

Human rights education

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Introduction

Before, I was not aware of my rights. Now, I am aware of all of them. I have the courage to stand up for myself and to ask for my rights when I am denied them.

Premalatha Tamilselvan (HREA et al., 2012)

Premalatha Tamilselvan is a young woman from India who participated in a human rights class in her school as a child. Organized by the non-profit organization, People’s Watch, with support from UN Human Rights, this program trained teachers to bring human rights education to their classrooms. For Premalatha, who is a member of the Dalit community, once known as “Untouchables” and the lowest caste in India, the human rights class was life changing. Now, at the age of 21, she plans to become a lawyer in order to advocate for the human rights of others (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020a).

Goals and concepts of human rights education

Human rights education (HRE) is a newly established field of educational theory and practice with increasing attention and significance across the globe. This effort, which has gained momentum since the early 1990s, has generated a growing body of educational theory, practice and research that often intersects with activities in other fields of educational study in schools, such as citizenship education, peace education, anti-racism education, Holocaust/genocide education, education for sustainable development and education for intercultural understanding. However, HRE is not only aimed at the formal education sector but has deep

roots in non-formal education, such as non-profit organizations and after school clubs, and also takes place in the training of professionals, such as social workers, teachers and law enforcement officials.

Inter-governmental organizations, including the United Nations, and regional human rights entities, such as the Council of Europe, have promoted HRE in policies and practices. In (UNGA, 2005), the United Nations General Assembly created the permanent and ongoing World Programme for Human Rights Education and, in 2011, passed the Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. From the UN point of view, knowledge about human rights by all actors in society is fundamental to the virtuous cycle of people knowing and claiming their rights, and governments being held accountable for their human rights promises.

Purpose and structure of the chapter

This chapter shares a brief history and current overview of HRE today, with snapshots of HRE in practice in various contexts across the globe. First explaining HRE through definitions and models of teaching and learning, it then examines HRE with a critical eye. Following this, in connecting theory to practice, the chapter offers examples of HRE in formal, non-formal, and professional settings, as a means of instilling values, sharing knowledge, and training in skills to advocate for human rights.

Background on HRE

Definition of HRE

The most widely accepted definition of HRE is that offered by the United Nations, whose General Assembly passed in December 2011 a Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training with the following language (Article 2):

1. Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviors, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights.

This paragraph reaffirms the UN's long-standing definition that HRE has a place in all forms of education and training, including the formal, nonformal and informal sectors. As with other educational processes, HRE has components of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which should be consistent with recognized human rights principles and empower individuals and groups to address oppression and injustice.

The [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(2011\)](#) 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 (Article 2, para 2) (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

This paragraph reflects the evolution of HRE practice, as education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights affirms the full spectrum of learner goals in accordance with knowledge/understanding, values, capacities and actions, with a framework of human dignity and personal empowerment. This new, extended definition also draws attention to teaching and learning processes and reaffirms the outcomes of HRE as being oriented towards taking action “for” human rights.

History of HRE

With the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, HRE was considered crucial to the realization of human rights for all people. In the preamble to the UDHR, it states,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by *teaching and education* to promote respect for these rights and freedoms ... (emphasis added). (United Nations, 1948)

Soon after the adoption of the UDHR, the United Nations launched educational campaigns to promote rights. In 1951, UNESCO launched an educational campaign to dispel false and discriminatory information regarding race. UNESCO's (1974) Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace, and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, officially called for education to advance human rights. Four years later, the first official definition of HRE was created by the International Federation of Teachers in 1978, which stated:

Human rights education and teaching must aim at: (i) Fostering the attitudes of tolerance, respect and solidarity inherent in human rights; (ii) Providing knowledge about human rights, in both their national and international dimensions, and the institutions established for their implementation; (iii) Developing the individual's awareness of the ways and means by which human rights can be translated into social and political reality and at both the national and the international levels.

The definition has evolved since 1978, as noted above. Yet, both definitions share the common emphasis on fostering respect, sharing knowledge about human rights, and raising awareness about strategies to promote human rights from both an interpersonal and legal perspective.

Legal and normative dimensions of human rights

The goals of HRE are oriented around the elimination of human rights violations. Consistent with this higher aim, HRE can be oriented towards changes in the public domain (the behavior of governments) but also changes in the private domain (the behavior of individuals).

In achieving these goals, HRE has both normative and legal dimensions. The legal dimension incorporates sharing content about international human rights standards as embodied in the UDHR and other human rights 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. Through the lens of the legal standards, it is governments (signatories to treaties) that are ultimately responsible for preventing such abuses, both through their own behavior but also through their ability to influence the actions of citizens whose conduct may be infringing on the rights of others.

