

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342516013>

"The treatment of human beings as objects": How US students view human rights *and how they learned about them in school

Chapter · January 2018

CITATIONS

0

READS

30

2 authors, including:



[Felisa Tibbitts](#)

Teachers College

33 PUBLICATIONS 489 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Human rights in social work training [View project](#)



Human rights/human rights education within GCED [View project](#)

“The treatment of human beings as objects”: How US students view human rights
*and how they learned about them in school

Felisa L. Tibbitts¹ and Rebekah Nelson

Abstract

This chapter presents the results of a human rights education survey administered to 152 upper secondary school students in a Boston public school in fall 2017. Nearly all the students had learned about human rights in school and most were able to identify at least four human rights correctly. Many of these were socio-economic rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but not ratified by the U.S. government in international human rights treaties. Every methodology of learning human rights identified by a student contributed to the school’s influence on their thinking about human rights. However, the subset of students who rated the influence of the school the highest were statistically more likely to engage in learner-directed actions such as extracurricular activities and participating in a social action project related to human rights. These results confirm but also nuance the findings of earlier studies that have shown links between participatory methods and active citizenship. The study shows that this relationship is particularly influential for a subset of more motivated students. On the other hand, the findings indicate that a range of methodologies (*through* human rights) can be used effectively in HRE. This points the way to further research concerning combinations of methodologies, the quality of the content used in teaching and learning practices, and more complex ways of thinking about what learners bring to the HRE learning experience.

Introduction

Importance of UDHR and the Expansion of HRE

Human Rights Education (HRE) is a practice-oriented expression of the high-minded ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), including equality and respect for human dignity. Amnesty International defines HRE as a “deliberative, participatory process aimed at empowering individuals, groups and communities...It’s goal is to build a culture of respect for

¹ Contact: fltibbitts@gmail.com

and action in the defense and promotion of human rights for all”.² As with other educational processes, human rights education and learning 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.

The United Nations (UN) offers further explanation of what HRE encompasses:

- (a) Education *about* human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- (b) Education *through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners; and
- (c) Education *for* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.³

Various UN instruments have promoted HRE as a responsibility of member states and over the past decades researchers have documented a noticeable increase in the presence of HRE within intended curriculum. More than 83 countries across different regions of the world have adopted human rights education in legislation, policy documents and curricula since the 1990s.⁴ Studies of textbooks have also shown a dramatic increase in the number of times that human rights is mentioned, with increases most pronounced in Africa, Asia and the West and least pronounced – though still improved – in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.⁵

What is the ‘achieved curriculum’ for HRE in school settings? Just because human rights is contained in a title of the content of a curriculum, does not mean that it is having the desired effect upon learners. HRE is ultimately about transformation of individual and state behaviors so

² Amnesty International, “Promoting Human Rights Education and Capacity Building?” Accessed 2 Oct. 2017. <http://www.amnestymena.org/en/WhoWeAre/HumanRightsEducation.aspx?media=print>

³ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*. GA 66/137, Art. 2, para. 2, United Nations, Geneva 2011.

⁴Rennie Moon, “Teaching World Citizenship: The Cross-National Adoption of Human Rights Education in Formal Schooling. (2009) Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, as quoted in Susan Garnett Russell and David Suarez, “Symbol and Substance: Human Rights Education as an Emergent Global Institution” in M Bajaj (ed), *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2017, p. 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

that human dignity is fully respected. Even in schools, HRE would ideally reflect the “about” “through” and “for” human rights definition set out by the UN⁶, including: elements of pedagogy promoting student-centered learning and, specifically, critical reflection; and a praxis aimed towards learner empowerment and taking action to influence their environment in ways consistent with human rights values.

Literature Review

The International Study of Civic and Citizenship Education (ICCS/IEA), a cross-national, large scale assessment on citizenship education in classrooms and schools for students age 14, has findings that are relevant for a study on HRE in class and schools. The 2016 ICCS/IEA study has shown that student reports of civic learning is associated with their expressed interest in social and political issues.⁷

The most common methodologies identified for the majority of classrooms involved in the ICCS/IEA study were use of textbooks, lectures with students taking notes and discussions on current issues; approximately half of the classrooms also engaged in group work (with the exception of Chinese Taipei).⁸ Theoretical and applied research on HRE in schools have shown that treatment of human rights in school, if present at all, is likely to be oriented towards content knowledge alone.⁹

Less frequent were the most interactive activities: project work, role playing and students’ direct involvement in proposing topics of discussion during lessons.¹⁰ The ICCE/IEA study positively links between student engagement in co-curricular, extracurricular and local community engagement and student knowledge and skills for active citizenship.¹¹

⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*. GA 66/137, Art. 2, para. 2, United Nations, Geneva 2011.

