor in the U.S. Industrial Revolution and industrialization in other parts of the world today.

The economics teacher, when introducing the concepts of supply and demand and diminishing returns in the global market place, can provide troubling insights into the use of forced labor that results in excessive profits. When teaching about immigration, the teacher can introduce the concept of remittances and give examples of Mexican, Haitian, and other foreign laborers who work in the United States and who send large percentages of their wages back home, which may mean the very survival of their extended families or their entire communities.

The government teacher can compare and contrast the social and political rights of citizens in the United States with those of other countries, investigating issues ranging from personal freedom to poverty, lack of education, and health-care. The geography teacher can compare and contrast the problems of a particular region or specific community in the U.S., such as the infant mortality rate among different racial groups in urban settings, with those of other countries.

A current events class is an ideal venue for in-depth examination of human rights and the effect of their violation on societal institutions, as well as the possibilities for seeking justice for their victims. Contemporary events can be examined in print and non-print media by utilizing local, state, and national media that present a variety of political viewpoints in order to demonstrate how information is prioritized or omitted in different sources.

Postholing

Whereas the “infusion” pedagogy presents global awareness of human rights and their violations in the world today on a relatively superficial level, the “postholing” technique facilitates an in-depth examination of the subject by integrating a new unit of instruction composed of four or five lessons into the existing curriculum framework. This involves speeding up or condensing the mandatory curriculum timeline with a summarizing film or lecture in order to make room (posthole) for a new unit of instruction on human rights. This embedded unit could include child labor, juvenile soldiers, poverty and malnutrition, sexual exploitation of women and minors, lack of primary education for children, the plight of farm workers worldwide, global warming and its effects on climate and living, and other issues confronting the world and its people. “Postholing” an entire unit of instruction creates classroom time to explore possible solutions to these pervasive conditions. The teacher decides whether to include one theme, such as poverty or forced labor of minors, or teach four or five lessons on different global issues. The teacher decides the number of lessons he or she is able to posthole into the mandated curriculum, since the lessons must be aimed at a specific group of students and tailored to their particular interests and needs.

Another “postholing” idea in teaching human rights violations and initiatives to eliminate them is to incorporate an application of the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights (UDHR)¹⁰ and/or the Covenant of the Rights of the Child (CRC)¹¹ in the instructional process. Using this “postholing” framework, teachers can download from the web case studies of abuses of children’s rights and the rights of adults, and then divide the class into teams to identify violations of rights established by the UDHR and the CRC. Case studies should cover all geographic areas of the world, including the United States. Utilizing two charts outlining the rights expressed in the UDHR and the CRC, students identify and check human rights violated in their assigned case studies. The teacher then probes:

- *Comparing the violation of adult human rights with the violation of children’s human rights, what do we find?*
- *What conclusions can we draw from the violations of human rights in these two documents?*
- *What generalizations can we make about human rights abuses in the world today?*
- *What can we do as a class or an entire school to reduce or eliminate some of the world’s harrowing conditions?*

Student teams are then required to develop a realistic plan of action regarding how a specific condition in any part of the world, including in their own communities, can be improved or rectified. The pedagogies of “infusion” and “postholing” offer the experienced teacher a meaningful diversion from the traditional curriculum approaches at certain topical intersections. My teaching experience in the Miami-Dade Public Schools showed that students welcome the use of these methods in the classroom. These strategies provide students a golden opportunity to learn about prevailing issues in selected nations of the world, and to be able to discuss possibilities for counteracting violations of human rights. The articles in this special section pro-

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vide information and teaching suggestions that focus on a small selection of important historical and contemporary topics. For those wishing to conduct their own research, the articles and the concluding feature on resources present a range of useful websites of non-governmental organizations that can assist students wishing to promote human rights. 🌐

Notes

1. See United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "State of the World's Children Special Edition: Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 2010," available on the United Nations website at www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/fullreport.php.
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4. Migration Policy Institute (MPI), "Refugee Protection." Available at www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/refugee.cfm.
5. U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2007." Available at www.state.gov/documents/organization/82902.pdf.
6. "ILO Global Report on Child Labour Cites 'Alarming' Extent of its Worst Forms" (May 2002). Available at www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/press-and-media-centre/news/WCMS_007784/lang-en/index.htm.
7. International Labour Office (ILO), "Accelerating Action against Child Labour: Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2010." www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgreports/-/dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_126752.pdf.
8. Margaret Besheer, "The UN Estimates there are More than 250,000 Child Soldiers Worldwide." (January 30, 2008) Available at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/01/mil-080130-voa08.htm.
9. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, Facts and Figures on Child Soldiers," (London, 2009). Available at www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/.
10. The text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is available at www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml.
11. The text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is available at www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm.

TONI FUSS KIRKWOOD-TUCKER is associate professor emerita at Florida Atlantic University and now serves as visiting associate professor of social science and global education at Florida State University. Her primary research interests lie in curricular balance and the implementation of global perspectives in curriculum and instruction in teacher education and schools. She can be reached at tkirkwoodtucker@fsu.edu.