At the same time, HRE is a normative and cultural enterprise. Through the lens of social change, the goals and process of HRE can also be oriented toward the hearts, heads and hands of ordinary people. The process of HRE is intended to be one that provides skills ("hands"), knowledge ("head"), and motivation ("heart") to individuals to transform their own lives and realities so that they are more consistent with human rights norms and values.

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, human rights and education scholars, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These frameworks assist in setting goals for HRE, illustrating both what it shares and what it adds to other educational approaches that address values such as social justice.

Human rights themes and content in school curricula can take the form of cross-cultural topics 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 occurring in school settings.

In addition to primary and secondary schools, HRE is 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 and minoritized populations; as part of community development programs; and in public awareness campaigns.

Spread of HRE

As part of the expanded human rights movement, HRE has proliferated and differentiated since the 1990s. In fact, the expansion of HRE has benefited from several worldwide developments. These include not only the worldwide human rights movement but also the expansion of mass education and globalization (Ramirez et al., 2006, as quoted in Russell and Suarez, 2017).

What evidence do we have of the proliferation of HRE? Civil society networks serve an important role in disseminating ideas and norms about human rights (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The only study on this subject indicated that the number of organizations dedicated to HRE quadrupled between 1980 and 1995 (Ramirez et al., 2006). These developments mirrored similar increases in the number of international NGOs during that time.

Human rights discourse has entered into the realms of the nation-state. The establishment of national human rights institutions is one sign of state commitment to human rights. An analysis of national constitutions from 189 countries through 2005, found that 60% mention the term "human rights" at least once (Beck et al., 2012), although we cannot say, of course, if and how the presence of national human rights institutions or human rights in national constitutions reflects actual state behavior or the emphasis on HRE. For some countries, the link is clearly stated. For example, the South African Constitution mandated the creation of the South African Human Rights Commission, which includes education as one of its core responsibilities.

The institutionalization of HRE is also reflected in the proliferation of HRE academic publications and curricula. A 2017 study carried out by Russell & Suarez found “human rights education” in the titles of 474 publications in 2013, as compared with 51 in the year 2000. In the area of curricula, more than 83 countries across different regions of the world have adopted HRE in legislation, policy documents and curricula since the 1990s (Moon, 2009; as quoted in Russell and Suarez, 2017, p. 31). 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 (Russell and Suarez, 2017, p.33).

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 Center of Human Rights Education Associates (HREA), HRE USA, and Novamerica, serve as good examples. As the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 forced many education courses online, access to HRE in the virtual space, through webinars, workshops, and academic and community courses, increased remarkably that year. Moreover, bibliographies and descriptive databases of HRE materials are available through key human rights organizations as well as United Nations-related agencies (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2005; Amnesty International, 2020b; HREA, n.d.; Council of Europe, n.d.).

Impacts of HRE

The literature on HRE has gravitated towards empowerment as a key feature of successful programming. At the same time, empowerment is a multifaceted and nuanced concept that is difficult to define in concrete and observable terms. Empowerment methodologies can be easily linked with skill development. Having the opportunity to develop concrete skills, such as organizational, advocacy or leadership skills, can be considered a form of “instrumental empowerment” (Ross et al., 2011).

Knowledge itself can be a form of empowerment, for example, learning about the law and how to use it to protect one’s rights. Reflecting and recognizing that one’s personal values are consistent with those contained in international human rights standards or that one’s personal experiences of discrimination are shared by others, can also be empowering.

At the University of San Francisco, graduate students, who were also educators, enrolled in an HRE course in which they contributed to research on HRE based on their own teaching experiences. One teacher described how her students responded with feelings of empowerment when she taught HRE in her class. In particular, students whose histories were not reflected in the history textbooks found the means to challenge oppression through HRE (Adamian, 2015). Another teacher shared that her students found hope in human rights. Some of them have gone on to study human rights law and international relations, and be activists for human rights in college (Arduini, 2015). A third teacher found that HRE fosters critical thinking and action. One of her students shared that HRE allowed them to identify rights violations, recognize privilege, and understand their own ability to influence society to promote human rights (Padilla, 2015).

In India, an organization, People’s Watch, has trained teachers in HRE in nearly 4000 schools. Students shared that they were personally transformed by HRE. They used their knowledge to raise awareness about human rights, report abuses, and even to stop human rights abuses themselves (Bajaj, 2011a,b).

These studies provide just a few examples of the impact HRE programs may have on people’s lives. While additional research is needed, it is clear that HRE has the potential to empower people to take action to protect human rights.