⁷ Wolfram Schulz, John Ainley, Julian Frailon, Bruno Losito, Gabriella Agrusti, Tim Friedman, *Becoming Citizens in a Changing World: IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 International Report*, IEA, Amsterdam, p. 169.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 172.

⁹ Felisa Tibbitts “Evolution of Human Rights Education Models,” in M. Bajaj (ed.), *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2017, pp. 69-95; Felisa Tibbitts and William Fernekes, “Human Rights Education,” In S. Totten, and J.E. Pederson, J.E. (eds.) *Teaching and Studying Social Issues: Major Programs and Approaches*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC, 2010, pp. 87-117.

¹⁰ *Op cit.*, p. 172.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

The ICCS/IEA study, as well as others, consistently show a positive relationship between participatory and interactive methodologies, such as open discussions, with knowledge of civics/citizenship and, moreover, a greater likelihood of motivation to participate in community groups if given the opportunity to engage in co-/extracurricular activities and groups outside of the school as part of civic learning in schools.¹²

Secondary studies of the ICCS/IEA data have looked at youth support and involvement in “conventional citizenship” (e.g., voting in national elections, joining a political party, writing a letter about a social or political concern) and youth support and involvement in “social movement citizenship” (e.g., spending voluntary time in the community, engaging with an NGO, collecting signatures for a petition and participating in a non-violent march or rally). In his analysis of the IEA Civic Education study data from 1999, Pizmony-Levy found that females were more likely than males to support and participate in social movement citizenship than conventional citizenship; youth from disadvantages backgrounds were also more likely to support social movements.¹³

Based on this earlier literature we expected to find similar findings for the learning of HRE in Boston classrooms, that is, that participatory and interactive forms of learning HRE would be positively associated with learning human rights and support involvement in active citizenship (“social movement citizenship”). Moreover, we would expect that females and students from disadvantaged backgrounds would be more likely than their White male peers to support HRE.

The Boston Latin School Study

This chapter analyzes the results of a survey administered to 152 upper secondary school students in the Boston Latin School (BLS) in fall 2017, which asked students to name human rights and important activities to promote them. The students were also asked to indicate if and

¹² Schulz et al; Oren Pizmony-Levy and Jessica Ostrow, Pro-Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors in Higher Education: Investigating the Role of Formal and Informal Factors, (under review at *Environmental Education Research*).

¹³ Oren Pizmony-Levy, “Sociological perspectives on youth support for social movements” in *The Second IEA International Research Conference: Proceedings of the ICR-2006, Volume 2. Civic Education Study (CivEd), Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS), Second Information Technology in Education Study (SITES)*, 2006, IEA, Amsterdam, pp. 67-85.

how they had learned about human rights in school and to what degree this education had influenced their views on human rights.

BLS is a public exam school that is the oldest public school in the U.S.¹⁴. It is rated first in Massachusetts and has a student body that is 46 percent male and 54 percent female, and a total minority enrollment of 53 percent. This school has offered a human rights-oriented history course for twenty years, inspired by the work of the non-profit organization Facing History and Ourselves, which is headquartered nearby in Brookline, Massachusetts and works internationally in supporting educators in infusing themes promoting ethics, social responsibility and justice.¹⁵ Students in four 12th grade ‘Facing History’ courses and students in one Art History class participated in the study. In addition, 15 ‘Topol Fellows’ completed the survey.¹⁶ The majority of the students completing the survey were exposed to themes related to human rights and therefore cannot be considered representative of other U.S. students, as HRE is not typically offered in most U.S. schools. Nevertheless, these students can share something about their human rights views and how they learned it in school which may provide insight in teaching and learning processes specific to the U.S. educational culture.

There is a longstanding acceptance of education’s role in the promotion of peace, human rights, equality, tolerance of diversity, and sustainable development. These questions pertaining to HRE were part of a longer questionnaire that also contained questions related to Peace Education (PE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The survey was developed by an international team of experts on HRE, PE and ESD¹⁷ (including one of the authors) and was administered to students in England, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and the U.S. between September 2017 and February 2018. This wider, multi-year research study investigates the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum within the Global Citizenship Education (GCE) initiative, a strategic area of UNESCO’s Education Sector program for the period 2014-2021, guided by SDG 4.7 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA).

