

Contemporary Issues in Human Rights Education

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Abstract - Human rights education (HRE) is, historically and philosophically, inextricably linked to the international human rights movement. HRE, which emerged out of the international movement to guarantee a child's right to education, was conceived of as a pedagogical approach to introduce students to the human rights system and to the rights and duties they incur as citizens in an increasingly interdependent global world. Human rights education aims to build an understanding and appreciation for human rights through learning about rights and learning through rights. Human rights education is inextricably linked with the pedagogy of teaching. It requires not just imparting knowledge about human rights but also applying a human rights based pedagogy to ensure young people learn in a rights-respecting environment and promotes the rights of others. The main elements of human rights education are the acquisition of knowledge and skills about human rights, the development of respectful values and attitudes and changed behavior that reflects human rights values, the motivation of social action and empowerment of active citizenship to advance respect for the rights of all. Human rights education encourages using human rights as a frame of reference in our relationships with others. It encourages inquiry, forming arguments, deciding, cooperating, evaluating, sharing and living according to values. Human rights education encourages us to critically examine our own attitudes and behaviors and, ultimately, to transform them in order to advance respect for the rights of all.

Keywords: Human Rights, Values, Principles, Universality, Human Dignity, Equality, Non-Discrimination, Participation, Respect, Responsibility, Inclusivity, Difference, Perspectives.

I. INTRODUCTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Inspired by the UN's call for HRE, various organizations have created HRE resources, and educators have begun to theorize about pedagogical approaches to the subject. For example, Amnesty International (AI), a leader in the HRE community, maintains a website and publishes a newsletter, The Fourth R, to disseminate lesson plans, classroom materials, and book reviews. AI's characterization of HRE, however, is so diffuse that it does not express the unique educative potential of human rights. AI's website describes HRE as "a lens through which to observe the world and a methodology for teaching and leading others." Conversely, others who have expounded on the potential of HRE in the last decade have struggled to disentangle it from preexisting pedagogical frameworks. Betty Reardon, the founding director of the Peace Education Center at Teachers College, notes that HRE is often incorrectly described as a strand of peace education. As Reardon argues, the two are fundamentally different. While peace education holds the reduction of violence as its conceptual core, HRE centers on human dignity and its realization. Moreover, she contends, HRE challenges the peace research community to "extend the definition of peace beyond the limitation, avoidance, or absence of war to include issues of justice, poverty, and freedom." For this reason, Reardon, goes on to say, "peace education needs human rights education." Mary Braebeck and Lauren Rogers succinctly describe HRE and distinguish it from moral education, which tends to focus on the development of critically aware individuals. Braebeck and Rogers located the unique educative power of HRE in its "mandate to engage in political action to enact just laws, policies, and universal covenants to protect human rights." To this end, they point out, HRE challenges moral educators to look beyond the concerns of the individual and the development of character to the real-world structures that support and challenge injustice. In other words, Braebeck and Rogers illustrate that the power of HRE lies in its connection to the human rights system. Human rights education is defined as training, dissemination, and information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights by imparting knowledge and skills, and molding attitudes. Human rights education has five dimensions:

- strengthening respect for the human personality and its dignity
- fully developing the human personality and its dignity

- promoting understanding, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples, and racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups
- enabling all persons to participate effectively in a free society
- furthering the activities of the United Nations to maintain peace

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The various objectives of the study are as follows:

