

## Book and media reviews

# Making education rights accessible for educators and schools

Strømme Lile, H. (2021). *International Law on the Aims of Education: The Convention on the Rights of the Child as a Legal Framework for School Curriculums*. London and New York: Routledge. 220pp., £36.99 (Paperback) ISBN: 978-0-3676-8232-3; £120.00 (Hardback) ISBN: 978-0-3673-5870-9; £33.29 (e-Book) ISBN: 978-0-4293-4594-4.

### Reviewed by

**Jenna Gillett-Swan**

Queensland University of Technology, Australia, [jenna.gillettswan@qut.edu.au](mailto:jenna.gillettswan@qut.edu.au)

Education related rights are infrequently known and understood in full by those working within education contexts, despite their direct relevance for schools and those working within them. Recognising the need for all relevant rules of international law to be brought into the discussion, Strømme Lile undertakes the ambitious task of analysing CRC Article 29(1) and ‘encompassing the entirety of international law on the aims of education’ in the process (p.39). *International Law on the Aims of Education: The Convention on the Rights of the Child as a Legal Framework for School Curriculums* provides an accessible, valuable, and clear deconstruction of what the aims of education, as articulated through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) are, and what this means for school practice.

The text’s main analytical focus is on the scope of the legal aims of Article 29(1), but it also draws upon other relevant treaties and examples to illustrate key points, tensions, and potential inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation. The central premise of the book is that international law on the aims of education comprises ‘legally valid laws that must be respected and fulfilled’ (p. 4), and ‘although education is a right, it is also a duty...’ (p.20).

These points, while familiar to those well versed in rights, may be lesser known by those with an emerging understanding, especially those working in schools or training to become teachers.

The book addresses three main questions: these relate to 1) identifying international law and its scope and validity as a legal obligation; 2) unpacking the content of the aims of education; and 3) articulating the legal obligations of teachers in relation to international law on the aims of education. The text is divided into eight content chapters (plus an introduction and conclusion) that dive into the content, scope, and role of international law. The book's greatest value is its deconstruction of the aims of education into logical, meaningful chunks for focused discussion in its different chapters.

In the introductory chapters, the author picks up on the issues of terminology, translation and interpretation, particularly as they relate to how the concept of education is defined and understood. These aspects are increasingly being acknowledged more widely in the field and do indeed require more attention as they speak to the realities of varied interpretations in practice. The author highlights the lack of neutrality in conceptualising the aims of education, as they represent internationally agreed morals and philosophies rather than universal truths. The importance of education is underscored by the powerful assertion that 'rights would just be empty words unless generations to come were educated to respect the rights of all human beings, not just some' (p. 12).

In several chapters, the author objectively navigates certain aspects of rights that are espoused in ambiguity or tension, areas that often also receive less empirical focus in general educational rights research. For example, there tends to be less focus in educational rights research on accessibility of educational content and ensuring respect for culture and children's right to education in their own language. This is an accessibility issue that particularly concerns Indigenous children and children from linguistic minorities. Strømme Lile rightly questions where the line is drawn in relation how many children belonging to a national minority are required before the state has an obligation to provide education in their own language. Such provocations throughout the text may engage the reader to think more critically about some of the everyday practices in local contexts that remain unquestioned and unproblematised from a rights perspective, through the lens of the aims of education.

While some readers may be looking for more coverage of areas of tension or contested areas within the scope of the aims of education, the issues that are covered are covered well. The issues discussed broadly introduce some potentially contested or controversial topics in the field, while focusing on realistically discussing their likely court outcomes. An engaging feature of the text is that the author makes transparent their thinking and logic as they progress through the critical interrogation of the text and meaning of each part of Article 29. There are

several parts of the text that are ripe for lively discussion, whether the reader has an emergent or developed understanding of children's rights and education.

An important thread throughout the text is that which connects each part of the detailed and multifaceted aims of education to the importance of duty bearers such as teachers not only knowing, but adhering to the minimum standards of rights put forward by the Convention. This dual emphasis on both international law on the aims of education, and implementation obligations articulated through knowledge of the Convention and its mandates is an important, yet often overlooked aspect of assuring children's education rights.

This book offers a unique contribution, with few other texts covering the aims of education as extensively and accessibly for a wide readership. While some sections include more detail than is probably needed for most teachers or educational researchers, the legal context is nonetheless interesting, informative and useful. A particular strength is in how the author sometimes makes dense legal jargon accessible for a diverse potential readership.

Given the broad intended audience, spanning both academics and practitioners, there is perhaps a missed opportunity for practical strategies to be woven throughout the text to give further practical support to those working in schools or training to do so. While the author provides solid coverage of the theoretical and historical background and context, some readers may want to know more than the what and why of the legal obligations associated with the aims of education. They may also appreciate examples of how to incorporate these in their own work – the practical implications. This being said, the book provides a solid foundation for a deep understanding of the aims of education and makes a laudable contribution to the field. It is a must-read for those with a personal or professional interest in children and young people, child rights or education, including initial teacher education. The text has something for all readers: teachers, policy makers, initial teacher education students, researchers, and academics. Why should teachers and those interested in education care about the aims of education? At the end of the day, as the author so aptly puts it, because 'education without any purpose (aims) seems a bit pointless' (p.44).

## References

United Nations (UN) (1989, November 20). *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Treaty Series, 1577). Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>