Human rights education as an evolving practice

Evolving theories of human rights

Scholars and practitioners have identified principles of good practice for HRE, but there are no ready-made formulas. For each context, for each set of learners, HRE is customized. A term that has come to be used in the field of HRE is vernacularization or localization. It is this adjustment to content and methodologies in programming that allows the message of human rights to be brought closer to people in their daily lives. Bajaj (2011a,b) distinguishes different versions of HRE by ideology, context, constituency and locale. Tibbitts developed the HRE models of Values & Awareness - Socialization, Accountability-Professional Development and Activism-Transformation according to learner groups and strategies for promoting social change (Tibbitts, 2002, 2017).

This flexibility makes HRE a fascinating area of study. It can also create challenges in relation to developing a core literature that applies across contexts. In other words, HRE that is carefully and strategically designed to account for context and environmental specificities means that the results of studies on how learners experience HRE may provide insights locally but often have limited explanatory power elsewhere. For example, in an analysis of HRE content in South African textbooks post-apartheid, it was found that much of the content and exercises emphasized personal and communal values (Russell et al., 2019). The prominence of communal values is not a common theme across all HRE content, although it is becoming more prevalent.

Transformative and emancipatory HRE methodologies

For this reason, interactive, learner-centered methods are widely promoted. The following pedagogical methods are representative of those promoted by HRE advocates. These methods are applicable to all types of HRE but are most comprehensively implemented in popular education learning models.

Justice-oriented: centering marginalized voices, social and economic rights (in addition to civil and political rights), and the analysis of systemic injustice through lenses of critical, antiracist, multicultural, and/or social justice education ([Gibson and Grant, 2017](#));

Decolonizing: centering the contributions of formerly colonized peoples, acknowledging and rectifying the wrongs committed against them, and rejecting the dominance of Eurocentric ways of teaching and learning ([Zembylas, 2018](#))

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 some conditions are unjust and how they came to be so;

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](#))

Transformative methodologies encompass and extend methodologies of instrumental empowerment. Both sets of methodologies are intended to cultivate agency in the learner. However transformative methodologies are different in two respects. The first is that the agency of the learner is cultivated with the explicit aim of social transformation through human rights activism. HRE that prepares learners to organize human rights awareness-raising or campaigning can be associated with transformative methodologies, though this can still be considered a form of instrumental empowerment.

The second way in which transformative methodologies are different than empowerment methodologies is that they can also explicitly foster personal transformation, aligned with the concept of "intrinsic empowerment" ([Ross et al., 2011](#)). Transformative and emancipatory learning approaches, drawing from critical pedagogy, invite a critical reflection on power and oppression in one's local environment, usually as part of a close community of learners. Any subsequent reshaping of one's understanding of the world can result in taking actions to combat one's own oppression in one's family and immediate environment, consistent with wider processes of (privately experienced) social change in a society. When organized on a widespread basis with and for persons belonging to oppressed groups, such personal transformations are the basis of human rights activism.

The specific methodologies of transformative and emancipatory learning are associated with critical pedagogy and [Paulo Freire \(1968\)](#). The HRE literature is strongly rooted in critical pedagogy, which encourages learners to think critically on their situation, recognize connections between their individual problems and the social contexts in which they live and to take action against oppression. Critical pedagogy was and continues to be associated with the HRE Transformation Model ([Bajaj, 2011a,b; Tibbitts, 2002, 2017](#)), as this model is explicitly oriented toward a form of empowerment related to overcoming internalized oppression.

Critical pedagogies offer a means to address human rights violations due to systemic discrimination, that is, discrimination that is enmeshed in the systems and values of society. Anti-racist education is an example of a critical and justice-oriented pedagogy that can support learners and educators in disrupting racism at the individual, societal, and global levels. It provides them with the tools to examine racism on multiple levels, including their own position in perpetuating or dismantling it ([Gibson and Grant, 2017; Love, 2019](#)).

HRE in the era of Black Lives Matter and the Covid-19 pandemic

Current events have human rights dimensions and the application of the human rights lens allows for conversations about structural violence and injustices, especially those affecting vulnerable groups. The Black Lives Matter Movement is a human rights movement that calls for racial justice. The movement is not only calling for the end to discrimination against individuals, but a dismantling of the structures in society that perpetuate discrimination. To address injustices fully, HRE must teach about both forms of discrimination as well, and strategies to advocate for change. Teaching about current events such as Black Lives Matter can help learners to understand the need for this dual approach to human rights advocacy.

The global health crisis of Covid-19 has revealed underlying inequalities – both within and across countries – that are affecting people's access to health care including the Covid-19 vaccine, quality education and even food and water. At the time this chapter was being written, new HRE curriculum was under development to support teachers in introducing human rights themes related to the pandemic, foster the sharing of student experiences during the pandemic, and promote taking action to address injustices revealed in the local community and on the global level ([Generation Human Rights and HREA, 2020](#)).