- To provide a platform and participation of members to promote and strengthen the processes of democratization, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- To help strengthen relations and promote cooperation at the legislative, institutional, business, academic and civil society organizations levels.
- To strengthen the conditions necessary for peace, given that conflict is incompatible with democracy and human rights and reduces all possibility for their development.
- To establish and/or strengthen existing research networks, undertake research and studies, disseminate the findings, organize dialogues and debates, and formulate policy recommendations, strategies and plans of action in the fields of democracy and human rights.
- To promote and undertake advocacy and ensure the participation to raise awareness and effective participation and engagement of the citizens, political actors and other decision-makers in the activities and national processes.
- To encourage policy-makers to promote the participation of women in political, legislative, social, economic and cultural processes.
- To promote youth participation in political, legislative, social, economic and cultural processes.
- To support and strengthen, through partnerships and networks, the contribution of civil society organizations in promoting democracy and respect for human rights.
- To encourage and foster implementation of the recommendations, resolutions, strategies and plans of action through national ownership, integration and/or adoption of national legislations, strategies, plans of action and other national systems, and to monitor implementation.
- To promote advocacy activities that support the implementation of regional and international instruments and decisions in the fields of democracy and human rights, and that support existing mechanisms and national institutions.
- To establish sound communication programmers to disseminate all the outputs and activities through different media and IT channels.
- To take any other measures conducive towards the promotion of democracy and human rights.

III. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

1. *Racism*

Racism is the belief that characteristics and abilities can be attributed to people simply on the basis of their race and that some racial groups are superior to others. Racism and discrimination have been used as powerful weapons encouraging fear or hatred of others in times of conflict and war, and even during economic downturns. This article explores racism from around the world.

2. *Women's Rights*

Women's rights around the world is an important indicator to understand global well-being. A major global women's rights treaty was ratified by the majority of the world's nations a few decades ago. Yet, despite many successes in empowering women, numerous issues still exist in all areas of life, ranging from the cultural, political to the economic. For example, women often work more than men, yet are paid less; gender discrimination affects girls and women throughout their lifetime; and women and girls are often the ones that suffer the most poverty. Gender equality furthers the cause of child survival and development for all of society, so the importance of women's rights and gender equality should not be underestimated.

3. *Rights Of Indigenous People*

There are approximately 370 million indigenous people spanning 70 countries, worldwide. Historically they have often been dispossessed of their lands, or in the center of conflict for access to valuable resources because of where they live, or, in yet other cases, struggling to live the way they would like. Indeed, indigenous people are often amongst the most disadvantaged people in the world.

4. *Economy*

With the avalanche of taxes coming via Obamacare and in the aftermath of the fiscal cliff fiasco, expect another year of moribund economic news. With another drama looming over the debt-ceiling limit and with new taxes to spend, don't expect Washington to do anything other than to make matters worse.

5. *Gun Control*

Following the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Conn.—where 26 people, including 20 children, were murdered—gun-control advocates immediately sounded the alarm. Expect the battle to begin right as Congress reconvenes, with bills introduced to ban types of guns and ammunition clips. President Obama will also weigh-in, having designated Joe Biden with the task of coming up with a plan.

6. *Axis-Of-Evil Nuclear Ambitions* □

Two of the three axis-of-evil countries singled out by President Bush nearly a decade ago are still threatening to upset the world order and are coming closer to the day of reckoning. Iran is closer to developing a nuclear weapon dramatically changing the equation for Mideast peace, while North Korea's recent launch of a rocket into space makes its nuclear ambitions all the more horrifying. Obama didn't do much on anything in his first term to blunt the momentum toward disaster but the time is coming when some tough decisions will have to be made.

7. *Obamacare*

Obamacare will be implemented in 2014 for most Americans so we will finally start finding out how this mammoth monstrosity will operate as 2013 progresses. More companies will begin shedding workers, doctors will begin to bail from the profession, and taxes will kick-in. Obamacare has another date with the Supreme Court over the contraception mandate and there will be efforts in the House to limit funding needed to implement the law.

8. *Mideast Turmoil*

With Syria still in upheaval and Egypt increasingly becoming unsettled, the April Spring continues to devolve into chaos. Israel will remain at odds with its Arab neighbors even as Hamas pushes for a third intifada, Gaza remains a tinderbox, and Iran seeks wipe the Jewish state from the map. All the elements are in place for continued chaos in the Mideast.

