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Sandra Sirota

University of Connecticut, sandra.sirota@uconn.edu

Glenn Mitoma

University of Connecticut, glenn.mitoma@uconn.edu

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Preparing Educators, Advocates, and Allies: Teacher Education in the HRE Movement

Sandra L. Sirota* and Glenn Mitoma**
University of Connecticut

Abstract

Despite several decades of international initiatives designed to promote human rights education (HRE) at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level

* **Sandra L. Sirota** is Assistant Professor in Residence of Experiential Global Learning and Human Rights with the University of Connecticut's Human Rights Institute. She conducts research on human rights and social justice education in the United States and South Africa. She served on the founding steering committee of Human Rights Educators USA and is a steering committee member of the University and College Consortium for Human Rights Education. Previously, she taught human rights courses in New York City high schools. sandra.sirota@uconn.edu

** **Glenn Mitoma** is Assistant Professor of Human Rights and Education and the director of Dodd Impact at the University of Connecticut. His research and teaching focus on the role of education in advancing respect for human rights, and the history of HRE. As Dodd Impact Director, Glenn oversees efforts to advance a culture of human rights through programs in HRE, business and human rights, and democracy and dialogues. glenn.mitoma@uconn.edu

and the more recent trend of emergent human rights programs in colleges and universities in the United States (Advocates for Human Rights, 2016; Cargas, 2019), there is little evidence that United States teacher education programs have engaged human rights as a meaningful component in the preparation of future educators. In this article, we offer data from two separate studies showing the current state of HRE in teacher education. We consider the human rights of educators and learners in and outside of the education system. We examine the struggles they face in not just teaching and learning, but in advocating for and promoting human rights and social justice. We conclude with opportunities and challenges for the future of global HRE for teachers. As human rights educators and scholars with nearly thirty years of combined experience and dedication to the field, we welcome this opportunity to reflect on the past and imagine the future of human rights teacher education. We draw from both the non-profit world at the local, national, and global levels and HRE at the secondary school and university levels. Of note, we draw heavily from our positionality as scholar-practitioners in the United States and, most recently, at the University of Connecticut. The examples we share are one piece of a rich and diverse picture of the growing global field of HRE.

Keywords: Pre-service teacher education, Teacher education, Human Rights Education

“Nothing will change until we educate those who are going to educate our students.”

—HRE USA Steering Committee Member and Director of a University Human Rights Program in Southern United States

Introduction

International initiatives designed to promote human rights education (HRE) at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level and the more recent trend of emergent human rights programs in colleges and universities in the United States have been increasing in the last few decades (Advocates for Human Rights, 2016; Cargas, 2019). Despite this, little

evidence exists to demonstrate that United States teacher education programs have engaged human rights as a meaningful component in the preparation of future educators. Elsewhere, particularly in Europe and Latin America, and now in South Africa, future educators are encouraged by national policy to learn about human rights and explore how human rights might inform their professional practices. In Denmark, for example, the legislative framework governing teacher education curricula invokes human rights on three separate occasions (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2016), while in Paraguay, the national teacher education standards note that, through democratic education, human rights “permeates the entire teacher education curriculum” and “helps create a culture of respect for the dignity of the human person (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights 2004, p. 22).” In South Africa, the new national “Teaching for All” program is “grounded in the human rights movement” (Teaching for All, 2021). The program trains pre-service and in-service teachers to infuse HRE into the Life Orientation course curriculum, encourages universities to develop core courses in HRE for pre-service teachers, and facilitates the publication of nine textbooks to support this comprehensive effort.

Undoubtedly, the reluctance of the United States federal government to participate in the international human rights system generally—and HRE initiatives specifically—hampers efforts to increase the legibility of human rights within the education system. Even so, institutions of higher education that provide teacher education in the United States have the opportunity and responsibility to equip teachers with the knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes necessary to support their future students’ right to HRE.

The United Nations (U.N.) Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only recognizes the human right to education “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” in Article 26 but also privileges “teaching and education” as the primary mode for promoting respect for all human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Over the past seventy-five years, this has been a difficult promise to realize, as the U.N. and states emphasized legal and political approaches to human rights. More recently, the resurgence of authoritarianism and racism, and the deepening

of economic inequality, present clear challenges to the entire human rights enterprise. Even so, recent developments within the field suggest some key opportunities to recenter HRE by prioritizing integration with teacher education.

