Human Rights Education

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DEFINITION

Human rights education (HRE) is an international movement to promote awareness about the rights accorded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related human rights conventions, and the procedures that exist for the redress of violations of these rights (Amnesty International, 2005; Reardon, 1995; Tibbitts, 1996). Decades ago, the United Nations (UN) and its specialized agencies formally recognized the right of citizens to be informed about the rights and freedoms contained in the documents ratified by their countries – the right to human rights education itself (UNGA, 2005). Since then, numerous policy documents developed by UN-affiliated agencies, international policymaking bodies, regional human rights bodies, and national human rights agencies have referenced HRE, proposing specifically that the treatment of human rights themes should be present in schooling (Pearse, 1987).[1]

The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights defines human rights education as "training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the molding of attitudes directed to:

(a) the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,
(b) the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity,
(c) the promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, and
(d) the enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society. (UN, 1996)

This definition is not specific to the schooling sector and in fact, the United Nations proposes human rights education for all sectors of society as part of a "lifelong learning" process for individuals (UN, 1996). The "human rights" to which it refers are broadly defined and include those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as related treaties and covenants, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, among others.[2] Which human rights are addressed in learning situations, and how, has become of increasing interest as the worldwide human rights movement has grown.

THE EXPANSION OF HRE IN SCHOOLS

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[1] During the 1990s, several important international documents on human rights education were elaborated. These were the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy (Montreal, 1993), the Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy (UNESCO, Paris, 1995), the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Guidelines for Plans of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004 (1995). These refer to the relevant education articles of international treaties and place informal pressure on national governments to co-operate.

[2] The full set of human rights documents as well as related General Comments can be found on the website of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at www.ohchr.org .

Although still a developing field, there is increasing evidence that HRE is emerging in the work of non-governmental organizations at the grassroots level as well as in national systems of education (Buergenthal and Torney, 1976; Claude 1996; Elbers, 2000; HREA, n.d.; IIDH, 2002). The only study focusing on this subject indicated that the number of organizations dedicated to human rights education quadrupled between 1980 and 1995, from 12 to 50 (Ramirez et al, 2006). In reality, the numbers are probably much higher since only those organizations that had an Internet presence or were already networked in international circles were documented.

In 2006, an International Bureau of Education (IBE) study that examined the number of times the term "human rights" was mentioned in official documents found a mean of .70, .82 and .64 for countries within the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and the former USSR, and Latin American and the Caribbean, respectively (Ramirez et al, 2006). Interestingly enough, the lowest means were for Asia and Western Europe and North America at .11 (Ramirez et al, 2006), although the range of response rates across regions – from 31% to 74% - suggests that these results are approximate at best. A review in 1996 showed that through the cooperative efforts of NGOs and educational authorities, human rights courses and topics had been introduced into the national curricula in Albania, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Norway, the UK and Ukraine (Kati & Gjedia, 2003; Tibbitts, 1996). The IBE study and other less formal data suggest that the number of educational systems including human rights in their formal curricula has grown significantly since that time.

Hundreds of human rights-related teaching materials have been developed worldwide for use in classrooms and schools, and many of these are widely available, free of charge, on the Internet. The On-Line Resource Centre of Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) and other on-line resource centers serve as good examples. Moreover, bibliographies and descriptive databases of human rights education materials are available through key human rights organizations as well as United Nations-related agencies (UNGA, 2005; Amnesty International, 2005; HREA, n.d.; Council of Europe, n.d.).

During this same period, non-governmental organizations which have traditionally spearheaded human rights education efforts, also gathered to develop human rights education action plans that had an influence on their own work and cooperation with others (Amnesty International, 1996; Netherlands Helsinki Committee, 1996). In the last five years, national and regional HRE networks have been established in many parts of the world (HREA, n.d.). In 2005, with the conclusion of the UN Decade for HRE, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights launched an on-going and more focused World Programme with a Plan of Action for Human Rights Education (UNGA 2005), which promises to elicit improved cooperation from governments, as well as cross-cutting support from UN bodies (Amnesty International, 2005). The first phase of the World Programme is focused on promoting human rights education in schools.