Critiques of human rights and HRE

Universalism

Human rights education (HRE) is one approach in secular education that has had to grapple with the concept of universal values. A traditional HRE approach promotes the universal values of the United Nations and the position that human rights are "universal, interrelated, indivisible and interdependent" ([UN, 1993; OHCHR, 2022](#)). Numerous HRE resources are explicitly oriented toward the transmission of human rights values and standards. The intention is that the human rights framework will be used as a lens for

analyzing human and government behavior and as a basis for improving the realization of human rights in the everyday lives of people.

Hegemonic, western-centered and “top down”

Human rights education needs to be taught in a way that allows for questioning and dialogue. Some HRE scholars have critiqued a “declarationist” approach to HRE as promoting the values embodied in international human rights standards as absolutist, negating the possibility of genuine “dialogue” with learners in regard to their existing value systems (Keet, 2012). At best, such an HRE approach fails to fully foster the critical capacities of learners; at worst, it promotes a hegemonic, Western-centered values system. For HRE to truly be empowering and transformational, it should not be taught in a way that replicates the very rights abuses it aims to dismantle. For that reason alone, HRE necessitates the inclusion of dialogue, deliberation, and debate.

HRE lessons and curriculum aligned with the traditional, or declarationist, approach draw on some of the techniques associated with the psychological theory of intuitive ethics as well as the values clarification approach, a pedagogy that provides learners with opportunities to explore and develop their own value system (Lee, 2001, p. 33). At their core, such values clarification activities presume that the learners will already possess values that are consistent with human rights standards and respect for human dignity. From this perspective, we can see that HRE indirectly endorses the proposal that there are “common values” that operate cross-culturally. In practice, these kinds of HRE activities are also able to bring out some complexity, such as the potential tension between multiple human rights (for instance, freedom of expression in a situation where hate speech is being used).

Some scholars have identified HRE teaching and learning processes that do not allow for a genuine critique of the human rights system as a whole and have therefore promoted political correctness (Baxi, 2009; Keet, 2014). One may use even values-clarification techniques instrumentally for validating the preordained universal values of human rights. Such concerns build on those presented by relativists that the human rights framework reflects an overly dominant Western influence in relation to the ideas of the Enlightenment and the historical context of the immediate post-WWII period. Critics of a traditional “transmission” approach to HRE argue that it does not allow learners to consider these concerns and is therefore contributing to a non-reflective socialization process. These concerns are also amplified in environments where there is sensitivity to the term “human rights” for reasons related to local political dynamics.

Possible solutions for human rights critiques

Educators, scholars, and practitioners have proposed solutions to these critiques that are primarily pedagogical. Some now promote the critical pedagogy approach – established by Paulo Freire and foundational to the popular education version of HRE – for analyzing the human rights framework as a whole, not only the structures in which learners live and work. This approach can explicitly reveal and examine the Western origins and potential hegemonic influences of the human rights system, while in a learning context dedicated to applying teaching and learning systems to promote and protect human dignity. The focus then becomes not whether the human rights framework is the preferable value system to apply, but “what is to be done” to bring about change – using the value system and language indigenous to and embraced by the learner (and presumably consistent with humanistic values).

The literature calls this approach “critical HRE” (CHRE) in order to emphasize that the critique extends internally to the human rights system itself, as well as to society (Keet, 2015; Bajaj 2011a,b). A more recent development is the use of the term “transformative HRE” (THRED) (Bajaj et al., 2016), emphasizing the role of pedagogy in promoting social change and consistent with the transformative model of HRE (Tibbitts, 2002, 2017). Some scholar-practitioners have moved away from use of the term “HRE” altogether and instead promote the concept of “humanizing pedagogy” or the “pedagogy of mutual vulnerabilities” (Salazar, 2013; Keet et al., 2009). Some view such approaches as helping to ensure the emancipatory and liberating potential of HRE.

Another pedagogical response actively seeks to bridge local and transnational vernacular rights cultures. Critical interpretive pedagogy proposes more specifically that human rights must be interpreted within a plurality of cultural, religious and philosophical doctrines (Adami, 2014; Al-Duraweesh and Snauwaert, 2013). Rather than simply applying a universal set of abstract principles, rights are actively interpreted, shaped and transformed. They are thus “sutured with the multiple histories, cultures and contexts in which they are formed, and reflect a history of struggles that is both local and transnational” (Dunford and Madhok, 2015). This quasi-universalistic approach is a practical accommodation to the criticisms of universal values.