HRE as an academic field has expanded in recent years. Sarita Cargas (2019) has identified 35 Bachelor's Degree programs in human rights across Asia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America. Since the adoption of the 2011 United Nations Declaration on HRE and Training, the range and depth of scholarship focused on HRE has increased dramatically. Two new journals, the *International Journal of Human Rights Education* and *Human Rights Education Review*, were established, and a special issue of one of the two top journals in human rights, the *Journal of Human Rights*, was focused on Human Rights in Higher Education. In the past several years, many monographs and edited volumes have appeared, including *Teaching Human Rights in Primary Schools* by Alison Struthers (2020), *Human Rights and Schooling: An Ethical Framework for Teaching for Social Justice* by Audrey Osler (2016); *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis* by Monisha Bajaj (2017); *Critical Human Rights, Citizenship, and Democracy Education* by André Keet and Michalinos Zembylas (2018); and, most recently, *Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction* by Maria Hantzopoulos and Monisha Bajaj (2021).

This academic production is entwined with emerging policy and practice. HRE has been promoted through networks in the United States such as Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA) and the University and College Consortium for Human Rights Education (UCCHRE). These networks have fostered the development and dissemination of new strategies for teaching and learning human rights from primary grades through graduate school, as well as the incorporation of references to human rights within state social studies standards (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2016).

These trends have encouraged calls to infuse human rights into formal teacher preparation (Sirota, 2019; Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017; Cassidy, Brunner, & Webster, 2014). Advances have been made in the development of standards and frameworks (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2016) and real progress

in policy implementation in some places, such as Sweden (Adami, 2014) and South Africa (Teaching for All, 2021). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that human rights remain marginal at best in teacher education, particularly in the United States. In this article, we offer data from two separate studies showing the current state of HRE in teacher education. We compare the prevalence of HRE to similar forms of education, in particular social justice education (SJE). We examine how the differences and similarities between HRE and SJE allow for a merging of the two that can strengthen efforts to challenge injustice. We consider the human rights of educators and learners in and outside of the education system and the struggles they face in not just teaching and learning, but in advocating for and promoting human rights and social justice. We conclude by identifying opportunities and challenges for the future of global HRE for teachers. As human rights educators and scholars with nearly thirty years of combined experience and dedication to the field, we welcome this opportunity to reflect on the past and imagine the future of human rights teacher education. We draw from both the non-profit world at the local, national, and global levels and HRE at the secondary school and university levels. Of note, we draw heavily from our positionality as scholar-practitioners in the United States and, most recently, at the University of Connecticut. The examples we share represent one piece of a rich and diverse picture of the growing global field of HRE.

Human Rights in Teacher Education: State of the Field

In the past five years, we have conducted studies on HRE in the United States, gaining insight into the opportunities and challenges for HRE in teacher education. As part of a recent civil society stakeholder ‘shadow’ report to the United Nations, Mitoma led a team of student researchers in gathering data on human rights in United States teacher education programs. Submitted as part of a mid-term report of the United States’ Universal Periodic Review human rights performance, this shadow report found, unsurprisingly, very limited integration of human rights into teacher education (HRE USA & UCCHRE, 2018). Data was gathered from publicly available information about university and college education programs,

including teacher education programs, and analyzed to determine alignment with HRE standards. The findings were summarized in the mid-term stakeholder report submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in January 2018, and are expanded upon below. While this research is not necessarily conclusive, the evidence suggests both the scope of the problem and some opportunities for addressing it.

