

## How can human rights education contribute to international peace-building?

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### **Introduction**

Many governments, international agencies, and NGOs today are faced with the daunting task of re-establishing peace and order in post-war societies. In so doing, they have, at least in the abstract, appeared to recognize not only that human rights are an essential component of just societies, but that human rights education is a necessary element in the process of re-establishing stable and just post-war societies. Hence, human rights have become an important concept in both popular and diplomatic language. Human Rights Education (HRE) is based on the premise that human rights will reduce violence within society, if understood as generally accepted principles and rules of society expressed and adapted to a particular society and culture. In practice, however, HRE is rarely a prescribed remedy. For example, in the 1998 report for the UN Research Institute for Social Development, entitled *Rebuilding after War*, HR or HRE was entirely absent as an element in the process of the rebuilding societies<sup>4</sup>. In addition, where it has been used, HRE has not been effectively examined or evaluated to assess its effectiveness. In this article, we discuss the role of HRE in conflict and post-conflict (C/PC) societies and delineate findings from our own research, linking best practices in the field with a theoretical framework for human rights education<sup>5</sup>. We conclude by identifying the minimum requirements for an HRE program to be successful.

The international community has not been able to meet the challenge of re-establishing peace and order in communities ravaged by civil war, such as in Angola, Haiti, Kosovo and Somalia. The task of peacemaking is complex; it involves not only the well-known obstacles of development and political and economic culture, but also the trauma and chaos associated with the end of a war and the breakdown of social order. Financial support, even in large sums, is not alone enough to ground a stable society. For example, the \$1.5 billion investment in Cambodia has hardly resulted in success. However, there is strong empirical evidence that HRE reduces violence in situations of conflict. Members of women's groups, for example, have expressed that learning about their human rights not only made them better social advocates, but also reduced the level of domestic violence in their personal lives. More importantly, we have found in our research<sup>6</sup> that teachers and grassroots activists express a strong commitment to human rights, and see human rights as a positive force in moving from conflict toward peace and security.

The integration of human rights must go beyond advocacy, publicity and documentation but lead to a culture of human rights that is systematic and integrated. Human rights are based on who has power in society, who uses it and to what level. The defining moment when a country has moved beyond the conflict stage into a post conflict period is first and foremost the time when fewer HR violations such as mutilations, torture, murder are taking place and an immediate demand to redress these rights is being planned (Post Conflict Project, 1999).

### **Human rights**

The human rights principles incorporated into many international treaties were designed "to prevent recourse to violence and to be a foundation of freedom, peace and justice in the world" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1994). The UDHR was specifically formulated as a means to prevent "barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of mankind." Since 1948, the role of human rights in world affairs has grown, but the barbarous acts of violence continue. International human rights should function as "universal" reference points, common to, and relevant to the acts of both the local population and international peacekeepers (Baekey & Gabriel, 1991). Generally, it is assumed that the more human rights are observed, the more just and peaceful the society (Amnesty International, 1999). It is important, however, to note that those who perceive human rights to be a set of western values contest the concept of human rights that attack local traditions or defend the rights of criminals (Post Conflict Project, 1999). Thus, in addition to recognizing the role of international human rights instruments and institutions as an element of international peacekeeping efforts, local groups also emphasize the need to teach human rights in terms of local traditions.

In evidence we have collected from the field, teachers and human rights activists note that, even in very difficult circumstances, human rights function as (a) needed, common, internationally recognized reference points for social justice; and (b) as reminders that each human being has rights and that the authorities are obliged to recognize and protect them.

Once a peace accord has been signed for which all the necessary lobbying has taken place to ensure human rights concerns are integrated into it, the most important function, local, national, and international civil society groups have, is to teach the citizenry about their rights, what they are, and build the capacity of the government to recognize and protect them. It is from these common reference points that a foundation can effectively build a society that reflects a true human rights culture (Post Conflict Project, 1999).

### **Human rights education**

The general goal of all HRE is to integrate international human rights standards and practices into peoples' daily lives. It is often linked conceptually and in practice with civic education, conflict resolution programs, democracy education and the like (Vergara & Estevez, 1994; Post Conflict Project, 1999). Human rights educators in C/PC contexts linked their HRE programs to these broader programs in two cases. They were either reluctant to classify their programs solely as "human rights education," even though a major component was that a respect for human rights is an underlying

motivation of these programs. They felt by calling it something other than HRE it is less likely to put the people involved at risk with local authorities who might feel threatened by this type of program. In another case, a knowledge of human rights is acquired in these programs only in the process of learning some other set of skills or knowledge. This means that human rights has been consciously incorporated into the stated goals or value-system, but never discussed orally.