9. *Gay Marriage*

Emboldened by Obama's election-year conversion to the cause of same-sex marriage, gay activists will push ahead with attempts for legalization at the ballot box and in the courts. The main action will be at the Supreme Court where the justices have already said they will hear oral arguments challenging whether states can restrict marriage to one man and one woman. Expect a decision by early summer.

10. *Immigration Reform*

Democrats will try to cement their gains among Hispanics voters by pushing for immigration reform that includes amnesty and a path for citizenship for illegal aliens. Obama has indicated that immigration reform will be among his top second-term priorities. Republicans will be sure to counter with measures of their own, with Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) certain to take a lead role.

11. *Labor-Union Battles*

As their power steadily erodes, labor unions will train their sites on efforts to reduce collective bargaining rights, roll back lavish government pensions, and expand right-to-work states. After victories last year in Wisconsin, Michigan and even liberal California cities like San Diego and San Jose, the anti-union forces will look to find new territory to liberate.

12. *War On Terror*

While the world remains a dangerous place, how to conduct the war-on-terror will continue to be debated. Conservatives have reason to be concerned about the erosion of certain civil liberties under the Patriot Act and

progressives will be increasingly concerned over Obama targeting terror suspects with drone attacks. And the issue of Transportation Security Agency overreach at airport screening stations have both sides seeing red.

13. *Marijuana Decriminalization*

Voters in Colorado and Washington passed initiatives allowing recreational use of marijuana, pushing decriminalization of the drug into the political forefront. Activists in other states are sure to follow suit with ballot-initiative attempts and the federal government will have to reconcile its policy on how to deal with the new state laws.

IV. THE WAY FORWARD

In many of the crises referred to in this paper, education plays an essential role as part of public policy to proactively deal with inequalities in educational opportunities and outcomes in multicultural societies. Educational initiatives can also help in creating a new society that not only recognizes differences, but also helps develop shared values, rights and responsibilities within communities. Unless there are concerted efforts to develop democratic engagements and build ‘communities of development and hope’, conflicts are likely to increase. Creating active citizens in poorer communities can only take place if there is deeper intercultural engagement, both within and outside educational institutions. Democratic and shared political cultures go hand-in-hand with greater levels of legitimate economic activities for all communities. Income inequalities are associated with a lack of education and social inequality. To reinstate the ‘voice’ of the disenfranchised in the curriculum requires a great deal of fine diplomacy, persistence and sophistication, particularly if the desired changes aspire not to be relegated to the margins of academic life. Reactive, rhetorical and rebellious responses in curricular terms are not only inadequate, but also counter-productive. At the same time, teacher education institutions have a major role to play in enhancing intercultural education, because the teachers act as multipliers, affecting the lives of those they teach for many generations. One of the challenges for education systems that intervene in institutions is to build inclusive public values within policies that can accommodate the notion of difference. This can be achieved by the following:

- Creating conditions for equity and belonging within diverse groups from an educational perspective.
- Developing integrative mindsets based on difference, while decreasing the levels of inequality, thus providing multiple options.
- Building, in education systems, mutuality among multi-divided groups in society leading to ‘ownership’ of these Affinities.
- Developing policies that bridge gaps between genders and groups at different levels, while nurturing notions of human rights and citizenship for the disenfranchised and excluded groups.
- Ensuring inclusive affirmative and positive action policies across population group.

V. CONCLUSION

Human Rights Project, has argued that the modern human rights system forever changed the discourse on international relations and issues "vital to human decency and peace." Moreover, he contends that the unique power of human rights inheres in their educative potential. As, human rights "provoke discussion and reflection, praise and criticism. They inform and stimulate an ongoing legal, political, and moral debate. The educative potential of human rights is best released by teaching the subject in a way that emphasizes the link to the human rights system and its structures. It is hope that, as the decade for human rights education comes to a close developers and teachers will follow and adopt a framework for teaching human rights that does not ignore the movement’s history or its institutional context.

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