Researchers examined online information from 76 different education programs at universities and colleges accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The institutions examined here are a sample of convenience from the approximately 800 CAEP-accredited programs in the country, and represent public and private institutions across fifteen different states. Data was collected regarding human rights references in five different categories: 1) mission statements, 2) teacher education requirements, 3) courses and curriculum, 4) human rights academic programs (non-teacher education), and 5) formal HRE centers, institutes, or research programs. These five dimensions were selected to provide evidence of how and where human rights might manifest in institutions already providing traditional teacher education. Examining mission statements or other general statements of vision and values allowed us to identify whether the discourse of human rights was directly invoked with respect to the overall purpose and commitments of the institutions and programs. While mission statements provide insight into institutions' general orientations, formal teacher education program requirements also indicate the extent to which human rights are included as specific competencies for future educators. The final three categories were intended to capture information about other opportunities for teacher candidates to engage with human rights through their teacher education program: courses and curriculum reflected the range of opportunities available to students in addition to requirements; optional human rights academic programs, including degrees or certificates, which teacher candidates might enroll in; and formalized centers, institutes, or research programs that focused on HRE.

However, the limitations of this pilot research are evident in the sampling as there was no effort made to systematically reflect the range of variables among teacher education programs, including size, demography, geographic location, or institutional type. Further, what is available online represents programs with varying degrees of precision, based on how often the websites are updated or what level of programmatic detail is provided. Particularly with regard to course content, course titles and catalogue descriptions tend toward generality (i.e., 'Foundations of Education') which offer very little insight into what is actually being taught in those courses.¹ Also, no data was gathered on courses outside of those offered within schools or departments of education, and therefore this research does not reflect what some students may encounter in the rest of the university as they fulfill content requirements with courses that may include human rights, as, for instance, offered by history or political science departments. Finally, no data was collected on the personal human rights commitments of faculty, students, or others, which may orient or affect their work.

Separately, as part of a larger study on how the Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA) organization influences HRE in the United States, Sirota interviewed 32 human rights educators, scholars, and activists throughout the country. The interviewees offered their own experiences of the state of HRE in teacher education. Notably, the sample size of 32 was small and participants were selected due to their role as leaders of HRE USA, rather than their experience with teacher education. Mitigating these limitations, more than half of the study participants were considered experts in the HRE field due to their decades of creating curricula, training educators, conducting and publishing research, and teaching HRE in K-12 classrooms, institutes of higher education, and non-profit organizations. Findings from

¹ That there may be "hidden" human rights curriculum in many of these programs is not supported by the findings of Fernekes (2014), who directly inquired with teacher preparation providers in New Jersey and concluded flatly, "HRE does not occupy a significant place in social studies teacher education coursework and curricula" (p. 25).

these interviews and Mitoma's study demonstrated a dearth of HRE opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers.

In Mitoma's study, researchers found no reference to human rights in university, school, or program mission statements, nor any evidence that explicit human rights content was a requirement of any teacher education program at the 76 providers examined. Further, the data suggest that teacher candidates have extremely limited opportunities to pursue structured human rights curricula even as an option. The lack of HRE for teachers was reflected in Sirota's interviews, as the following excerpt from a scholar and human rights educator in the Northeast United States who has been teaching in the field for decades demonstrates. He emphasized that HRE opportunities were largely unavailable for pre-service and in-service teachers, pointing to the need for support from school administrators:

I think that we've done a lousy job in teacher education. One of the real deficits I think we have is that we have very little presence in preservice ed... But you also have to educate educators, so the people in the classroom need to learn about human rights. And I say this with all due respect - that's insufficient too. I would say the biggest void in HRE in pre-K to 12 education is school admin. I can't find a position statement or a focus on human rights in school admin literature. [A professor in educational leadership & administration] and I had a discussion about this and she agreed - the same thing - and that's her field. Her field is school admin, education leadership. (as cited in Sirota, 2019, p. 333)

In addition to human rights, Mitoma's research team coded for the presence of related fields and looked for the keywords 'democracy,' 'dignity,' 'diversity,' 'equity,' 'global,' 'international,' 'justice,' 'multicultural,' 'rights' (without 'human'), and 'social justice.' Of the 76 institutions examined, 36 were found to have programs, courses, centers, and/or mission statements that invoked 'diversity,' 33 referenced 'social justice,' 29 referenced 'global,' 14 referenced 'multicultural,' and 12 referenced 'equity.' References to 'human rights' were limited to programs in 6 institutions, and, as noted above, even

when such human rights-oriented programs exist, they are not particularly integrated with the teacher education programs. These programs, including an Urban Education and Social Justice Master's program with a teaching credential at the University of San Francisco, provide learning opportunities in areas related to human rights, but there is little evidence of explicit exposure to human rights as a critical content area or approach. Courses in multicultural education or education for diverse learners are far more widespread and are often a required part of the curriculum for teacher candidates. The University of Connecticut, for example, requires all teacher candidates to enroll in 'Multicultural Education, Equity, and Social Justice.'