The core content or the material to be covered in HRE is defined by the laws, institutions and practices that have grown out of the human rights instruments, the basic documents and institutions that have grown up around the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A key element is the use of the adjective "human" as opposed to "civil" or "fundamental." This means that all human beings, not just citizens or those within national borders, enjoy these rights, whether or not they are prescribed in domestic law. Human rights are not dependent on positive laws or conditions. The UDHR does not "give" rights; it "recognizes" and "defines" them. The challenge of HRE is to make these ideals meaningful in people's daily lives. Hence, to be effective, we found that HRE must address several factors relevant to people in C/PC situations: violence, social trauma, relationship of HRE to other programs, the desired outcome. Specifically, HRE should: address violence, the immediate context of fear and personal danger, and sense of personal powerlessness; deal with social trauma, personal and group animosities, as well as patterns of discrimination and marginalization, through, for example, teaching how to respect other people's rights; be incorporated into other programs of conflict resolution, social rehabilitation, democracy building, rule of law etc.; and be a conscious choice among varied possible desired outcomes (i.e., is education to be oriented towards legal or social advocacy, or to democracy building, or to conflict-resolution, or to community building, or to empowerment etc.) rather than being vague or all-inclusive (Andreopoulos & Claude, 1997).

### **The content of human rights education**

With this background, we will now define HRE for conflict and post-conflict situations (C/PC). Human rights are linked to internationally recognized standards. In C/PC situations where the population has experienced extreme violence, HRE works well if the people to whom it is addressed see its value in their daily, violence-punctuated lives. Teachers must therefore identify messages and learning content that speak to real problems. Therefore, for HRE to be effective in C/PC situations it requires learning in three fields: cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral. The first field, cognitive, defines the knowledge needed to promote human rights. This category may include several or all of the following: introducing learners to the idea of having rights; a sense that these rights are recognized worldwide; that while they "depend" on civil law or constitutions they are not "given" by them and that they have roots in their own cultural world; how having rights has helped other people in similar predicaments; the history of the events in world history that brought about the international movement, and how human rights violations are identified and examined; the role of national and regional laws and institutions (legislative, judicial and administrative, national and local); the relevancy of human rights problems at home and overseas; the role of human rights in peace accords and peace building; and the role and functions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with the protection of human rights.

The second field of learning is attitudinal, which focuses on encouraging attitudes to promote rights, notably a sense of self-esteem and empowerment based on the fact that the state and its institutions, as well as any international peacekeepers (if this is part of their mandate) are obliged to protect human rights. To this can be added: encouraging attitudes of self-help and trust of others; a positive attitude towards participation and advocacy; a commitment to fairness and equal treatment; non-discrimination; a willingness to support the social institutions necessary to protect human rights; and with regard to training for police officers and other public officials, to encourage on their part sensitivity and responsiveness to human rights issues.

The last category addresses the development of behavioral and other basic skills necessary to ensure each of the various rights as well as conditions basic to all rights. These skills are as varied as mobilizing and organizing<sup>7</sup>, collecting and processing information, documenting human rights violations, promoting human rights through the media, improving collaboration, mutual respect, trust and communication, learning how to respond to violence and threats of violence, bringing individuals to justice, enlisting the services of government and international agencies in the region, etc. Some of these goals are closely related to conflict management skills. All three categories of learning are necessary for the promotion of human rights. HRE, in so far as it is designed to promote human rights, is considerably more than a transfer of information and knowledge.

In practice, the content we saw varied from lectures to illiterate peasants on the French Revolution to harangues to overthrow government. These extremes emphasize the need for the production of HRE material that focuses on human rights and peace-building, but which allows flexibility for the local context. The researchers found that much of the HRE manuals made available by agencies such as UNICEF were not geared toward a post conflict environment. Others such as the International Rescue Committee's emergency education manual did not have human rights as a major focus, although the planning aspects did reflect a post conflict context. We found few internationally produced manuals that were geared towards HRE in C/PC environments.

### **Needs assessment**

The choice of topics to be integrated into a given program depends on an assessment of the needs, interests, motivations, potential and social context of the learners (Martin, 1996). To make content come alive, effective education strategies make use of the learners' own history and traditions and use problems and activities that are part of their daily lives or are seen in the media they see (Post Conflict Project, 1999). Linking human rights content, for example, with other post-conflict programs can benefit both. Equally important are activities that encourage interaction among local institutions such courts, jails, and administrative offices, as well as those that help rebuild destroyed housing. These and other teaching methods will be addressed in greater detail below.