¹⁴ Boston Latin School: <http://www.bls.org/>

¹⁵ Facing History and Ourselves: <https://www.facinghistory.org/>

¹⁶ 15 Topol Fellows are a cohort of senior year students engaged extracurricularly in peace and non-violent advocacy work within (and outside of) the school.

¹⁷ The survey was developed as part of the project “The Complexity of Implementing Ideals of Global Citizenship: A Comparative Study of Human Rights, Peace and Sustainability in Education” led by Thomas Nygren, Uppsala University. The survey was developed by Thomas Nygren and Felisa Tibbitts.

These new discourses present renewed opportunities to promote HRE and therefore a greater imperative to carry out research to understand how learners are themselves experiencing HRE in schools.

Methodology

The survey contained open- and closed-ended questions that gathered student self-reported knowledge of the GCED concepts of peace, human rights and sustainability; and student views on where they learned about these themes (for example, in the classroom, in the school, outside of the school, etc.) as well as how (e.g., reading a textbook, watching a video, engaging in a social action project, etc.). Questions were designed to provide varied student perspectives on *what*, *how* and *why* students learn about human rights, peace and sustainability in schools.

The questionnaires were administered through non-random, convenience sampling to upper high school students in five classes at Boston Latin School (BLS). These were non-required courses, including history courses (4 classes) and Art History (1 class). The research was reviewed and approved as being in compliance with standards of ethical research established at Teachers College of Columbia University. Parental permission and student consent forms were completed for all participating students.¹⁸

The survey contained 28 closed- and open-ended questions. The data analyzed for the purposes of this article included those assigned to the “human rights” section. This section contained questions related to students’ studies in human rights, and their concepts and associations with human rights. In addition, students’ background features were incorporated into this study.

Students completed questionnaires using Survey Monkey and these data were downloaded into Excel spreadsheets. A mixed methods approach to analysis was carried out. Codes for open-ended data were developed in three analytical stages. The first level involved open coding by one of the authors. Both authors then applied these initial codes to a subset of the surveys and refined the codes. Following a satisfactory calibration of the second set of codes for the original subset of surveys plus an additional set, the authors divided up the coding tasks

¹⁸ Deep gratitude to Judi Freeman, BLS History teacher, who facilitated all the on-site collection of permission and consent forms, as well as the administration of surveys to students.

according to question. The authors consulted with one another for any coding that was in question, and also to see if any new codes would be necessary for those answers coded as “other”. These codes were further reviewed by researchers in other national sites who administered the same questionnaire and validated for use in their context.

Closed-ended items naturally provided us with descriptive statistics for the survey results. In addition, statistical analysis was carried out in order to determine if there were any relationships between survey variables. We were especially interested to explore if there were significant differences in results in accordance with different background characteristics of students (e.g., sex, grade level, ethnicity and language spoken at home). We also carried out statistical analyses for statistically significant differences to explore any possible relationship between certain kinds of methodologies for learning human rights and the degree to which students ascribed their views on human rights to what they learned in school, as well as their views on how to promote human rights.¹⁹

Results

Student Backgrounds

One hundred and fifty-two BLS students completed the survey. Forty-three percent were 11th graders and 57 percent were 12th graders in their final year of high school. Among these respondents, 67 percent identified as female, 30 as male, and 3 percent as other. This represents a higher percentage of females in these classes than across the BLS student body in general.

The students collectively represented diverse ethnicities, though White students of European descent represented the majority.

Table 1. Student ethnicity (n=152)

White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	58%	88
Asian alone	20%	30
Hispanic or Latino alone	9%	14
Two or more races	7%	11
Black or African American alone	6%	9
American Indian or Alaskan Native alone	0%	0
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander alone	0%	0

¹⁹ The authors are indebted to Erick Axte for his support in the statistical analyses.

Thirty-seven percent of the students indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home. Combined with the Table 1 renderings on ethnicity, we find considerable diversity among the students, although an underrepresentation of students from Black or African American descent as compared with the general population of the Boston metropolitan area.²⁰

Learning Human Rights in School

Nearly all of the students (97 percent) indicated that they learned human rights in school. This is not surprising given that the study involved students from the ‘Facing History’ classes.