In complement with these pedagogical methods, the decolonization of HRE may ensure that HRE does not perpetuate the very oppression it seeks to undo. Decolonizing HRE means to not favor Eurocentric epistemologies to the detriment of others, particularly those from the Global South. Decolonization could include the acknowledgment and attribution of contributions to the human rights framework by non-Western countries and individuals and to share content and knowledge from non-Western scholars, practitioners, and activists. It goes beyond the classroom content, though, to include who is teaching, how they teach, and the environment in which they teach.

The HRE models and pedagogies inform teaching and learning at the practical level. HRE is implemented in a wide range of settings and contexts with diverse groups of learners. To be effective, educators must adapt their pedagogical approaches and educational content based on these variations. In the next sections, we share examples of this variety of approaches and content of HRE in action.

HRE in action

HRE is offered in formal settings such as primary, secondary, and higher education and as part of professional development. It is offered non-formally by NGOs and after-school clubs. It is even present in informal settings such as in community conversations, as public art, and around the dinner table. The online space, in part spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic, is now flooded with HRE courses, workshops, lessons, and other resources.

HRE in National Plans of Action (Mexico)

In national curricula, HRE is included at different levels. At least 20 countries have created National Plans of Action for Human Rights Education ([Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020a,b](#)). Another 36 countries address HRE in their National Plans of Actions for Human Rights. The inclusion of HRE in a national level plan is one sign of a country's commitment to the right to HRE. Mexico offers one example of this. The first country to include economic and social rights in its constitution in 1917 ([Sikkink, 2019](#)), today in Mexico, HRE is offered through NGOs as well as local and national commissions for human rights in order to work towards ending current and preventing future human rights violations ([Martinez Sanz, 2018](#)). Between 2013 and 2015, the National Human Rights Commission reported that public organizations had carried out at least 20,000 HRE related activities in the country. This number does not include non-profit organizations and other private sector activities ([Martinez Sanz, 2018](#)).

Even countries that do not have plans at the national level may still include HRE in their formal and non-formal educational institutions. For example, in the United States, where education is decentralized, at least 42 of the 50 states have required or recommended HRE standards in their social studies curricula ([Sirota, 2017](#)). Through these diverse and varied offerings, HRE reaches individuals and communities around the world, as described in the following examples.

HRE in the K-12 schooling sector (South Africa, USA)

In South Africa, HRE can be found in the secondary school textbooks for the subjects of social studies, history, and life orientation. In social studies and history, the HRE content is integrated into other material, such as World War II. In life orientation, human rights is offered as its own topic, though requiring only 7 h of instruction in 10th and 11th grades, and 4 h in 12th grade. In the history and social studies textbooks, HRE focuses on knowledge and values. In contrast, the life orientation textbooks include lessons to ensure learners not only know their rights and critically consider their values, but also how to advocate for human rights ([Russell et al., 2019](#)). At present, a plan is underway to include HRE in a new national teacher training program, Teaching for All, in South Africa. ([British Council, 2020](#)).

In the United States, as education is decentralized, each state sets its own curriculum standards. While HRE is in social studies curriculum standards in at least 42 states, only two states include HRE at every grade level – New Jersey and Mississippi ([The Advocates for Human Rights, 2016](#)). Where national and state mandates are lacking, local school districts may choose to include HRE more robustly than required. In Manchester, Connecticut, for example, HRE is now a required high school course in order for students to graduate ([Faipier, 2018](#)). Some schools that do not offer standalone human rights classes invest in human rights by supporting teachers' professional development through HRE organizations such as RFK Human Rights. Through the organization's program, Speak Truth to Power, RFK Human Rights has trained over 9000 educators around the world ([RFK Human Rights, 2020](#)).

HRE in higher education

Human rights centers (global, USA)

At the higher education level, as in many other areas of education, HRE has a growing presence. Human rights and HRE degrees are offered at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels. Universities and colleges also offer human rights as an undergraduate double major or a minor. They offer human rights concentrations or a certificate. At even more universities and colleges, at a minimum, students can enroll in individual human rights courses. In addition to degrees and courses, in recent years two special issues on HRE were published in the journals *Prospects* and the *Journal of Human Rights*. Two new journals dedicated to HRE were created – the *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, out of the University of San Francisco and the *Human Rights Education Review*, out of the University of South-Eastern Norway.

College and university human rights centers are often integral to the promotion of HRE on campus, and in the surrounding communities. In addition to overseeing and coordinating majors, minors, concentrations, and certificates, they provide offerings to the broader community within and around the institution through public events, workshops and classes. In recent years, human rights educators and center directors have established networks to support each other's work and further develop the field of HRE. In the United States, the University and College Consortium for Human Rights Education (UCCHRE) was founded in 2016. The mission of the consortium is "to further human rights learning, research, policy, and practice within and across university and college communities." UCCHRE's effort is another example of the growing cooperation in and professionalization of the field.

