

Book Review

Street Law: Democracy For All – Learner’s Manual (2nd Edition 2017, ISBN 9871485119692)

Street Law: Democracy For All – Educator’s Manual (2nd Edition 2017, ISBN 9781485119708)

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Price: Free Download. Hard copy R240 (approx. conversion of £14.10 at time of publication)

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Street Law may have originated from the East Coast of America, but there is no doubt its growing popularity and effectiveness as a public legal education tool spans the globe. This Learner’s Manual and accompanying Educator’s Manual is aimed at young people, students and teachers. The combination of books serve as a functional Street Law tool far wider than the jurisdiction of its South African authors. It explains how democracy is widely viewed, the formation of governments, abuse of power, elections and the concepts and practices in citizenship. The refreshing simplicity and user friendliness of this manual is its strength. Far from undermining it’s depth as a

resource, this straightforwardness is an asset allowing the text to be given to a diverse age range of learners and a diverse experience range of educators. The book aims to improve the understanding of the reader on principles of democracy and it certainly does this in a beautifully simplistic way using pictures, diagrams and examples from South Africa and at times other jurisdictions.

At the heart of this publication is a series of interesting activities in every chapter, which can be tailored to suit the students. It is easy to think of simple adaptations which would make these exercises suitable for students from 11-21 years of age. The accompanying Educator's manual takes each exercise in the Learner's manual and provides a detailed breakdown of the objectives of the exercise, the procedure to run the exercise, the timings of doing so, and what materials are needed.

Chapter 1 focuses on the different types of democracy and the fundamental principles behind it. The exercise ideas for students in this chapter go beyond thinking about constitutional situations. They look at people's actions and whether they are considered to be a feature of democracy (e.g. exercise 10: do you think democratically?). This is also an example of the book subtly attempting to foster justice tolerance and fairness within its readers.

Chapter 2 describes the workings of a government in a democratic society including the role of constitutional legislation, and the structure of the court system in South Africa. The section on courts was one of the few sections where the manual was less transferrable between jurisdictions. However, one student exercise gives a valuable

set of guidelines for setting up a mock parliamentary debate on the death penalty and it is easy to see how university students running a Street Law project could adapt the topic but follow the structure of this exercise.

Chapter 3 looks at abuse of power, what it is, and domestic and international methods of keeping it in check. What is particularly timely in this chapter is the role of media in highlighting and potentially preventing that abuse.

Chapter 4 is about human rights (what they are and what categories they may fall into). There are also interesting sections on how they fit into a democracy, whether they should appear in a bill of rights and how to resolve situations where they conflict. There are a number of good situational exercises for students to consider whether it is ever justified to suspend a human right.

The focus of chapter 5 is voting and elections. The different types of voting, and principles and practices of free and fair elections are outlined. The interesting topic of funding political parties is brought into exercise 8 of this chapter. This chapter promotes political tolerance including an exercise asking students to consider the benefits of a multi-cultural society.

The final chapter in the manual is dedicated to citizen participation; how to be an informed citizen, participation, changing policies and responsibilities to other citizens. There is a great exercise asking students to think about how they would obtain further reliable information on a range of topics / rumours they hear, as well as more ideas for students to role play debates.

The manual also contains a useful glossary of terms and appendices which include an abbreviated version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the South African Bill of Rights, and part of the Electoral Code of Conduct.

This book lists as two of its aims; 'fostering justice, tolerance and fairness and developing students' willingness and ability to resolve disputes and differences without resorting to violence.'¹ While giving the appearance of being neutral, this book has a graceful undertone which leads the reader to a place grounded in the ethical principles of fairness and tolerance. At times the student exercises and answers in the corresponding manual may feel too prescriptive. However, they can be easily adapted and do provide a nice base to be used by a clinical legal education student perhaps lacking in confidence or experience. The book is unsurprisingly rooted in South African examples, situations, and documents but this can also serve to enhance the learning of clinicians and clinical legal education students outside this jurisdiction. Overall, these manuals are succinct, clear, and thought provoking. They will make a valuable contribution to any student group who are considering running Street Law programmes on issues of citizenship, democracy, constitutions or other matters of public law. At a reasonable cost, it is a worthwhile edition to any Street Law library collection.

¹ <https://juta.co.za/products/street-law-democracy-for-all-educators-manual/> (as of 12.01.18)