

EDITORIAL

Building a global human rights education research community

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In this edition of HRER, we highlight new efforts to develop a sustainable community of global human rights education research. Human rights education (HRE) developed in many forms as a field of practice in the second half of the twentieth century, promoted by non-governmental organisations, various UN initiatives and other intergovernmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe. The first purpose of HRE was to promote human rights as a ‘common language of humanity’, as expressed by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (UN, 1998). The UN Secretary-General’s address, made nearly 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), celebrated the lives of human rights leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., for whom a guiding principle of struggle was non-violence.

Broadly speaking, HRE is concerned with enabling engaged citizens across the globe to understand and embrace the principles of human dignity and equality, and to accept responsibility, not only for the rights of those close to hand, but to defend the rights of all people everywhere. As such, the human rights project and that of human rights education can be characterised as a cosmopolitan endeavour (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 1996; Osler & Starkey, 2003; 2005).

In the first phase of explicit HRE scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, the focus moved beyond law schools to address informal education (Baxi, 1997), school education (Torney-Purta, 1984; Shafer, 1987; Tarrow, 1987 & 1992; Cunningham 1991; Starkey, 1991; Lynch et al., 1992; Osler & Starkey, 1994; Alderson, 1999; Shiman, 1999), and professional training (Lister, 1991; Osler, 1994 & 2000). There was a strong element of advocacy and awareness-raising, and early scholarly recognition of human rights education as a human right (Osler & Starkey, (2018 [1996]; Ó Cuanacháin, 2010).

While HRE has an established base in university law schools in many regions of the globe, it is only in the 21st century that there has been an expansion of empirical research into human rights education in pre-school, primary and secondary school settings, as well as in informal environments. There has been a focus on both established democracies and conflict-ridden regions. This interest is reflected in the growing number of doctoral studies published, from the first decade of the 21st century onwards (for example, Carter, 1999; Carolan, 2000; Ó Cuanacháin, 2004;

Hudson, 2006; Al-Nakib, 2012; Struthers, 2015; Abu Moghli, 2016; Mejias, 2012; Vesterdal, 2016; Hall, 2018). While a significant number of these studies addresses citizenship and social studies education, others address activism as learning, school leadership and culture, or focus specifically on child rights.

Today, HRE is developing in a variety of forms, some of which might be characterised as transformative in intent (Osler, 2016). To strengthen and develop this fast-growing field, we applied to the World Educational Research Network (WERA) to support an International Research Network (IRN) on Human Rights Education. This was established in Spring 2019, with many members of the HRER International Editorial Board as core members, and was launched in London in June 2019. The coordinators are Audrey Osler (USN, Norway) and Hugh Starkey (UCL Institute of Education, UK). The two pillars of the network are *Human Rights Education Review* and the International Conference on Education and Democratic Citizenship (ICEDC), based at UCL.

Like our academic colleagues across the globe, we have sought to find new ways of working during the pandemic and so in 2021 we launched a WERA IRN HRE webinar series. The IRN is open to all researchers whose work addresses human rights education, while the webinars are open to researchers at all career stages, to NGOs, and others interested in or responsible for HRE in different settings, ranging from local authorities to intergovernmental organisations. To date, we have attracted participants from North and Latin America, from across Europe and from a range of African and Asian nations. Webinar Series 1 runs from January to June 2021 and further details can be found in HRER announcements. We aim to create an opportunity for supportive but critical debate of key questions in the field of HRE and enable an exchange of views between researchers and practitioners.

Although many of our planned activities have been postponed due to the pandemic, members of the HRER core editorial team (Flatås, Osler, Stachurska-Kounta, Stokke) prepared papers for a special panel at the 2020 NERA conference in Turku, Finland on 'The future of HRE in the Nordic region', where Gunilla Holm (Helsinki University) acted as respondent. This Special Issue of HRER draws on six selected papers intended for presentation at the 2020 ICEDC in London, which was designed as a special contribution to the WERA IRN but unfortunately cancelled.

Responding to Walter Parker's challenge to human rights educators in Volume 1(1) of *HREER*, Lee Jerome, Anna Liddle and Helen Young's article 'Talking about rights without talking about rights: on the absence of knowledge in classroom discussions' reports on research in three secondary schools in England where students were engaged in deliberative discussion of controversial issues. The authors examine the need to be more explicit about what knowledge might sit at the heart of a curriculum for HRE. From their analysis, the authors share four insights: there is a need to be more explicit about what constitutes human rights knowledge; HRE requires the development of political understanding, which moves beyond individual empathy; educators need to value the process of deliberative discussions and avoid a push for conclusive answers; and students need support to draw on knowledge from a range of disciplines.

In a study that focuses on two UNICEF programmes, Megan Devonald and her co-authors focus on the actual contribution and potential of HRE to support adolescent refugees in non-formal humanitarian contexts. Their mixed-method study concludes that in general terms the programme targeting Syrian refugees in Jordan fosters active citizenship, life skills and empowerment, although the authors

note that concerns about girls' safety prevent them from accessing some elements of the initiative. By contrast, the programme for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh fails to provide meaningful HRE for a variety of reasons, related in part to the refugees' inability to leave the camp and an unwillingness by either the host or home country to allow refugees access to the curricula of their respective authorities. The authors conclude that teachers in humanitarian programmes need thorough training to ensure a proper integration of human rights education relevant to students' immediate and medium-term needs.

Francesca Zanatta addresses teacher education, exploring the potential of a child rights' programme to contribute to transformative human development. Her focus of analysis is a Relationships and Sex Education module that draws on queer theory and critical pedagogy. Based on data from focus groups with students, the author finds constructive tensions and potential conflicts between future teachers' personal values, professional roles, and the course framework. She concludes that intersectional children's rights education offers a unique opportunity for students to question existing knowledge, engage with the political, and navigate ethical dilemmas.

Vanessa Hughes draws on an ethnographic case study of a London secondary school English as a Second Language classroom to consider the experiences of teachers and newly arrived migrant children. Hughes uncovers how students and teachers find themselves at the intersection of conflicting government policies. Specifically, UK immigration policy agendas that treat refugees and migrants with suspicion and actively promote a hostile environment undermine children's right to a non-discriminatory and accessible education in keeping with its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights. The author concludes that teachers perform an important role in providing a safe educational space for the integration of refugee children.

In a second article addressing UK policy, Hans Svennevig, Lee Jerome and Alex Elwick critically examine policy approaches for countering violent extremism (CVE) in education, raising issues of wider relevance to CVE programmes in other national contexts. The authors review the UK government website *Educate Against Hate*, and seek to evaluate the extent to which it is consistent with human rights principles. They argue that the advice, guidance and resources are variable in quality and often inconsistent. They further suggest that the materials ignore or undermine children's rights, treating children as potential victims with little agency, and perpetuating discriminatory stereotypes. The authors propose an alternative approach for CVE that is consistent with the principles of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, an approach that acknowledges young people's agency and ensures proper representation of different cultural and ethnic groups. Importantly, they argue that we address extremism in a more nuanced manner, one that recognises and permits educational autonomy.

The final paper in this edition is a study by Anatoli Rapoport, exploring the potential synergies and the complementarity of HRE and global citizenship education (GCE) within the United States. Rapoport examines the standards (content and skills) published by individual states across the United States, which set the framework for textbook production and curriculum development in the teaching of social studies. Rapoport is interested in whether the standards make an explicit link between the two concepts. As an advocate for GCE, he considers whether and how a human rights

discourse may enable broader acceptance of global citizenship, particularly in conservative environments.

We hope you will enjoy this special issue and that you find these varied articles a stimulus to further research and scholarship in HRE.

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