Students were asked to indicate which learning methods they had engaged with when learning about human rights. Table 2 below presents these results, listed in order of frequency.

Table 2. How students learned human rights in school (n=143)

Methodologies	% of Total	Frequency
Participated in a class or small group discussion	91%	130
Watched a video on the topic	88%	126
Discussed controversial issues regarding human rights	81%	116
Listened to a lecture	70%	100
Answered questions from the teacher	69%	98
Worked individually on an assignment	66%	94
Read texts other than the textbook	65%	93
Took notes	59%	85
Presented arguments and different opinions	59%	84
Worked with a partner or small group	57%	81
Critically scrutinized information and different opinions	52%	75
Read the textbook	39%	55
Did extracurricular activities	36%	52
Personal involvement in a social action related to human rights	29%	41
Undertook a research-based inquiry	26%	37
Took a test	16%	23

²⁰ Persons of Black/African American descent comprised 24.4% of the Boston population, according to a 2017 census. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-population/> (Accessed 5/27/2018.)

These results show a wide range of teaching methodologies used in the school. We can divide these methods into three general tiers according to frequency of being mentioned: ≤ 50 percent, between 51 percent and 69 percent, and ≥ 70 percent. We then see that participating in discussions were among the most popular methodologies used, along with teacher lectures and watching a video. Among the least popular methods were reading a textbook and taking a test, as well as undertaking research-based inquiries or engaging in extracurricular activities and social actions.

These results are only somewhat consistent with the results of the 2016 ICCS/IEA study. That study showed that the most popular methodologies were use of textbooks, lectures with students taking notes, and discussions on current issues; approximately half of the classrooms in the international study also engaged in group work (with the exception of Chinese Taipei).²¹ Textbooks were not used in most of the surveyed BLS classrooms, and tests were almost never administered. On this basis, these BLS classrooms may be considered ‘less traditional.’ Consistent with the ICCS/IEA results, however, the most learner-directed participatory methodologies were least frequently used in the BLS classrooms, namely extracurricular activities, personal involvement in a social action (related to human rights) and a research-based inquiry.

Students were asked to indicate how much their experiences in school had influenced what they thought about human rights. On a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 representing the highest level of influence, the average across the students was 4 (with a range of 0-5). Table 3 presents these results in greater detail.

Table 3. Influence of school/class on students’ thinking about human rights (n=151)

Scale	Frequency	Percentage of Total
0	2	<1%
1	3	2%
2	1	<1%
3 (below average)	27	18%
4 (average)	74	49%
5 (above average)	44	29%

²¹ Schulz et al, p. 172.

These results led us to wonder if certain teaching methods had relatively more influence on what students thought about human rights. For example, which of these methodologies would be statistically more likely to produce a maximum effect on students' thinking about human rights (a "5" on a scale of 1 to 5)?

We carried out two-sample tests of proportions to look for statistically significant differences across individual methodologies among those students rating the influence of schooling on their human rights thinking as 5, based on whether they experienced each methodology. Table 4. shows that the highest proportion of "5" ratings came from students who did extracurricular activities (44 percent), though 21 percent of students who did *not* participate in extracurricular activities also rated the influence of school on their thinking about human rights as 5. We found this difference in proportions to be statistically significant, indicating that this methodology was most effective at producing maximum influence on students' thinking.²²

Based on the literature, we anticipated that this and other participatory methodologies would have a higher likelihood of producing ratings of 5, and found this to be the case. In addition to engaging in extracurricular activities, we found statistically significant differences for the three methodologies identified in the table below: personal involvement in a social action related to human rights; answering questions from the teacher; and working with a partner or small group.²³

Table 4. Likelihood of '5' rating by participation in each methodology

Methodologies	Proportion of students who rated 5 /	Proportion of students who rated 5 / did not
---------------	--------------------------------------	--

²² Among "5" students, we found significant difference in the proportion of students who participated in extracurricular activities (M=44) as compared to those who did not (M=21); $z=2.96, p=.002$.