The handful of opportunities that do exist for pre-service teachers to pursue HRE come with their own constraints. At three reviewed institutions (University of Connecticut, Boston College and the University of Massachusetts-Boston), students enrolled in teacher education programs have the opportunity to pursue a graduate certificate in human rights as a supplement to the core education curriculum. While the certificates are technically open to teacher candidates, given the other requirements of the teacher education programs, in most cases, students have limited space in their schedules to complete the mandatory courses.

At the University of Connecticut, while the graduate certificate in human rights is open to pre-service teachers, constraints in the schedule make it difficult to meet the requirements of both the certificate and the teacher education program. For example, one student who was particularly motivated to earn the certificate had to be flexible and creative in order to do so - by enrolling in classes during the intersession and completing an independent study. Students who are interested in HRE may, alternatively, enroll in a human rights education course to fulfill the requirement to take a course on diversity. Yet, because it is one of many options, many students complete the teacher education program without ever having a human rights education course.

One institution, the University of San Francisco, offers an MA degree program in HRE through the School of Education. This 30-credit program is designed to accommodate in-service teachers and other working professionals such as those in the non-profit sector. It does not currently

integrate with the credentialing MA programs also offered in the USF School of Education. Recent attempts to offer a credential in HRE through the School of Education were unable to overcome such practical considerations as limited space in the teacher education curriculum, cost to students, and state requirements. Bureaucratic obstacles and state credentialing requirements had paused the potential for collaboration at the time of this writing.

Similarly, Teachers College (TC) offers a degree concentration in Peace and HRE for students pursuing a Master's or Doctorate in International Educational Development, but this program is located in a department separate from the credentialing teacher education programs. At both TC (Department of International & Transcultural Studies) and USF (Department of International & Multicultural Education), the departments housing HRE programs have an international focus, suggesting one of the primary pathways by which human rights intersects with the field of education is through engagement with issues and practices beyond the classroom and outside the United States.

USF's HRE course offerings are unparalleled and include 'International Human Rights Law and Advocacy,' 'HRE: Pedagogy and Praxis,' and 'HRE: History, Philosophy and Current Debates.' Other explicit human rights coursework offered in education schools or programs was rare, with only five other examined institutions (Boston College, Eastern Connecticut State University, Stanford University, Columbia University Teachers College, and University of Connecticut) listing HRE courses in their published catalogs. This suggests narrow opportunities for teacher candidates to gain exposure to human rights from an education perspective, even at universities where human rights programs are established outside of the school of education.

Two institutions housed human rights centers or programs administratively within their school or college of education. The Lynch School of Education at Boston College houses the Center for Human Rights and International Justice (CHRIJ), which supports research projects focused on the human rights dimensions of gender in post-conflict societies and migration, in addition to the graduate certificate in human rights. There is

little evidence of institutionalized connections with the educational or teacher education programs, aside from the courses offered by CHRJI Co-Director M. Briton Lykes, who is appointed in the Counseling, Developmental & Educational Psychology department. Neither her co-director nor any of the seven Affiliated Faculty have academic appointments in the School of Education. More centrally dedicated to engaging educators, Montclair State University's Holocaust, Genocide, and HRE Project (HGHREP) in the College of Education and Human Services offers a range of teacher training and professional development, instructional resources, and undergraduate internships dedicated to developing and delivering HRE modules in local schools. In partnership with the state Commission on Holocaust Education, the HGHREP leverages New Jersey's statutory requirement that schools provide education on the Holocaust and genocide to conduct HRE. Even so, this outreach work appears to have little direct visibility in the undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs—for instance, there are no HRE courses listed in the catalog—at MSU.

