

Book Review

Empowering Children: Children's Rights Education as a Pathway to Citizenship.

R. Brian Howe and Katherine Covell.

Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Reviewed by Lydia Pungur
University of Alberta

Empowering Children is a comprehensive book about the meaning of children's rights in literature and in international studies, as supported by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (the Convention). Howe and Covell make a logical and supported case for expanding rights to children from not-yet citizens to participatory citizens. They indicate that teaching children's rights should be commensurate with their developmental level in a deliberative democratic setting in institutions such as schools. Counter-arguments are made against neglecting children's rights. Their argument is for empowering children through school curricula, specifically a rights curriculum using the contagion model for democratic and participatory pedagogy promoting children's rights education. Such education, according to the authors, should include democratic education techniques provided in an interdisciplinary setting.

The purpose of the book is to build a case for adopting children's rights education in schools, which should be the primary vehicle for promoting citizenship through education. The introductory chapter illustrates opposition to schoolchildren's elections organized by UNICEF and some governments, with the results showing that children value the family, provisions, education, and the environment, not unfettered personal freedoms. The theme of responsibility increasing as children age exists throughout the book. Howe and Covell claim that children's rights education leads to good citizenship with knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills needed for participation in a democratic society.

Children's citizenship education is a task that the authors indicate most states have failed to follow. Under the Convention, children are provided with many civil and societal responsibilities, but not full adult political rights. For example, Article 12 provides rights of expression and participation to children in relation to their age and maturity level in matters relating to children, including political decisions. These rights are explained, and methods of implementation are provided, with participation in governance being at the core of child citizenship. The authors emphasize the need for children's rights

Lydia Pungur is a doctoral provisional candidate in theoretical, cultural, and international education in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Her interests are comparative education, social studies and curricula, citizenship education, and globalization.

education as justified by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. These rights, according to the authors, are lacking, and the recommendation is made that society focus on children's rights. Issues about curricula design and implementation are called for. Necessary relevant pedagogies and skills for fostering democratic citizenship are described extensively, such as critical thinking and cooperative learning within a democratic classroom. The goal of this setting is to teach adequate social responsibility, values, and behaviors within democratic society.

The authors conduct a literature review of the conceptions of citizenship, which is twinned with responsibility, viewing these conceptions and policies as "adultcentric," concluding that there is "failure to recognize children as citizens" (p. 16). In a section of the book focusing on globalization, state and global cosmopolitan citizenship concepts are included using a framework originally conceived of by Held (1995). Tied in with global awareness is the need to fulfill international standards of human rights and to promote global citizenship and democratic decision-making. The authors convincingly argue that children are citizens in their own right in most countries and under the Convention are legal citizens. However, they are disempowered or excluded in citizenship literature even though trends in society are to confer all groups with citizenship rights. Howe and Covell make transparent common arguments against children as citizens, including the tired adage of not having the capacity to exercise rights and responsibilities.

Howe and Covell base their pro-child citizenship stand on the UN Convention and on research. Specifically, these arguments are supported by common positivist ideas of child development as seen in psychology and neuroscience. These stages, according to conceptions of child development, occur over a lifespan where there is a chance for "evolving capacities" to be more appropriate for responsible decision-making. In the ideas of the Convention, child citizenship participation is a key deliberative and participatory democratic principle. Evolving participation is explained in terms of a ladder, with the highest level being decision-making initiated by children and shared with adults. Because the ideal conception of citizenship balances rights and responsibilities, values and virtues need to be emphasized for responsible citizenship. Furthermore, ideal citizenship entails praxis through participation and the exercise of rights and responsibilities, so that children acquire these skills through social institutions such as families and schools. Participation and the exercise of rights and opportunities for children and adolescents should be age-appropriate in line with their evolving capabilities. This concept promotes a sense of societal belonging that benefits adult democratic citizenship. Differentiated citizenship according to the Convention is based on age categories; older children have greater participation rights than younger children, and subgroup differences are accepted under international human rights conventions.