²³ We also found significant difference in the proportion of "5" students who had personal involvement in a social action related to human rights (M=41) versus those who had not (M=25); $z=2.03, p=.02$; as well as for students who answered questions from the teacher (M=33) versus those who had not (M=23), $z=1.29, p=.1$; and finally for students who reported working with a partner or small group (M=35) as compared to those who did not (M=23); $z=1.58, p=.06$.

	experienced each method	experience each method
Read the textbook	33% (18)	27% (26)
Read texts other than the textbook	29% (27)	29% (17)
Took notes	29% (25)	29% (19)
Watched a video on the topic	31% (39)	20% (5)
Answered questions from the teacher	33% (32)*	23% (12)
Participated in a class or small group discussion	31% (40)	19% (4)
Critically scrutinized information and different opinions	33% (25)	25% (19)
Presented arguments and different opinions	30% (25)	28% (19)
Discussed controversial issues regarding human rights	31% (36)	23% (8)
Worked with a partner or small group	35% (28)*	23% (16)
Listened to a lecture	32% (32)	24% (12)
Worked individually on an assignment	30% (28)	28% (16)
Undertook a research-based inquiry	35% (13)	27% (31)
Personal involvement in a social action related to human rights	41% (17)**	25% (28)
Took a test	35% (8)	28% (36)
Did extracurricular activities	44% (23)***	21% (21)

Table Notes: * $p < .1$, one-tailed t -test; ** $p < .05$, one-tailed t -test; *** $p < .01$, one-tailed t -test

The significant influence of more participatory methods is consistent with the findings from other studies in relation to “active citizenship” and forms of learning, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Moreover, the most statistically significant methods – engaging in extracurricular activities and a social action – imply an intrinsic motivation of some students to engage in human rights outside of the classroom.

We then carried out statistical analysis to see if there were any statistically significant differences between individual methodologies and all students' ratings of the influence of school on the ways that they think about human rights (regardless of the rating of influence, i.e., 0-5).²⁴

Table 5. Mean rating of overall influence of school on human rights thinking by methodology

Methodologies	Mean rating of students who experienced each method	Mean rating of students who did not experience each method
Participated in a class or small group discussion	4.06**	3.52
Watched a video on the topic	4.09**	3.48
Discussed controversial issues regarding human rights	4.06*	3.9
Listened to a lecture	4.07*	3.82
Answered questions from the teacher	4.09**	3.79
Worked individually on an assignment	4.03	3.91
Read texts other than the textbook	4.04	3.9
Took notes	4.07	3.88
Presented arguments and different opinions	4.06	3.9
Worked with a partner or small group	4.15**	3.8
Critically scrutinized information and different opinions	4.08	3.89
Read the textbook	4.07	3.94
Did extracurricular activities	4.17*	3.89
Personal involvement in a social action related to human rights	4.15	3.93
Undertook a research-based inquiry	4.05	3.96
Took a test	3.91	4

Table Notes: * $p < .1$, one-tailed t -test; ** $p < .05$, one-tailed t -test

Across all of the methodologies except “took a test”, the influence of school on the ways students think about human rights was higher for students who reported engaging with each methodology than for those who had not. In other words, if students mentioned that they had learned human rights through a given methodology – regardless of the methodology (with the exception of test taking) – they were likely to attribute their schooling to their views on human

²⁴ The influence of school/class on students' thinking about human rights was analyzed closer by comparing mean ratings against 16 teaching/learning methodologies. Using the statistical analysis software Stata, we performed two-sample t -tests to look for significant difference between the mean ratings for those who experienced a specific methodology versus those who had not. We assumed unequal variance, based off of the descriptive statistics and unequal sample sizes, which helped to avoid inflating the significance of the results.

rights. This suggests a nearly non-discriminating association between being exposed to human rights in the classroom and having this teaching and learning influence student views. At the same time, we once again found a statistically significant influence for those students reporting that they engaged in participatory activities, such as extracurricular activities, discussions, working in a small group and discussing controversial issues.²⁵ However, we also found that other ‘passive’ methodologies, such as listening to lectures and watching a video were also statistically significant in influencing student thinking on human rights.²⁶ We will return to this finding in our discussion.

What Human Rights Students Know

Students were prompted to write in up to five rights they consider to be human rights. We coded these rights according to the rights listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Answers that were not international human rights were coded as “other”. Just over 50 percent of the students mentioned five or more human rights correctly in their answers. Ninety-five percent of the students were able to list as least three human rights correctly.