The few HRE opportunities for pre-service educators mean that these students graduate without understanding how to teach human rights, even in states with human rights included in curriculum standards. This point was emphasized in an interview Sirota conducted with a university professor from New England who stated that even though the state curriculum enumerates human rights in social standards, teacher education does not:

They do social studies education. This is part of the curriculum. My guess is somebody might talk about [human rights] but I know people at the university who do the social studies education do almost nothing specifically addressing human rights. Although I've tried. I've tried...if you counted the graduates from the university's teacher education programs and asked them what is the UDHR, I'd be amazed if 50% could say they know what it is. That's my guess. And I had a curriculum resource center for 30 years - global, multicultural studies; human rights was a part of that but it was essentially serving teachers who graduated. (as cited in Sirota, 2019, p. 329)

A number of study participants echoed this finding and shared their concerns about underprepared educators bringing HRE to their students. They worried, for example, that without proper training, educators might not be confident in facilitating difficult conversations around sensitive human rights topics. Other concerns included a lack of funding, unsupportive administrations, and pushback from parents. As one human rights educator from the Midwest shared:

Funding, I would say, is always a challenge, because to do it right, you really need to have educators trained, because I think in our desire to spread HRE, sometimes we don't go deep enough, and if you don't go deep enough, you can do more harm than good...I've seen some of those efforts, where you just come in and give an HRE lesson, but if you don't really internalize it, if you don't have deep enough conversations and if, as an educator, if you don't fully serve as a role model, then it's not ... It's going to be just another subject.

The conversations that are really challenging that are happening in the classroom, it's a real skill, it's a real life-long skill that ... I can't say that I've mastered anything. I'm on the path to learning it. That's why a lot of educators are really scared to take this on, and don't have enough support either from administrators or from others. The younger ones are very afraid of the parents' reactions, so we've had that where the parents are [asking], "Why did we talk about Islam in that classroom?" Those are the challenges, I would say.

Over a decade since the World Programme for HRE's (WPHRE) First Phase Plan of Action called on U.N. Member States to provide educators 'the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies to facilitate the learning and practice of human rights in schools' (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO 2006, p. 19), we find little evidence that HRE has made significant inroads into the professional preparation of educators in the United States. Meanwhile, of the 76 states which submitted WPHRE First Phase national evaluation reports in

2009 (the United States was not among them), only one indicated that no human rights training occurred in pre-service, in-service, or administrative teacher education (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). If American educators are to avoid falling further behind their global colleagues in HRE practice, the colleges and universities that provide teacher education will need to overcome the tradition of human rights isolationism that defines United States policy.

Where Do We Go from Here? Meeting the Challenge of HRE for Teachers

To a large extent, the integration of human rights in teacher education will depend on how it addresses or aligns with key challenges faced by the field, none more pressing than the shortage of candidates. In recent years, enrollment in teacher education programs has collapsed, declining by over 50% (from 725,518 to 336,658) since 2010. All of these declines were in university and college-based teacher education programs, with non-college-based alternative certification programs (like the for-profit Texas Teachers of Tomorrow) posting gains in enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Although K-12 student enrollment has increased over the past 20 years, the Great Recession led to an unprecedented round of layoffs in the education sector (over 200,000), and teaching jobs had largely not returned by the time the Covid-19 pandemic struck, placing additional pressure on the field (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). A MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2013) reported only 39% of teachers were very satisfied with their job—a 25 year low—and half of American teachers (51%) felt they were under ‘great stress’ several times a week. More recently, Educators for Excellence (2018) found that many teachers felt largely unprepared by their teacher education programs to engage beyond the classroom, either with parents or families, or on policy issues impacting education.

Recent findings indicate that high school seniors are less interested in becoming teachers, citing both the low pay and the lack of autonomy as critical factors (Croft, Guffy, & Vitale, 2018). Such perceptions are, in part, rooted in the structural changes wrought by neoliberal education reform,

which, since the 1980s had reshaped public education with the market principles of competition, efficiency, and accountability (Hursh, 2007). Under the doctrine of ‘school choice,’ families were encouraged to think of public education as a private good that should maximize return-on-investment in terms of economic mobility. High-stakes testing tied to school funding, as with the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, positioned teachers as singularly responsible not only for individual student outcomes (which are largely driven by structural factors) but also for the financial viability of the school. Policymakers and the courts have often compounded these pressures by undermining teachers’ collective bargaining rights (e.g., Wisconsin Act 10, *Janus v. AFSCME*) and heightening their economic precarity.

