



Book Review. *Human rights and global diversity: Basic ethics in action**

Kristina Andrews*

* Florida Gulf Coast University,
College of Education (PhD
student), Fort Myers, FL, USA.
E-mail: tinahannaha@gmail.com

Article Info

Received: 22.11.2019

Revised: 24.11.2019

Accepted: 25.11.2019

How to cite

Andrews, K. (2019). Book Review.
Human rights and global
diversity: Basic ethics in action.
*Journal of Curriculum Studies
Research*, 1(1), 71-74.

* Churchill, R. P. (2006). *Human rights and global diversity: Basic ethics in action*. New York: Routledge. 152 p., ISBN:0130408859.

BOOK REVIEW

Human Rights and Global Diversity: Basic Ethics in Action (Churchill, 2006) would be recommended for teachers and administrators working within ethnically and culturally diverse schools around the world. The author provided a foundation and defense for the implementation and enforcement of universal human rights while respecting plurality and cultural diversity. These rights include: "life, personal liberty, freedom from acute gratuitous pain, and satisfaction of basic needs (adequate food, water, clothing shelter, and medical treatment for survival)" (Meyers, 1985, p. 53). In addition to an extensive composition of the argument for universal human rights, Churchill presented the counter-arguments to the universality of human rights, as well as the challenges faced by those who recognize and actively support socially just and equitable treatment for all persons in all cultures.

The ease of mobility for voluntary movement among nation-states and the forced migration of other individuals from nation-states has created regions around the world that are culturally diverse. As a result, these individuals are subject to becoming a societal member of a nation-state of which they may or may not hold citizenship and/or political, economic, or civil

rights. Thus, the individuals may experience feelings of isolation and discrimination, as well as to being subjected to economic disadvantage and political policies. These restricting conditions may be a result of not being citizens and full members of the dominant culture and society in which they are immersed. Therefore, it is critical for educational stakeholders to, not only become informed on the basic human rights that all individuals are entitled to, but to become active in ensuring that students and their families have access to these rights. Furthermore, it is imperative that students acquire an awareness of socially just and equitable practices afforded to them, according to their human rights, of which all persons, including themselves, have a right.

Churchill's (2006) book *Human Rights and Global Diversity: Basic Ethics in Action* is divided into three chapters: 1. *Reasoning about Human Rights*, 2. *Debating the Universality of Human Rights*, and 3. *Human Rights and Cross Cultural Negotiations*. In the culminating section of the book he provided the Human Rights Treaties and Covenants and Human Rights Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Churchill presented the concepts and constructs of human rights, the universality of human rights and an argument for human rights. To strengthen the argument that human rights should be applied universally, he presented the counter-arguments to the universality of human rights and sought to invalidate the counter-arguments. Churchill's overarching claim for human rights was that they are the same for all human beings regardless where they reside. He emphasized the importance of noting that the absence of human rights to any group of individuals, in any area of residence does not invalidate the right of those individuals to be entitled to basic human rights. Rather, it is an indication that those individuals are victims of immorality and injustice. He presented the oppositional constructs by the integration of the voices of theorists Dworkin, Donnelly, Gerwith, Al-Na'im and Othman.

Chapter one, *Reasoning about Human Rights*, provided a conceptual framework within which Churchill analyzed the concepts of human rights. He argued that all components and variations of exceptionalism or particularism are false. He concluded that they are not dependent on cultural, social or political constructs, and while they may be absent in particular regions or amongst members of a culture, it does not negate the entitlement of the members to have access to the rights. Therefore, Churchill's logical argument for the universality of human rights inferred that rights are entitlements that may be self-administered or administered to other members of society. To support these self-administrative or designated rights, he examined and explained the difference between moral and legal rights in the first section of the chapter and provided an argument for support of the moral reasons all individuals should be afforded human rights. Furthermore, Churchill exemplified the notion that humans should not merely be provided with natural rights, but are entitled through the moral obligations of social justice and equality, moral human rights. At the end of chapter one, Churchill shared the experiences of a mother and her young daughter who faced deportation to Nigeria. The mother had married the daughter's father and they lived in a nation where they were afforded liberties and freedom as women. Being deported back to their homeland would

have subjected the daughter to female genital mutilation and would have jeopardized their access to liberties and freedom they were accustomed to as females.