Practical human rights courses in higher education offer the opportunity for students to contribute to advocating for human rights by working on specific issues and learning from community members. These opportunities may be offered by professors in partnership with civil society organizations. Professor Bill Simmons teaches a course at the University of Arizona known as Problem-based Learning without Borders (PBL). He emphasizes the course's versatility: it can be taught at the undergraduate or graduate level, online and offline, with any group of students and in large and small classes. Course meetings may even be held at

a community-based setting. Students research local or global issues, working with and learning from the community-based group. Past courses have focused on human rights topics such as mass incarceration in Arizona, femicide in Mexico, and women's rights in South Sudan. The students conduct research, offer strategies to achieve the community's goals, and work with community partners to strengthen and implement those strategies. Professor Simmons' students have directly contributed to efforts to secure human rights, such as when their work was used in a legal case on femicide in Mexico which was brought in front of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Simmons, 2020).

Scholars at risk Student Advocacy Seminars (global, USA)

Opportunities for gaining practical skills and experiences, and contributing to the field of human rights may be initiated by NGOs in partnership with institutions of higher education. The organization Scholars at Risk (SAR) offers an example of this. SAR is an NGO that since 2000 has worked with colleges and universities around the world to host scholars whose academic freedom is in jeopardy in their home countries. In 2014, SAR launched Student Advocacy Seminars. Through these seminars which are run around the world, students spend a semester conducting research and advocating to secure the freedom of a scholar who has been wrongfully imprisoned, in violation of their human rights, often due to advocating for democracy. Students gain knowledge and skills in promoting human rights as they simultaneously apply theory to practice in advocating for the freedom of an imprisoned scholar (Scholars at Risk Network, 2020).

Universities and colleges can be resources for the general public to access HRE. The University of Arizona, University of Connecticut, Columbia University, the University of Graz (Austria), Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium) and Leiden University (The Netherlands), among others, offer human rights courses and workshops that are open to the public on current issues such as systemic racism, migrant and refugee rights and the COVID-19 pandemic, and on skills-building such as conducting research or teaching human rights.

HRE in teacher training (USA)

As demonstrated, HRE is included in regional, national, and local curriculum in primary, secondary, and higher education. Teachers receive training in HRE through multiple avenues. Teacher education in human rights may take place in universities and colleges, through non-profit organizations, at the level of the national government, or in professional development programs in K-12 schools.

Teacher education in human rights is a fairly small field at present, though in a number of places, it is readily available and robust. In the northeastern US, the University of Connecticut offers HRE to pre-service teachers and current high school teachers. For example, teachers may become certified as Early College Experience, or ECE teachers, thereby being able to teach human rights to students in their high school, who receive college credit for these classes. After their initial coursework, in order to maintain ECE certification, teachers must participate in HRE workshops at least once every two years. The number of teachers who have become ECE certified is growing. As of 2020, 25 teachers across the state were certified, with six more teachers in the midst of the certification process (Glenn Mitoma, personal communication, August 7, 2020).

HRE in the training of social workers and psychologists (Netherlands, USA, Europe)

At the heart of the UDHR is the "equal unalienable worth of a human being". The fields of both social work and psychology are essentially about the problems of human beings and human relationships. In the field of psychology, the person, couple or family unit is the unit of change whereas in social work the community and society (in addition to the person and family) can be the focus area.

In recent years, practitioners and trainers in these fields have begun to integrate an explicit human rights dimension into their work. Human rights is linked with the core dignity of each client and potentially offers a universal framework of ethics that is rooted in international law. The human rights value system is in line with the "capabilities approach" argued by Sen (1999), who sees capabilities as essential for freedom to being human, to develop and for the realization of human rights. Moreover, the human rights approach for social work explicitly recognizes community organizing as a form of community social work (Staples, 2012) that "connects people on the basis of a sense of common experiences, such as exclusion, poverty or other forms of social injustices" (Rayneart et al., 2010, p. 7).

In the social work sector, the International Federation of Social Workers has endorsed human rights as a core competency. The working group of social work trainers in the Netherlands and Flanders developed a manifesto in 2015 calling for the inclusion of HRE within the training of social workers (Raynaert et al., 2010). As of 2015, the Council on Social Work Education has as its Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice as a required goal for schools of social work in order to be accredited (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p.7). This competency creates an incentive for more schools of social work to integrate these principles within their education programs. The National Association of Social Workers (2006) in the US also has a Policy on Human Rights.

Scholarship related to human rights and social work is growing, including the launch of the *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*. This scholarship includes studies related to the application of human rights to social work policies and practices.