The combined effects of the Title II ‘teacher quality’ provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act, which have been reinforced both at the state level and through accreditation processes such as those overseen by CAEP, also push teacher education programs to realign in ways that focus on a narrow range of indicators of their ‘quality’ (e.g. pass rates of graduates on state credentialing tests, student completion rates, or accreditation status) (Zeichner, 2010). The discourse of ‘accountability’ and the fetishization of quantitative metrics have created new pressures on programs to measure and report on teacher candidate potential effectiveness on individual student performance as measured by standardized tests. The rise of the Pearson-administered edTPA as a widely-adopted, high-stakes assessment of teacher candidate competency has, for instance, led to significant changes in curricular design in many programs (Bernard et al., 2019). Several studies have indicated that both the test and the resulting program redesigns reinforce structural inequities and take time away from providing students opportunities to develop valuable knowledge, skills, and practices not assessed through the edTPA (Greenblatt & O’Hara, 2015; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). As teacher education programs adapt to these mandates, they risk reinforcing those aspects of the teaching profession that make the field less attractive overall.

Given the scope of the challenges faced by teacher education programs, wider adoption of HRE principles and practices will likely hinge on whether or not such principles and practices help programs address those

challenges. Indeed, meeting these challenges will require strategies that link together rather than isolate. HRE is a potentially powerful, interlinking framework that would allow programs to orient around a basic commitment to universal values by: 1) making human rights central to the professional identity of teachers; 2) preparing teachers to serve as agents of change in their classrooms and communities; and 3) providing a framework for addressing systemic oppression and inequity. Emphasizing the human rights of educators and learners, proponents can help make HRE central to the professional and civic identities of teachers.

Adoption of HRE could be facilitated through its collaboration with related, more widely adopted forms of education such as social justice, multicultural, and global education. As social justice was identified in nearly half of the teacher education programs by Mitoma and his research team, in collaborating with social justice education (SJE) oriented networks, programs, and organizations, teacher education programs could build on the shared values of SJE and HRE that are already present in these programs. SJE is less formalized than HRE and represents a particular kind of educator stance as well as a commitment to a range of justice-oriented pedagogies and perspectives. SJE centers the educator's role as a political actor, often rooted in an understanding of the relationship between educator and student advanced by Paulo Freire (1972). SJE and other related frameworks emphasize structures and mechanisms of oppression, with the social analysis of power often forming a key part of the curriculum, and attention is given to marginalized voices and participatory strategies that develop community capacity to resist and transform those social relations. Thus, SJE objectives are transformational, both for individuals and the society, and are often embedded within or adjacent to social justice movements, with which educators and students are often engaged.

HRE and SJE are clearly intertwined, with each contributing to the promotion of rights and justice. Human rights offers a specific framework that identifies a shared set of rights for all human beings as well as mechanisms to protect those rights. While social justice does not have a shared definition or set of rights, social justice efforts are often focused on securing human rights, both economic, social, and cultural rights as well as

civil and political rights. The flexibility of social justice paired with the more defined framework of human rights can work well in tandem (Grant & Gibson, 2013). Importantly, social justice efforts have called attention to issues that should be—and eventually are—considered human rights. For example, calls for the right to same sex marriage and climate justice were social justice movements before they were considered human rights. Most recently, after decades of advocacy by social justice and human rights activists, a “clean, healthy, and sustainable environment,” was formally recognized as a human right by the United Nations in October of 2021 (OHCHR, 2021). As rights such as these have emerged and gained support, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has official recognized these rights at the international level and called for action by governments, as well as individuals, to protect them.