Table 6. Aggregate number of human rights listed (n=152)

Number of human rights	Number of students	Percentage of total students
0	3	2%
1	1	<1%
2	4	3%
3	15	10%
4	51	34%
5+	78	51%

²⁵ T-test results for students who “worked with a partner or small group” (M=4.15, SD=0.87) versus those who did not (M=3.8, SD=1), $t(137.62)=2.27, p=.01$.

²⁶ T-test results for students who “watched a video on the topic” (M=4.09, SD=0.82) versus those who did not (M=3.48, SD=1.33), $t(27.75)=2.21, p=.02$; students who “answered questions from the teacher” (M=4.09, SD=0.86) versus those who did not (M=3.79, SD=1.06), $t(89.57)=1.76, p=.04$; and students who “participated in a class or small group discussion” (M=4.06, SD=0.87) versus those who did not (M=3.52, SD=1.25), $t(23.23)=1.9, p=.04$.

We were curious to know if there were any statistically significant differences between students' ability to correctly name human rights and their background characteristics. However, there were no statistically significant differences related to grade level, gender, ethnicity and language spoken at home.

Across the 150 students completing this answer, 643 coded answers were found. Table 7 presents the frequency of kinds of human rights mentioned by students, according to our coding based on the UDHR. We emphasize that students did not select multiple-choice responses but had to write out these human rights.

Table 7. Kinds of human rights mentioned by students, by frequency (n=150)

Human Rights according to the UDHR	Percentage of students	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Right to decent standard of living, including food, clothing, housing, health care and right to security (esp. for sick, elderly, women and small children) (Article 25)	--	158	25%
Freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19)	--	111	17%
Right to life, liberty/freedom and/or security (one or all) (Article 3)	--	73	11%
Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18)	47%	70	11%
Right to education (Article 26)	45%	68	11%
Non-discrimination and equality (general) (Article 2)	22%	33	5%
Freedom of participation in government (Article 21)	16%	24	4%
Right to fair and impartial public hearing by independent tribunal (Article 10)	11%	17	3%
Right to marry and found a family (Article 16) – does not include on the basis of gender	9%	13	2%
Right to own property and not to be arbitrarily deprived of it (Article 17)	8%	12	2%
Right to work and a livable wage (Article 23)	7%	10	2%
To be free from slavery or servitude (Article 4)	5%	8	1%
Freedom of movement (Article 13)	5%	8	1%
Right to seek and enjoy asylum (Article 14)	5%	8	1%
Right to a nationality (Article 15)	5%	7	1%
Right to recognition/equal protection by the law (Articles 6 and 7)	4%	6	1%

Right to rest and leisure (Article 24)	4%	6	1%
Free from torture, inhumane, degrading treatment or punishment (Article 5)	3%	5	<1%
Right to privacy (Article 12)	3%	5	<1%
Freedom of peaceful assembly and association (Article 20)	3%	5	<1%
Right to environment	1%	2	<1%
Freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile (Article 9)	<1%	1	<1%
Right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty before the law (Article 11)	0%	0	0%
Right to participate in the cultural life of the community, including artistic, literary and scientific products (Article 27)	0%	0	0%
Other	--	86	13%

We note the relatively high popularity of socio-economic rights among these students, including the eco-soc rights of Article 25 (twenty-five percent of the responses), the right to education (mentioned by a full 45 percent of the students). These rights are contained in the UDHR but have not been recognized in international human rights laws signed by the U.S. government. We did observe that many students wrote in civil and political rights that are traditional parts of the U.S. political culture and typically learned in U.S. schools: Right to life, liberty/freedom and/or security (Article 3), Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18) and Freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19).

Certain categories of the UDHR were highly represented as students sometimes wrote more than one right that was coded for the same UDHR article. For example, Article 25, which includes a range of socio-economic rights, captured a full 25 percent of all answers provided by students, though not necessarily 25 percent of the students completing the questionnaire mentioned a socio-economic right. Other UDHR articles that also sometimes captured more than one human right response by a student included Freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19), Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18), and Right to life, freedom and security (Article 3).