The final three chapters are devoted to citizenship education programs, curricula design, and the challenges of implementation. Citizenship education approaches that are values focused, namely, values clarification, character, and moral education are explained. Behavior-based approaches including anti-racist, environmental, and peace education are also examined and critiqued.

The citizenship knowledge approach through civics usually incorporated into social studies, global citizenship education, and human rights education are outlined, with the latter being the most favorably evaluated, but all are seen as insufficient. For example, civics usually focuses on facts, and reforms call on experiential learning, contemporary themes, global education identity, and the facilitation of values development, empathy, and reasoning and various perspective skills. Human rights education includes empowerment goals with the aim of social change and is supported by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The authors explain that existing programs are problematic or insufficient, setting the stage for children's rights education as citizenship education with democratic participative principles and pedagogy, incorporating a global consensus values base context and in tune with social diversity. Such education should be interdisciplinary, foster democracy, and base knowledge and values on the Convention. It informs students of their rights and responsibilities. The problem with former citizenship education approaches is that there is a lack of recognition of children as citizens and myths exist about the UN Convention, a legal document that the authors recommend should set the framework for citizenship education. Furthermore, seen as being mainly authoritarian, pedagogy and governance in schools for adolescents is generalized to be counter to the Convention.

Children's rights education is viewed as having a contagion effect so that children taught in a democratic classroom about their Convention rights acquire citizenship values. In order to implement curricula effectively, teachers should participate in curricula design, should have professional development to understand children's rights, and should believe in the goals. Relevant democratic teaching strategies and skills are described such as the need for critical reflection, with references to children's rights education curricula in Canada that the authors developed for use in various subjects. The "contagion model" shows how democratic pedagogy and participatory learning causes the learner to respect rights values and to be socially responsible. It includes factors, variables, and outcomes. This model is useful as an ideal type for curriculum writers, but is prescriptive in methodologies, not providing opportunities for teachers to use professional judgment to be reflective with variables such as meeting individual learning styles. The authors recommend that human rights education start young, but to increase detail during middle-school age with increasing cognitive capacities. In the concluding chapter, the authors aim to empower children with knowledge about their rights and self-worth, but acknowledge obstacles such as traditional schools and curricula and teaching difficulties. In addition, traditional views of children are examined and convincingly refuted.

The Convention faces international law shortfalls. Although most countries have ratified it and it is legally binding, according to Howe and Covell, few implement safeguards under international law as they are not readily enforceable unless instituted in domestic law and therefore fall in the realm of symbolic policy. The authors argue for UN Charter Rights to become an obligation based on human rights and related ethical arguments and UN reports. Unfortunately, as Howe and Covell point out, minors do not vote or have lobbying power, reducing opportunities for children's rights to take hold. Although

some of the arguments for fostering children's rights education are tenable, a few are not. Once again, under the recommendations the brunt of responsibility falls on teachers, who as illustrated in the book often are not adequately educated in the area of children's rights nor have time to provide this level of education due to heavy workloads and stress.

Additional forces reduce opportunities to promote children's rights in education. Trends associated with globalization such as meeting accountability standards through testing and increased focus on technology, math, and science as a means of competing globally by training students for marketable subjects are only partly addressed. These pressures from governments and sectors of society further place the priority of teaching children's rights in jeopardy as they are not seen as economically important or readily feasible. Although the book contains a wealth of information and arguments in favor of children's participatory rights and citizenship through the promotion of the Convention and offers an extensive review of the literature and current studies, the book tends to be rather expansive on certain points, and it would have been more accessible if it had been tightened.

I recommend this book to undergraduate students, to teachers and administrators, curriculum writers, and to policymakers who are interested in a basic yet exhaustive overview of children's rights. It could also be used as a source book for literature about citizenship, adult and children's rights, children's curricula, and school programs.