Teaching as a Human Rights Profession

Because the HRE framework emphasizes the ethical and political responsibilities of teaching, it can counter the exclusive focus on de-contextualized technique and practice that is encouraged by, among other things, assessments like edTPA. In this way, HRE provides an alternative grounding for understanding the professional identity of teachers, which Etzioni (1969) once noted was consigned to the status of a ‘semi-profession,’ by positioning teachers as uniquely prepared, qualified, and responsible for the complex and necessary work of advancing a culture of human rights. Further, the emphasis on critical pedagogies, relational learning, and analysis of power within the transformative strands of HRE (Tibbitts, 2015) is well suited to address the gaps identified by Ken Zeichner (2010) in the current models of practice-based teacher education around political consciousness and cultural responsiveness. Incidentally, this orientation toward justice and the positioning of educators as active human rights defenders may also serve to attract a more diverse range of students to teacher education programs (as of 2018, 76% female, 65% white) (US Department of Education, 2021), as they can recognize the profession as one that can have a transformative impact not only on individual students, but also on whole communities.

Some teacher professional organizations have begun to adopt human rights or related frames. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has gone the furthest in adopting HRE principles and standards. The primary professional organization for social studies teachers in the United States, NCSS adopted a Position Statement in 2014, and updated it in 2021, declaring HRE a “necessary element of social studies programs” and calling for a comprehensive commitment and a coordinated plan of action to (1) “recognize the importance of human rights education”; (2) “integrate human rights education into social studies curricula, schoolwide policies, and classroom practices”; (3) “develop impactful human rights educators”; (4) “foster youth engagement and voice”; and (5) “infuse human rights education into local, state, and national policies” (NCSS, 2021, pp. 2-9).

Further, NCSS (2018) has added human rights to one of five core competencies for social studies teacher education. Standard 5, “Professional Responsibility and Informed Action,” holds that teacher candidates should “reflect and expand upon their social studies knowledge, inquiry skills, and civic dispositions to advance social justice and promote human rights through informed action in schools and/or communities.” Going forward, accredited teacher education programs in social studies will be required to demonstrate they are supporting their candidates’ mastery of Standard 5—a key opportunity for integration of HRE.

Less overt but still significant, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has elevated intercultural competence as a key element of language teaching and learning. Several recent position statements, including the 2014 statement on Global Competencies, the 2016 statement on the Role of Language Learning in Valuing Diversity and Promoting Unity, and the 2019 Diversity and Inclusion in World Language Teaching and Learning, reference intercultural communication and connection as key aspects of language learning. More recently, intercultural teaching and learning is one of six research priorities for 2020-2021 for ACTFL. HRE can connect with the ACTFL emphasis on intercultural competence in ways that push beyond limited ideals of “diversity and inclusion” toward more transformative models of justice.

More broadly, the integration of HRE into teacher education programs is unlikely to have an immediate impact on one of the key challenges to recruitment: teacher salary. While human rights frames are deeply critical of both fiscal austerity and the erosion of collective bargaining rights (Balakrishnan & Heintz, 2011), providing future teachers with HRE is not necessarily the most effective means of pushing back against the neoliberal agenda. Nevertheless, doing so may be an important long-term strategy. In recent years, teachers in West Virginia, Arizona, Los Angeles and elsewhere have rediscovered their political voice, even as they report being unprepared by their teacher education programs to engage in the political arena (Educators for Excellence, 2018). Human rights-based approaches to teacher education would certainly include the development of candidates' capacity to identify violations and advocate for protection of their own human rights as teachers. By aligning teaching with other kinds of human rights practice—i.e. in the legal, medical, and political fields, for instance—human rights-based teacher education could help teachers build solidarity with allied fields as they seek to claim a larger share of both the financial resources and cultural capital in American society.

Such solidarity contributes to and results from connections between educators and professionals working to advance human rights and social justice, particularly those associated with the robust human rights civil society organizations that have formed to fill the gap created by the lack of explicit support for HRE from the federal or state governments. Formal and informal networks of educators and organizations have long sought to advance HRE in meaningful ways at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Cultivating these collaborations further can help to ensure pre-service (and in-service) teachers have access to the support, mentoring and resources that will allow them to integrate human rights into their professional practice.

