



Human Rights Education and UPR Processes: The U.S. Experience

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Copenhagen Symposium 10-11 Dec 2014

What's happening in US schools?

- Do your state Social Studies standards mention the term “human rights”? The “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”? International humanitarian law (Geneva Conventions)?
- Is HRE included in required courses?
- Do you know of teaching and learning materials available to support HRE in the curriculum?



HRE USA (www.hreusa.net)

- * The mission: to advance HRE in US schools.
- * Formally launched in 2012. Now has over 400 members.
- * Strategic plan for US schools
- * Policy/Advocacy Working Group



Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

- All countries are obligated to participate every four years (no exceptions!)
- The international human rights standards that apply to the review include not only the treaties that the government has signed, but the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which is broader)
- Governments are supposed to submit a report to the UN and engage in a peer review with other countries
- It is possible for civil society organizations to consult with the government on their report and also to submit their own

Consultation on Status of HRE



- First time a UPR process consultative process focused on HRE
- HRE USA carried out consultations in three cities (SF, NYC and Boston) and an online survey of members
- Collaborated with US HR Network and HRE 2020

Process

- Started "small" – focusing just on HRE in schools and working within the existing network. Will be more ambitious next time.
- Ultimately involved a team of four key writers/editors but with multiple opportunities for review by the HRE USA SC.
- We learned as we went along: integrating results, recommendations and mid-point review of UPR Cycle 1.
- Formatting of report (Findings, Best Practices and Recommendations) and focus on three key areas.

Purposes

- Educate HRE practitioners about UN mechanisms (UPR specifically) and reinforce “glocal” perspective
- Educate teachers and other educational personnel about HRE, recruit for HRE USA
- Educate the U.S. State Department about HRE
- Develop a platform for HRE advocacy between now and the third cycle (already being used at state level)

Products of Consultation

- Prepared a Stakeholder Report with key recommendations to OHCHR in September 2014
- Submitted to State Department in December 2014
- Preparing two-page memo of “actionable points” to lobby HRE-friendly member states between January and May 11 2015



Curriculum Standards



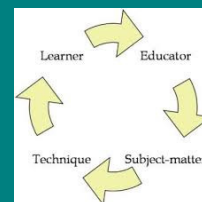
Key problems:

- The federal government lacks coordination, leadership and oversight in supporting state-level implementation of HRE
- At the state level, curriculum standards related to HRE are disparate and unregulated. Only 39 states even mention HR in their Social Studies standards and among them only 22 contain the UDHR (2014).
- Human Rights are most often taught strictly through a historical lens without attention to contemporary application.
- Human rights are taught without attention to HR skills and attitudes.

Curriculum

Recommendations:

- The U.S. DoE should encourage, support (technically and financially) state and local efforts to incorporate HRE in legislation and departmental policies.
- HRE should be incorporated within the curriculum standards of key subject areas such as Social Studies



Teacher Preparation

Key findings:

- The vast majority of teacher training programs do not require teachers to be proficient in HRE.
- The same is true for other personnel who work with children and youth in schools.



Teacher Preparation

Recommendations:

- The U.S. government should work with legislatures and credentialing/accreditation entities to ensure HRE in education programs for teachers, administrators and other educational personnel working in schools that receive federal funding.
- Also for social workers, paraprofessionals, special education staff, juvenile justice personnel and other providers of school programming that receive federal funding.

School Environment

Findings:

- Bullying continues to be a significant problem in the United States and lacks a coordinated response from federal, state and local governments, as well as district and school officials.

School Environment

Recommendations:

- The U.S. government should provide monetary and technical assistance to non-governmental organizations, institutions of higher education and school districts to ensure **safe and welcoming school environments**.
- ...to adopt **social emotional learning (SEL) standards**
- ...adopt **strong anti-bullying legislation**.

Reflections

HRE supports a broader effort by HR groups in the U.S. to focus on domestic human rights applications, wider use of human rights discourse, integration of ECOSOC rights and ratification of human rights instruments

Short term goals involve "neutralization" and expansion of use of human rights terms in curriculum schools. Links with "social justice" teachers and anti-bullying, reformatory discipline policies help to promote access to schools.

However, "culture wars" and school board politics remain a genuine challenge

Reflections

Need to keep the vision of the core, unique approach of HRE (e.g., emancipatory and transformative education). If we are reduced to value of "non discrimination" there is a diluted "added value" of HRE.

We should remain aware that:

- Values in the school environments are often oriented towards pro-social behavior and social control
- Schools are bureaucratic, regulated institutions
- Schools are reflections of community values and, in this respect, can be seen as "conservative" organizations.
- In the end, HRE should help schools and teachers do their jobs better.