

Human Rights and Education

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As a teacher for more than half a century, I have strong feelings about education. I see two ways in which education is connected to human rights.

First, I think of the right to a high-quality education as a human right. Having taught in communities of color and of low income in the US, as well as in communities of the dominant culture, I am well aware of the so-called “achievement gap” in this country, which is more accurately called the “opportunity gap.” Not yet in the US is a high-quality education recognized by those in power as a right for all children. So those of us who value human rights must continue to work toward that as a goal.

Second, while education as a human right means at very least that everyone will have basic literacy and numeracy, the crucial skills in today’s world that will allow them to make informed decisions within their own lives and fully participate in society, it means a great deal more than that. It is not just about being consumers, and it is not about learning just enough about a nation’s past to serve it blindly. More important, schooling needs to be about the liberation of children’s minds through critical thinking, inspiration by deep exposure to all of the arts and to excellent literature, and the full development of their own potential as human beings and citizens.

And education as a human right absolutely needs to be about creating humane and caring classroom communities, in order to prepare students for the communities they will build. Teaching for human rights—for humane relationships-- requires non-violent classroom management. I quote from one of my favorite books for teachers:

“Our goal is greater than just passing on facts and information. If we want our students to be caring human beings, then we need to respond to them in caring ways. If we value our children’s dignity, then we need to model the methods that affirm their dignity. If we want to send out into the world young people who respect themselves and respect others, then we need to begin by respecting them.”

(Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish, with Lisa Nyberg & Rosalyn Anstine Templeton (1995). *How to Talk So Kids Can Learn At Home and in School*, p. 42)