

## HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Wergeland Centre's "the state of the art project" in the area of human rights education. Human rights education (HRE) is an emergent field of educational theory and practice gaining increased attention and significance across the globe. The international human rights movement, spurred by the efforts of non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and other regional human rights bodies, has broadened its focus since the late 1970s by seeking to integrate human rights concepts, norms and values within the mainstream educational systems of world states. This effort, which has gained momentum since the early 1990s has spawned a growing body of educational theory, practice and research that often intersects with activities in other fields of educational study, such as civic education, peace education, anti-racism education, Holocaust/genocide education and education for intercultural understanding.

Research in the field of HRE encompasses studies carried out in academic settings as well as those that take place in the context of program and impact evaluations. In addition, there are primary resources available in relation to the practice of HRE, such as teaching resources, syllabi, curricular policies as well as secondary resources such as conference proceedings. For the purposes of this forum, I am taking into account only formal HRE research and not the broader set of information that presents or describes HRE activities.

In presenting the most relevant and interesting areas of HRE research, I think it is helpful to being by thematically categorizing what is available. Three simple categories are: theory, implementation and evaluation. For each of these, allow me to present an overview of the kinds of research that could fall within them, some key findings to date, and what I consider to be interesting areas of investigation for each.<sup>2</sup>

**1. Theory of HRE.** This area of research related to the goals, concepts, definitions and pedagogies (including critical pedagogies) of HRE. Research falling under this category attempts to clarify what HRE is, how it relates to pedagogical conditions, how it relates to other educational approaches (such as citizenship education and peace education), and how HRE relates to other trends in education (such as globalization and trans-national curricular borrowing).

It is not possible to present a comprehensive rendering of relevant HRE research in this area, particularly in such a brief space, but I believe that some key findings to date include

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1 Tibbitts, Felisa and Fernekes, William (forthcoming). "Human Rights Education". In Totten, S. and Pederson, J.E. (eds.) *Teaching About Social Issues in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: Innovative Approaches, Programs, Strategies*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to recognize Peter Kirchschräger of the Center for Human Rights Education, University of Teacher Education Central Switzerland Lucerne, with whom I have been working in identifying these categories of HRE research.

- the lack of consensus on a clear and operational definition of HRE that can guide practice, recognizing both its legal and normative dimensions as well as its diversity of approaches
- overlapping identities of HRE with other educational approaches, in particular citizenship education and education for democratic citizenship, leading some, such as the Council of Europe, to conclude that EDC/HRE should be combined and used as a single approach in school settings
- the use of critical, emancipatory and/or transformative pedagogical approaches as an ideal within HRE practice
- the need to critique HRE in the ways that the use of the human rights normative framework is debated: on its claim of universality, as a form of (Western) cultural imperialism and in light of its ability to be relevant to local needs, cultures and values.

An area for further investigation might allow for further elucidation of HRE vis-à-vis other educational approaches in order to recognize learning areas and approaches that are unique to HRE. This should help in the development of competencies and standards for practice, which the HRE field is currently lacking.

**2. Implementation of HRE.** This research includes presentations of methodologies, curriculum, policies, training programs, as well as conditions promoting HRE practice including curricular and policy frameworks, national human rights environments and the roles of key actors such as non-governmental organizations, educational policymakers and inter-governmental agencies. Examples of research include the practices of HRE, including curricular resources and programming of all kinds (formal, non-formal, educator preparation).

Some key findings related to implementation:

- challenges related to the implementation of HRE in schools, including lack of teacher knowledge about human rights and a lack of motivation to teach the subject and a general lack of curricular space
- good practice in relation to the design of HRE training programs with adults and with some HRE programs (mostly of a nonformal educational nature) carried out with youth
- the link between HRE, whole school approaches and school development in promoting a school culture that reflects human rights values
- the tendency for curricular frameworks to include quite limited references to human rights, i.e., presenting human rights in a quite philosophical and/or legal way that make them conceptually abstract for students or focusing on human rights in the context of violations that take place in other parts of the world.
- a lack of recognition and support for HRE among educational actors while at the same time quite active support coming from the non-governmental sector
- country-level predictors for the integration of HRE within national curriculum, especially countries in post-conflict and post-totalitarian political stages.

An area for further investigation, given that HRE is seen as an international movement, would be the conditions promoting its practice. Such conditions include national political or policy contexts as well as conditions in individual schools or schooling systems. Research might also assist us in identifying differences in school and non-school HRE practices and how to successfully involve teacher training institutions and government agencies in HRE.

**3. Evaluation of HRE.** This research and evaluation studies investigate the results of HRE, including outcomes on the learner, educator, classroom/learning environment, institutions, community/society.

In general, we find a lack of impact evaluations to draw upon. However, some key findings related to evaluations carried out to date:

- methodological challenges related to the study of HRE in schools, as school-based programming is often cross-curricular, short-term and infused within other subject areas
- the relationship between pedagogy/methods of instruction and human rights learning
- the “action” gap between HR awareness and knowledge and participation in the political domain or taking steps to change behaviors in inter-personal relationships
- the receptivity to HRE for individuals with particular background characteristics (e.g., highly empathetic persons, membership in a vulnerable group)

In terms of areas for further investigation, I believe that we need more examples of HRE evaluations, in particular impact assessments. Some impact evaluation studies have begun to identify areas of investigation and tools for measuring learner outcomes such as learners’ awareness of and views about human rights and the importance of caring about the situation of others suffering from human rights violations. As new studies emerge, scholars will be able to benefit from the research designs and tools that have been developed.

## HRE RESEARCH EXAMPLES

Below is a listing of examples of recent HRE research that has been carried out and which are readily available online. [*Note to Claudia: I can provide fuller bibliographies and URLs for the resources below.*]

*Journal of Social Science Education* (2006). Special issue on International Perspectives on Human Rights Education. <http://www.jsse.org/2006-1/index.html>

[Human Rights Education in German Schools and Post-Secondary Institutions: Results of a Study](#) (Lothar Müller, Amsterdam/Cambridge, 2009).

[Human Rights Training for Adults: What Twenty-six Evaluation Studies Say About Design, Implementation and Follow-Up](#) (Katharine Teleki, Cambridge, 2007).

[Rights Respect and Responsibility. Report on the Hampshire County Initiative](#) (Katherine Covell & R. Brian Howe, -, 2007).

[Baseline Study on Human Rights Education in Armenia](#) (Lucig Danielian, Lilit Umroyan and Theresa Khorozyan, Yerevan, 2005).

[An Evaluation of UNESCO Publications on Human Rights Education. Report to UNESCO Section of Education for Universal Values](#) (Audrey Osler, Hugh Starkey and Kerry Vincent, n.p., 2002).

The “Research and Evaluation” section of HREA’s On-Line Library ([http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base\\_id=103&language\\_id=1&category\\_id=4&category\\_type=3](http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=103&language_id=1&category_id=4&category_type=3)) contains over 70 research and evaluation studies, tools and resources.

The three resources that follow are not available online but are sources that might be consulted for those interested in cross-national HRE research.

*Intercultural Education*, (2005). Special issue on Human Rights Education and Transformational Learning. 16(2).

Ramirez, F.O.; Suarez, D.; and Meyer, J.W. (2006). “The Worldwide Rise of Human Rights Education,” pp. 35-52. In A. Benavot and C. Braslavsky (Eds.) *School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective: Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) and Springer.

Torney-Purta, J.; Barber, C.H.; Wilkenfeld, B. (2008). “How Adolescents in Twenty-Seven Countries Understand, Support and Practice Human Rights.” *Journal of Social Issues*.