Churchill composed chapter two, *Debating the Universality of Human Rights*, with a compilation of charges against universalism (Drydyk, 1990). Ethical relativism is manifested in the argument that human rights are relative to particular societal or group cultures. The incommensurable claim states that rights in one culture do not transfer into another culture without losing their meaning. Imperialism charges the concern of Western and Eurocentric cultures dominating and exploiting weaker and lesser-developed countries. The causal complaint asserts the potential risk of human rights posing threats or causing the decline of values and cultures of traditional societies. When a society affords better human goods and rights than are being promoted by universal human rights, the irrelevancy criticism asserts the new norms are not pertinent. Finally, the trade-off argument contends that the implementation of some human rights would be acting contrary to progress of some nation-states. Within this composition of arguments, Churchill provided adequate voice for theorists in order to ensure the reader has a comprehensive argument against universal human rights application. However, he then discredited each argument in a manner that enables him to further justify his argument for the universality of human rights.

Chapter three, *Human Rights and Cross-Cultural Negotiations* outlined four strategies for promoting human rights: transformational, accommodation, internal validation, and worldview integration. Drydyk (1990) claimed that human rights and their moral or value implications are interpreted culturally, and while they may not be defined or applicable according to a single global definition or interpretation, they are provided within the parameters of the specific culture. Donnelly's (1989) strategy of accommodation addressed the incompatible constructs between globally recognized human rights and those that are acceptable to specific cultural practices. He marked a distinction between the substance, interpretation, and forms, in which manners, the rights may be implemented. What Donnelly notes however, are the fundamental principles and substance of the rights: life, liberty, security of person, legal rights, and protection against human suffering, that should not be compromised. The strategy of internal validation was imbedded in the construct that particular human rights have become validated or interpreted within a particular culture. However, on a global scale, these specific cultural validations and interpretations may not be harmonious to other cultures. These sources of internal validation tend to arise from religious beliefs and customs and often pertain to women. Churchill shared the perspectives of Muslim theorists Al-Na'im and Othman in order to provide examples of internal validation according to the Islamic conception of human rights. Boylan's (2003) proposal of worldview integration aimed at globally collaborative efforts in order to form a single definition and interpretation of human rights. He argued that inconsistencies with its interpretation and implementation would be conflicting with rationality, autonomy, equality, and integrity for implying that all individuals be afforded the same rights regardless of their

location or culture. To apply conditions for human rights according to culture, would make the implication that not all humans have the right to gain access to the same human rights.

Churchill's composition supported the harmony between human rights morals and social and cultural values, practices, and forms of life worthy of preservation. Churchill strongly asserted that human rights are universal. As he presented each argument he understood and recognized that to support or validate the arguments of other theorists, he must falsify that human rights are universal. Therefore, there were biases Churchill brought in and manipulated throughout the book in order to recognize the counter-arguments for universality while potentially presenting the components with which he could refute the opposing view. This book may be too brief in its presentation to attempt to validate the construct of the universality of human rights. However, the strength of this book lies in bringing to light the complexity of human rights, the challenges the constructs of human rights and diversity have faced in the past and are currently facing, and the notion that human rights are not a right that is granted by any person or group, but that exist because the human being exist. Thus, it may be argued that human rights are not disputable. However, due to social, cultural and political factors, disparities lie within how to ensure that all persons are afforded what they, as human beings, are entitled to.

REFERENCES

- Boylan, M. (2003). *Basic ethics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Churchill, R. P. (2006). *Human rights and global diversity: Basic ethics in action*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Donnelly, J. (1989). *Universal human rights in theory and practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Drydyk, J. (1990). Globalization and human rights. In C. Koggel (Ed.), *Moral Issues in Global Perspective* (pp. 30-42). Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview.
- Myers, D. T. (1985). *Inalienable rights: A defense*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.