The Institute for Social Work at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands) provides an example of the infusion of HRE. The first year of social work education curriculum now integrates human rights themes repeatedly within the program, Principles of Social Work. This approach cements several theme-centered programs where HRE is delivered in a more reflective and experiential way. The recently developed second-year bachelor pursues the same didactic structure of first year Social Work. The second

year comprises four theme-centered programs (1) social security and safety, (2) social (in)justice (community level), (3) participation, and (4) empowerment (individual level) (Reynaert et al., 2010, p. 3).

Over the years, both international and national psychology associations have endorsed the application of ethics and, specifically, human rights norms in the professional practices of researchers, practitioners and educators within psychology. This includes the following: The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), the International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology (IACCP), and the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) developed and endorsed The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists (UDEPP) (2008). The European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) established a Board of Human Rights and Psychology in 2013. In addition, there are numerous national associations, like the American Psychological Association (APA), which have issued statements and principles related to human rights, psychologists and codes of conduct.

Thematic areas where HRE might be integrated within psychology education include, but are not limited to:

- International and regional human rights standards related to psychology (e.g., the UDHR and the rights of vulnerable groups)
- History of psychology/psychologists and human rights (e.g., psychological approaches to intergroup contacts, social inclusion, conflict and discrimination)
- Human rights as part of ethics/codes of conduct training
- Advocacy and root cause analysis within practicums (e.g., addressing political, social and economic conditions violating human rights and contributing to human suffering)
- Foundation of psychology – Feminist, cross-cultural and decolonial perspectives (Tibbitts and Hagenaars, 2020, pp. 254–259).

The Global Network of Psychologists for Human Rights (GNPHR) (<http://humanrightspscychology.org/>) was launched in 2020, and the website is hosted by the International Council of Psychologists (ICP, Inc). The website contains an evolving resource section to support the integration of human rights within psychology education and training. In this fast-developing area of HRE work, two publications came out in 2020 (P. Hagenaars et al., 2020; Rubin and Flores, 2020) and more are anticipated (Global Network of Psychologists for Human Rights, 2020).

HRE in the non-formal education sector

Amnesty International (global)

Amnesty International is the largest membership-based human rights organization in the world with over 2 million members and 5 million supporters (Amnesty International website). Amnesty's primary focus is research and campaigning to influence governments to abide by human rights obligations. Founded in 1961 in the United Kingdom initially to campaign for the release of political prisoners, the organization began to integrate HRE within its activities in the mid-1990s (Amnesty International, 2020a).

One key program is the "Write for Rights" (W4R) campaign, which takes place annually around Human Rights Day on December 10th. Human Rights Day commemorates the day when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, shortly after the founding of the United Nations. Amnesty encourages people to show their solidarity with the international human rights movement by engaging in the W4R campaign.

A major part of the W4R campaign consists of a letter-writing marathon which involves millions of people around the globe. In 2017, more than 6 million actions were taken in support of the individuals and groups featuring in the campaign (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 3). Every year, supporters write two letters. "One is to the person in authority – it could be a king/queen, president or head of police – who can help make change happen. The other letter is to the person or group of people we are fighting for (and/or their family) to express support so they know we will never forget them" (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 5).

For example, one of the human rights defenders that Amnesty included in their 2018 campaign was Atena Daemi from Iran, who was serving a seven-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin prison. She had suffered inhumane conditions and been denied medical treatment as retaliation for defending human rights, in particular for speaking out against the death penalty (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 13).

Another key HRE program carried out by Amnesty International is "Human Rights Friendly Schools", which began in 2009 and involves 16 countries. Amnesty staff and volunteers work with whole schools that "places human rights at the heart of the learning experience and makes human rights an integral part of everyday school life" (Amnesty International, n.d.). Beginning with a problem-seeking analysis of school conditions using a human rights lens, projects are undertaken to improve the realization of the principles of equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation. All aspects of school life are eligible for improvement: decision making in the school, discipline policies, relationships, curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the school's physical environment. Amnesty's Human Rights Friendly Schools program has a toolkit and builds on the literature of the whole school approach and whole school development.

A recently developed HRE area for Amnesty is its *Human Rights Academy*, an online platform for human rights learning. The initiative was spearheaded by the Amnesty team in the Middle East and North Africa in the wake of the Arab Spring, in order to support human rights defenders in the region and elsewhere. The multi-lingual learning platform includes self-paced online learning (for example, on different human rights areas, such as the rights of refugees), advanced capacity building on documenting human rights violations as well as online tools to facilitate youth activism (Amnesty International, 2020b).