### **Planning**

In practice HRE takes many different shapes and achieves different results<sup>8</sup>. On the basis of our empirical research we have identified some of the critical components, which are so essential that, without them, a given HRE program is in serious jeopardy. The challenges start with the planning. Given the inevitable degree of urgency in C/PC

situations, when HRE suddenly becomes possible as a result of a political agreement, it is important to have some basic designs prepared, as well as human and material resources available. Desiderata ready for the planning process must include several components. There should be a commitment on the part of the international agencies to incorporate HR and HRE into the peace process and the final agreements. Moreover, an analysis and delineation of the pedagogical implications unique to each situation are necessary. (This should take into account the groups, organizations, institutions, cultural and political histories etc., that will influence the attitudes and motivations of the would-be beneficiaries/learners towards HRE and other educational or social change inputs.) This is especially important in situations where divisions among the learners reflect the dividing lines between former combatants.

It is important that a design for the incorporation of the HRE program be included into the activities of local institutions such as public schools, community groups and even religious and professional organizations, however embryonic or war-scarred they might be. This requires integrating into the initial planning the resources (personnel and financing) and provisions (legal and political agreements) necessary to enlist the support of local government, civil society and especially security or other armed forces. The project's structure should foresee and plan for stages and sequencing (in terms of content, method and personnel) that respond to changing social conditions as communities move from a state of war to a state of peace. Plans should include follow-up HRE activities, such as the institutionalization of core HRE activities. Unless these are incorporated into the basic plan with a provision of resources, other priorities will prevail and this important factor of educational success, namely follow-up, will be lost.

Our research in the field uncovered very few examples of HRE being incorporated into long term planning. However, in countries like Cambodia where international donors made substantial funding available, there was a great deal more planning to ensure sustainability of HRE.

### **Teaching methods**

While teaching methods vary, most effective educators strongly recommend interactive<sup>9</sup> educational methods and limit lectures and other instructor-focused pedagogical approaches. The most successful practitioners see interaction between teachers and learners as the critical factor of successful HRE, as in other educational programs. One educator interviewed in the course of the research describes how she facilitates her workshops:

No lecture? experiential? participatory? related to their issue... I have no pre-designed curriculum, I do an assessment of needs; I often change in the mid-stream and always allow myself the flexibility to do that. I assess group needs at the beginning, which take a critical skill in facilitation, and then I am assessing and reassessing which way to go. I focus on involvement with others. Group work is key, especially when I give workshops in settings where there are many languages being spoken. I focus on group work because that is essentially what you are trying to teach people-how to work together. I do a ton of role-plays, because people love to do them, and I find that is what they remember (Post Conflict Project, 1999).

The relationship between the learning situation and the real life of the learners and especially the latter's perception of the relationship must be reflected in the teaching methods chosen. Interactivity in all its forms is especially necessary to promote the attitudes and skills necessary for a human-rights observant society. This dimension requires teachers to bring daily to the table issues being experienced by the participants outside the learning process and to assign tasks which require activities other than writing and research based on instructional materials.

Among the less traditional but low cost instructional delivery modes that can be effective in these situations are:

- distance learning using radio, audio and videotapes etc.
- games and group activities, especially those aimed at community building
- community theatre and special events such as multi-cultural dance and art displays
- design and implementation of advocacy campaigns
- problem-solving workshops in local communities

The training, experience, skills, and demeanor of teachers and local leaders, the support mechanisms and materials (printed, audio-visual etc.) available to them and the clarity and relevance of the goals are also key factors of successful programs. Each program must have in place mechanisms to judge and then either to retrain, coach, or, in the worst circumstances, let go less effective teachers.

In the absence, as yet, of source books of materials and methods prepared specially for these situations, teachers could benefit from a general purpose collection of documents and teaching materials, as well as audio and video tapes which might or might not be useful in the field. Also useful are articles or reports that explain and illustrate the needs and benefits of HRE in these situations. A basic "tool" kit might contain the major documents on human rights and humanitarian law, an anthology of other major readings on peacekeeping and HRE, a laptop, a printer and software to produce learning materials, and a selection of video and audio tapes with instructional value and the necessary equipment to use them.