RATIONALES FOR HRE

The broad normative framework of HRE and the wide spectrum of potential learners have resulted in a great deal of variation in the ways in which HRE has been implemented. Although HRE is defined by the universal framework of international (and sometimes regional) standards, the specific topics and their applications depends upon local and national contexts.

HRE in post-conflict or post-colonial countries tends to be associated with the rule of law and authorities trying to establish their legitimacy. Among groups that experience a high amount of discrimination, and within countries that are highly repressive and undemocratic, HRE tends to be focused on popular empowerment and resistance in relation to these issues. HRE in countries that are democratic but struggling with development can be oriented towards the infusion of human rights principles within sustainable development (Yeban, 2003). In countries that enjoy

strong democratic and economic development, HRE is often focused on issues of discrimination, for example in relation to migrants, minorities, or women. Of course, in any country at any given time, HRE can take on different forms and purposes depending upon the context of the program.

Several explanations have been proposed for the increased presence of HRE in schools since the 1990s. One explanation relates to increased globalization, a term still being defined, but recognized as one emphasizing "world citizenship and the strong assumption of personal agency required for global citizenship" (Ramirez & Suarez, 2006, p. 36). Moreover, authorities are increasingly calling on schools to promote respect among peoples, democratic governance and viable civil societies.

Democratic citizenship, including HRE, has been seen by regional human rights agencies as a way to "manage diversity," with HRE incorporated into processes such as the Graz Stability Pact in South Eastern Europe (Council of Europe, 2001; South House Exchange, 2004). In contemporary Europe, education for democratic citizenship, including HRE, has been seen as a way of promoting young people's active participation in democratic society, in promoting social cohesion and in fighting violence, xenophobia, racism, intolerance, and aggressive nationalism (Froumin, 2003).

In 1978, human rights education was already promoted by UNESCO but linked with disarmament (UNESCO, 1978). In 2005, human rights education has been linked in inter-governmental circles with a variety of global phenomena, including development and poverty, religious freedom, and globalization in general (UNESCO, 2005). Europe's regional human rights agency, the Council of Europe, is working on developing a "culture of religion" subject that takes an "ethics" and "human rights" based approach to religious teaching. This provides an alternative to governments that currently offer required religion classes that can be a source of division and ethnic nationalism, as in Serbia-Montenegro (Tibbitts, 2003).

Non-governmental organizations from different countries and regions periodically initiate meetings in which they identify strategies for applying the human rights framework to global challenges. One such symposium, which took place in South Africa in 2001 in a meeting organized in concert with the World Conference against Racism, identified HRE in schools as a key strategy for combating racism (Flowers, 2001).

PEDAGOGY OF HRE

Since 1995, further elaborations by the UN and other agencies have clarified that HRE has components of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which should be consistent with recognized human rights principles and which should empower individuals and groups to address oppression and injustice (Amnesty International, 2007; ARRC, 2003).

Human rights education has both normative and legal dimensions. The legal dimension incorporates sharing content about international human rights standards as embodied in the UDHR and other treaties and covenants to which countries subscribe. These standards encompass civil and political rights, as well as social, economic, and cultural. In recent years, environmental and collective rights have been added to this evolving framework. This law-oriented approach recognizes the importance of monitoring and accountability in ensuring that governments uphold the letter and spirit of human rights obligations.

At the same time, HRE is a normative and cultural enterprise. The process of human rights education is intended to be one that provides skills, knowledge, and motivation to individuals to transform their own lives and realities so that they are more consistent with human rights norms and values. For this reason, interactive, learner-centered methods of are widely promoted. The

following kinds of pedagogy are representative of those promoted by human rights education advocates. These methods are applicable to all types of HRE but are most comprehensively implemented in adult, popular education learning models.