Most Important Activities to Promote Human Rights

Students were asked to write in which activities they thought were most important for promoting human rights. The 151 students who responded to this question provided a total of 233 responses. Codes were developed with the results presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Most important activities to promote human rights (n=151/total responses=233)

Activities to promote human rights	Percentage of students	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Public education and awareness (including use of social media)	34%	52	22%
Education in a school setting (including HR Day, Model UN, guest speakers)	28%	42	18%
Having discussions	25%	37	16%
Protests/marches	18%	23	12%
Action/advocacy (general)	15%	23	10%
Working with/supporting human rights/humanitarian/charitable organizations	6%	9	4%
Trying to influence decision makers	5%	8	3%
Staying informed/access to information	5%	7	3%
Policy changes/political changes and enforcement	5%	7	3%
Expressing one's point of view	3%	4	2%
Voting and elections	2%	3	1%
Supporting the United Nations	2%	3	1%
[question skipped]	7%	10	4%

The results show that students identified a range of ways that human rights could be promoted, nearly all of them pertaining to actions that students could themselves carry out, although the question was not phrased in this way. If we do not count recommendations to require HRE in schools (18 percent), only 3 percent of the students directly mentioned changes in government policies or practices. Applying the “conventional citizenship” and “social movement citizenship” framework to these responses, we find that the former applied to 68 percent of the responses; actions associated with “social movement citizenship – such as protests/marches, actions/advocacy and supporting or working with charitable organizations or the UN – comprised 27 percent of the responses.

We speculate that these results can be partly explained by experiences that the students have themselves had in school, including learning about human rights, having discussions and expressing one's point of view. Public awareness raising was mentioned by over one third of the students. We also noted that protests, marches or advocacy of some kind were indicated in nearly a quarter of all responses.

We were curious to know if there were any patterns among students in relation to the kinds of human rights actions they endorsed and their background characteristics. Earlier literature had shown that females and students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely than their peers to support "social movement citizenship".

Two-sample tests of proportions were conducted to look for statistically significant differences by sex, ethnicity, and language spoken at home for each of the activities listed to promote human rights. The results showed that students coming from non-White backgrounds or speaking a language other than English at home were statistically more likely to indicate protests/marches as a way to promote human rights.²⁷ If these students are in fact from less economically advantaged backgrounds than their peers, this would be consistent with the findings of other studies. The only other analysis that showed a significant difference was that males were statistically more likely to work with/support a human rights NGO, humanitarian or charitable organization.²⁸ This finding is in contrast to other literature that has shown females to be more inclined towards active citizenships, particularly when it involves humanitarian causes.

Discussion

This study of youth views on human rights and how they learned about them in school was intended to shed light on the attained HRE curriculum in schools. In keeping with the UN Declaration of Human Rights principles of "about" "through" and "for" HRE, we explored what

²⁷ For engaging in protests/marches to promote human rights, we found significant difference in the proportion of students who spoke a language other than English at home ($M=.91$) as compared to students who spoke English at home ($M=.78$); $z=2.07$, $p=.02$. We also found significant difference in the proportion of non-White students ($M=.95$) as compared to White students ($M=.74$); $z=-3.6$, $p=.0002$.

²⁸ There was a significant difference in the proportion of male students ($M=.93$) who listed working with/supporting human rights/humanitarian/charitable organizations as compared to female students ($M=.71$); $z=-1.84$, $p=.03$.

students learned but also how they learned it and how they perceived that human rights could be promoted.

Students in these BLS classrooms experienced a wide range of teaching and learning methodologies in their classes, including traditional lecturing methods, use of textbooks and watching videos, to more experiential and learner-based methods such as small group discussion and projects. Our results showed that *any* methodology that had addressed human rights in some way influenced students' thinking about human rights, with the exception of test taking. Even the four methodologies that emerged as being most influential across all of the students do not fall into any particular methodological basket, for example, as "passive" or "active". This raised new questions for us.

One question was whether it is useful to research individual methodologies when students are experiencing such a wide range. Rather, it may be that a combination of certain methods are collectively most influential with students. Additional statistical work, such as cluster analysis, might assist in identifying underlying patterns such as these.

We also wonder if it would be more fruitful to consider the "method in context", that is, the actual content or learning objective attached to a teaching and learning process, to appreciate its relative influence. For example, the quality of small group work, or teacher lectures, a video or extracurricular activities would presumably influence how much students attribute these experiences to their learning. In other words, it may not just be that students engage in small group or class discussions per se, but what questions they are discussing. This speaks to carrying out qualitative research that would allow us to better understand how these methodologies intersect with the content and quality of HRE.