### **Evaluation**

Given the very chaotic circumstances involved, the ongoing evaluation of these programs is difficult but all the more necessary. At the basic level, programs use informal feedback mechanisms based on questions asked in class, after class and through questionnaires on what was learned. Similar questionnaires can be used at the end of a program or even a year later to examine consumer satisfaction. This process method does not tell us whether other training would have been more useful, or whether it took the form and provided the content that was most urgently needed at that time. Most importantly, it does not assess whether the training helped them protect human rights in their communities. We recommend other measures such as evidence of the following:

- The creation or growth of "somewhat" self-sustaining human rights education or related activities in public and private schools, NGOs, universities and teacher training institutions.
- The growth of activities and organizations promoting human rights within a community.
- Increased popular interest/participation in the political process.
- Changes in local law enforcement procedures (police, prisons and courts).
- Improved responsiveness on the part of other government services to the economic needs and political and civil rights of citizens.
- Improved media coverage of human rights.
- Reports from local groups of other changes, e.g., patterns of domestic violence.
- The Role of the International Community

From the long-term point of view of sustainability, our research so far points to several roles that external, typically international, agents can play to be effective. They can bring to bear perspectives that go beyond the immediate problems, such as lobbying in the negotiation process to ensure the inclusion of provisions for HR and HRE in peace agreements. They can provide sustained advising, training and cooperation in planning, importing technologies and resources, and they can draw on their experiences elsewhere. They are in a position to facilitate linkages between and among international and national institutions as well as local domestic groups and institutions. Finally, they should take care to ensure among themselves high standards in terms of accountability and transparency.

### **The essential components**

There is a wealth and diversity of experience in this field. Sharing this experience and adapting it to different circumstances depends on sharing stories and especially program evaluations. Too much still depends on individual memories, and on people moving from place to place, and then having the time to adapt their knowledge and experience to local circumstances. Successful HRE in C/PC circumstances depends on many links in a chain. Weak or missing links have a major impact. Among the various links identified above, at least the following eight are essential to an effective program:

- A viable design oriented to outcomes closely linked to the community's or at least the learners' own perception of their interests, and including follow-up and growth planning, ideally integrated into the peace agreements, at least in principle.
- Adequate financing, physical spaces, equipment and curricular materials.
- The integration of local institutions and events into planning and implementation.
- Competent personnel able to adjust to local circumstances and establish strong links with learners and their leaders
- A relatively supportive social environment and the resources to improve it.
- The perception (pre-existing or engendered) on the part of participants that the proposed HRE can benefit them.
- Evaluation mechanisms based on both processes and outcomes.
- A plan for the withdrawal of external agents, which allows for the growth of sustainable local institutions.
- Effective, even if inexpensive, follow-up procedures to reinforce the education.

There is plenty of evidence to show that well-planned and executed HRE programs build trust and set out basic standards for a peaceable society. While we agree that it is not easy to integrate all the elements listed above, they are nonetheless necessary if HRE is to bring lasting benefits in the form of the promotion of human rights in the recipient communities. Ultimately we believe that without any one of these components, one can predict that a given HRE program, no matter how long or how short, no matter what its methodology, will almost certainly not attain any lasting effect. The money could therefore have been better spent.

## **Notes**

1. Master of Arts, Teachers College, Research Field Director
2. Master of Arts, Teachers College, Research Field Director
3. Executive Director, Center for the Study of Human Rights, Project Director
4. There is also no mention of HRE as a remedy in Ilene Cohn's (1999) article. She advocates the truth-telling and prosecution approaches.
5. The authors with the support of the United States Institute of Peace and the Columbia University Center are currently completing a new study on HRE for the Study of Human Rights. Country Studies were carried out this year in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Due to financial constraints, the field research is still more illustrative than definitive. Additional field studies are needed to refine the framework.
6. The study grew out of experiences in the field where teachers found themselves working with materials and using methodologies that had very little relevance or attraction for those they were supposed to helping. The need for more research was further emphasized at a conference of specialists in rehabilitation of children and child soldiers where individual experts recounted interesting field experience but none were in a position to draw comparisons beyond a few cases known to each personally. Clearly there were around the world interesting experiences that ought to inform future planning and teaching. Someone needed to study them and make the findings available to others engaged in similar tasks elsewhere. The theoretical framework utilized an education model that identifies certain key elements as necessary for any HRE program, modified to include those especially needed in post-conflict situations.
7. In a conflict or post-conflict situation communities need to find ways to mobilize their resources, to work together to establish and then attain common goals. Only with a degree of social organization can a community articulate its needs to others in a position to assist. The difficulty is deciding who the legitimate representatives of the community are, especially when some are armed and others are not.



8. It is beyond the scope of this essay to provide the empirical details of the projects we visited.
9. Interactivity is used in a broad, inclusive sense that emphasizes "activity" on the part of the learners, such as answering questions and participating in debates in the classroom or going out into the community to teach others. Regarding methods of instruction, interactivity was valued highly. Interaction, we were told, reinforces learning, avoids "pro forma" participation and provides immediate feedback. As in all HRE, but especially in C/PC situations, interactivity appears to offer the context needed for learners to experience and learn the meaning of mutual respect, non-discrimination, understanding the point of view of others etc., all of which are needed to create a rights-supportive society.

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