- *Experiential and activity-centered*: involving the solicitation of learners' prior knowledge and offering activities that draw out learners' experiences and knowledge;
- *Problem-posing*: challenging the learners' prior knowledge;
- *Participative*: encouraging collective efforts in clarifying concepts, analyzing themes and doing the activities;
- *Dialectical*: requiring learners to compare their knowledge with those from other sources;
- *Analytical*: asking learners to think about why things are and how they came to be;
- *Healing*: promoting human rights in intra-personal and inter-personal relations;
- *Strategic thinking-oriented*: directing learners to set their own goals and to think of strategic ways of achieving them; and
- *Goal and action-oriented*: allowing learners to plan and organize actions in relation to their goals. (ARRC, 2003)

Human rights education in school settings is adapted to the age of learners and the conditions of national/local educational policies and schools. Developmental and conceptual frameworks for HRE have been developed by the United Nations and several NGOs. These frameworks assist in settings goals for HRE, illustrating both what it shares and what it adds to other educational approaches that address values such as social justice.

TABLE 1 METHODOLOGIES: DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR HRE

Levels	Goals	Key Concepts	Specific Human Rights Problems	Education Standards and Instruments
Early Childhood **Preschool & Lower primary Ages 3-7**	Respect for self Respect for parents and teachers Respect for others	Self Community Responsibility	Racism Sexism Unfairness Hurting people (emotionally, physically)	Classroom rules Family life Convention on the Rights of the Child
Later Childhood **Upper primary Ages 8-11**	Social responsibility Citizenship Distinguishing wants from needs from rights	Individual rights Group rights Freedom Equality Justice Rule of law Government Security Democracy	Discrimination/ prejudice Poverty/hunger Injustice Ethnocentricism Passivity	UDHR History of human rights Local, national legal systems Local and national history in human rights terms UNESCO, UNICEF

Adolescence **Lower secondary Ages 12-14**	Knowledge of specific human rights	International law World peace World development World political economy World ecology Legal rights Moral rights	Ignorance Apathy Cynicism Political repression Colonialism/ imperialism Economic globalization Environmental degradation	UN Covenants Elimination of racism Elimination of sexism Regional human rights conventions UNHCR NGOs
Older Adolescents and Adults **Upper secondary Ages 15 and up**	Knowledge of human rights standards Integration of human rights into personal awareness and behaviors	Moral inclusion/exclusion Moral responsibility/ literacy	Genocide Torture	Geneva Conventions Specialized conventions Evolving human rights standards

Source: (Flowers, 1998)

Human rights themes and content in school curricula can take the form of cross-cultural themes mandated by educational policy or it can be integrated within existing subjects, such as history, civics/citizenship education, social studies and humanities. HRE can also be found in arts programs and non-formal clubs and special events that take place in school settings.

In addition to taking place in schools, HRE is often organized in settings of higher education; in training programs for professionals such as the police, prison officials, the military, and social workers; for potentially vulnerable populations such as women and minorities; as part of community development programs; and in public awareness campaigns.

DEVELOPMENTS AND THE FUTURE OF HRE

The HRE field shows signs of continuing development and evolution. At the international level, UN agencies continue to encourage governments to develop formal plans of action for HRE and provide reports on its internal HRE activities as part of regular treaty-based reports. International and national networks of educators, institutes and organizations continue to dialogue and share resources on the content, standards, and methodology of HRE and learning. Research in the field, although currently sparse, is beginning to increase.

Within the educational sector, the human rights normative system is increasingly being proposed as the ethical framework for cultural globalization. Within the human rights sector, the "human

rights based approach" that the United Nations has advocated for all development programming has begun to trickle down to the education sector. Thus HRE, which has primarily focused on teaching and learning, may eventually seen as part of an overall "human rights based approach" to schooling, which calls attention to overall school culture, policies, and practices related to human rights values.

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