This study did reveal a strong link between participatory methods – in particular, learner-directed ones such as participating in an extracurricular activity of a social action related to human rights – for those students who had rated their school as maximally influential ('5') on their human rights thinking. This finding suggests that two things. The first is that having such options in the school setting will allow a subset of highly motivated students to engage more actively in human rights. This also reminds us that although this study focused on how methodologies may generally influence student learning about human rights, each of the students brings with herself or himself previous life experiences and values that may resonate more or

less with the human rights message. This is already suggested by this study and others that have found a stronger support for social movement activities for disadvantaged and minority students as compared with their classmates.

We were impressed by the high number of human rights that students were able to write on their own, and by the very high percentage of socio-economic rights, including the right to education. Although these latter rights are not endorsed by the U.S. government, we suppose that they were introduced to students in the classroom by learning about the UDHR and general discussions of international human rights.²⁹ This finding speaks to the power of the ideas of the UDHR and their appeal to students, who may not even be aware that the U.S. government has not ratified related treaties.

However, we also then wondered if the students had been made aware of the human rights treaties that the U.S. government had ratified, and the accompanying obligations of the government to uphold these rights. National protections systems – the collection of laws, policies and practices – associated with the protection, promotion and delivery of human rights – is ultimately the focal point of human rights law. It would be interesting to consider if the BLS student knowledge of support for socioeconomic rights – the most popular category across all the human rights written in on the surveys – was associated with any critical review and discussion of U.S. national, state and local policies.

We suppose that the ways in which students identified how to promote human rights seemed linked to their direct experiences in school. As noted earlier in this chapter, numerous ways that students wrote about how to promote human rights were related to education, awareness raising or discussion.

We also observed that a nearly a quarter of all responses pertained to protests, marches or advocacy of some kind, and wondered if this reflected the political mood of Boston. When this data was collected in fall 2017, numerous marches and protests – including in the Boston area – had been carried out in support of “Me, Too” and “Black Lives Matter.” Since that time, high school students – including some at BLS – have participated in marches and vigils in support of gun control reform in response to the murder of students at Parkland High School in Florida and

²⁹ Following the completion of the study, the BLS history teacher confirmed that she distributed the UDHR to her students as part of her curriculum.

of students in other U.S. schools due to gun attacks. The BLS teacher also informed us that during the 2016-17 school year, BLS was mired in a social media campaign tied to #blacklivesmatter in response to the microaggressions at the school, use of the n-word by students and an alleged lack of response from school administrators. These results suggest that the lived experiences of students – rather than academic treatment of how to address human rights violations – may be those that students are most easily able to recognize and identify with.

Concluding Thoughts

HRE is concerned with teaching students *about* human rights and helping students identify their rights and human rights in the world. This study shows that that HRE carried out at BLS has played an important role in influencing student knowledge and views about human rights.

This study suggests that a range of methodologies (*through* human rights) can be used in HRE, and such approaches are not only those that are classically seen as participatory. Among those students who rated their classes as most influential in their thinking about human rights, the most experientially oriented methods – such as extracurricular activities and participating in a social action – stand out. The study is interesting in confirming the results of other studies – including those mentioned above as well as the greater likelihood of disadvantaged students to support “social movement citizenship” and, for the purposes of this study, protests, activism and engagement with organized groups and organizations that promote human rights. Yet even students who did not participate in such activities benefited from the rich HRE offered in classes at BLS. *Through* human rights encompasses much more than discrete methodologies.

We feel that the combination of these findings suggests that there is a richer explanation of the relationship between what and how students learned about human rights and learning outcomes. These point the way to further research about combinations of methodologies, the quality of the content used in teaching and learning practices and more complex ways of thinking about what learners bring to the HRE learning experience.

As we consider about HRE and “*for*” human rights, we are left wondering. We do not have comparative data on whether or not the 25 percent of “social movement citizenship” answers can be considered high. We do note that this is a rather strict criteria, as students were asked to volunteer their ideas of how to promote human rights, rather than to indicate in a closed-

ended question their level of agreement about whether a set of presented actions were consistent with the students' own views about how to promote human rights.

Students more active in HRE and subsequently more engaged in promoting human rights will likely have intrinsic motivation to do so. Where does this come from and how does HRE in schooling settings interact and support this? Although the human rights vision ignites the imagination and engages the heart – as the U.S. students' response to the UDHR and historical human rights violations show – how they imagine addressing human rights violations and promoting human rights may be closely related to their lived experiences. These are all areas worthy of further study in the classroom setting as HRE continues to expand in national curriculum.