Women for Women's Human Rights (Turkey)

The majority of HRE efforts carried out in the non-formal education sector are through local or national organizations. One organization with a long record of carrying out HRE is Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)- New Ways, which operates in Turkey. WWHR – New Ways is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that organized a legal literacy program for adult women through a 14-year partnership with the Turkish General Directorate of Social Services (GDSS). WWHR prepared GDSS staff to deliver a 16-week Human Rights Education Program (HREP) for women who come to local community centers to receive services. Based on both a legal rights and gender perspective, the 16-week program seeks to empower women to know and claim their rights both in the private sphere (including familial relations, sexual and reproductive rights, gender sensitive parenting) and the public sphere (including economic rights, political rights, organizing, and access to justice).

According to WWHR literature, the specific objectives of HREP are:

- Enable women to gain awareness of their rights as equal citizens;
- Raise women's consciousness of how customary practices, that is, 'unwritten' laws, often limit or violate their rights;
- Serve as a catalyst for women's organizing efforts on the local and national levels and support grassroots organizing initiatives;
- Support women in developing strategies for the implementation of their legal rights in daily life (Tibbitts, 2016, pp. 2–3).

As of fall 2013, nearly 9300 women had participated in the program. The results of an impact assessment study in 2012 demonstrated impacts both on the learners and facilitators. Areas of impact included their identity; knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and behaviors in their family and in the workplace. These results are demonstrated not only in the private domain, but in the women's professional roles (Tibbitts, 2016, pp. 16–17).

HRE in community development

Tostan (Senegal)

HRE programs can be embedded within community development programs and linked with skills related to self-reliance. A community-based approach to HRE can involve processes such as mapping power and leadership in a community, holding discussions about the needs of members, and deciding collaboratively which ones to prioritize. In the absence of effective state services, community members address their own problems, which may or may not involve resorting to changing formal or customary laws but will almost certainly involve human rights values. In the non-formal HRE program in Senegal, the NGO Tostan integrates HRE within their Community Empowerment Program (Cislighi et al., 2016).

Tostan is a three-year, education program that puts rural communities in charge of their own futures. The Community Empowerment Program (CEP) involves human rights-based education classes and the establishment of a Community Management Committee (CMC).

Each village runs two classes of 25–30 participants – one for adults and one for adolescents – that meet three times per week over the course of the program. These are facilitated by someone from the same ethnic group but a different village, thus someone fluent in the local language and familiar with local customs. The classes draw on “modern nonformal education techniques as well as traditional African oral traditions like theater, storytelling, dance, artwork, song, and debate” (Tostan, 2020).

In addition to the CEP classes, communities establish a CMC that is responsible for implementing development projects designed by the community. Trained by Tostan, these are democratically-selected 17-member committees, of which nine members are women (Tostan, 2020).

Human Rights Cities (global)

The global Human Rights Cities movement similarly focuses on change at the city, town and village levels. A Human Rights City may be defined as a municipality that has adopted human rights principles and laws as guiding norms of governance. In practice, it provides for an “inclusive civic engagement with city management, where people have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the role of policy implementers, hence fostering participatory democracy with solidarity and social justice. Such a commitment translates locally into an improvement in the quality of life of all residents” (Human Rights Cities, 2020).

There are human rights cities in every major global region, which are also networked. Examples include Korogocho (Kenya), Nuremberg (Germany), Porto-Alegre (Brazil), Rosario (Argentina), and Walewale (Ghana). In the cases of these cities, each process has been tailor-made, is context specific and based on individual commitments. Different degrees of commitment and responsibility exist among human rights cities, which may vary from the declaration of intention to the effective implementation of a process where residents' civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are at the center of the city's governance and public policies (Human Rights Cities, 2020).

Human rights cities initiatives involve some degree of public awareness raising for HRE. A human rights city initiative that is formalized can involve a commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a norm of governance, combined with other human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969). Key is “the establishment of a socio-political process where the community and the municipality (usually represented by a governing body) cooperate to integrate the fundamental values as a priority in the planning and governance of the city” (Human Rights Cities, 2020).

Within the community development framework, HRE fosters the changed behavior of both state- and non-state actors, that is, everyday people in their daily lives. The norms for such changed behavior can be fed through the cross-cutting (human rights)

values of non-discrimination, equality, inclusion and participation, as well as the norms associated with the human rights of specific marginalized groups.

Concluding thoughts

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created in 1948. Despite the fact that it has been translated into more languages than any other document in the world, over 70 years later, people around the globe still lack access to human rights education. Yet, as demonstrated, promising HRE initiatives can be found flourishing in schools, communities, and professional spaces, empowering both learners and educators. In order for it to continue to flourish, just as the UDHR has been reinterpreted over time to now include such rights as the internet and same sex marriage, human rights educators must continue to reflect on and critique HRE to ensure it adapts with the times.

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