Long practiced in raising public awareness, human rights advocacy organizations are increasingly developing more sophisticated education initiatives (Russell & Suarez, 2017; Tibbitts, 2015). The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama offers an example of a social justice organization that recently expanded to include HRE. EJI, which focuses on

legal representation for people who are incarcerated, has developed a public education project, including a memorial to lynching victims, a community remembrance project, books, a documentary film, and a feature film. The project offers resources specifically for educators such as lesson plans, reports, and interactive websites. EJI recognizes the importance of education in securing human rights. As they note on their website, “We are haunted by our history of racial injustice in America because we don't talk about it. Ending mass incarceration and achieving equality, justice, and fairness for all Americans starts with learning and sharing the truth about our past” (Equal Justice Initiative, 2020).

In parallel with the formation of these policies, actions, and resources, over the past ten years, educators have joined other human rights professionals to establish two national networks, HRE USA and UCCHRE. These networks create opportunities for collaborations across regions, organizations, schools, and universities. Activists, educators, and scholars who had been working in isolation or informally and sporadically with colleagues to develop HRE in their local region now have a reliable and consistent community to share ideas as well as produce and access resources and educational opportunities. Since its founding in 2011, HRE USA has supported educators in teaching human rights through initiatives such as promoting the integration of human rights standards in social studies curricula, creating an HRE curriculum integration guide, and maintaining a free database of human rights lessons based on school subject and human rights topic—vetted for quality by experts in the field and ready to implement (HRE USA, 2020).

UCCHRE supports college and university educators through its mission “to further human rights learning, research, policy, and practice within and across university and college communities” (UCCHRE, 2021). Founded in 2017, the consortium is the first of its kind in the United States, facilitating collaboration among human rights educators at the college and university level. It has created an online discussion series on teaching human rights in higher education, organized an academic reading group, presented at conferences and workshops around the world, and established an annual meeting of university and college human rights educators to collaborate on

advancing HRE. While much of the membership is located in the United States, UCCHRE plans to expand their reach to support a global community of human rights educators in universities and colleges.

Collaborations—among individuals and organizations and across cities and countries—to advance HRE and teacher education in HRE have allowed the field to make significant progress that could not happen if these entities worked in silos. In Sirota’s study on HRE USA, she found that the network structure facilitated and increased collaborations on HRE across all areas of the network including planning events, policy advocacy, research, curriculum and resource development, and organizing workshops. Strengthening and expanding these networks in deliberate ways could complement efforts to bring HRE to teacher education programs and help to ensure educators have the support and training necessary to bring HRE to their students.

Educators as Agents of Change

Human rights are valuable to educators beyond their professional identities, and can serve to orient their civic responsibilities as they navigate the complexities of taking action to support meaningful change in their schools and communities. Both directly and through fostering the civic identities of their students, teachers are uniquely well positioned to contribute to individual and collective efforts to support human rights. In recent years, for example, teachers have been at the forefront of efforts to secure protections for undocumented immigrants, ensure equality for the LGBTQIA+ community, and address systemic racism. From El Paso (DeMatthews & Cisneros, 2017) to Tennessee (Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition, 2017), teachers’ voices were critical to the pressure campaign to extend Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protections during the Trump Administration. Over 17,000 of those voices have also been raised in an open letter to President Biden to do more to support transgender youth in the face of new discriminatory policies at the state and local level (Kumashiro, 2021). And in Connecticut, teachers have joined with young people, advocates, and scholars to form the Anti-Racist

Teaching and Learning Collective (ARTLC) to “address the oppressive effects of the racism that shapes public education and society at large” through educational resources, supports, and organizing (2021).

The Anti-Racist Teaching and Learning Collective is emblematic of the rising student leadership on a range of human rights issues. Indeed, ARTLC is anchored by two youth organizations, Students for Educational Justice and Hearing Youth Voices. Connecticut has been a rich site of student activism, with youth leading protests on human rights and social justice issues that directly affect them such as the climate crisis, gun violence, and racial injustice in and out of the school system. In Manchester, CT, for example, where a human rights course is now a graduation requirement, students have advocated for changing harmful Native American mascots (McDermott, 2019). Educators there drew on HRE in order to support students in their advocacy efforts. This work has influenced other schools in the state, such as Guilford, Farmington, Newington, and Watertown, to retire their racist mascots and begin to address the colonial legacies they embody. These advocacy efforts, of course, were not always successful. Educators’ and administrators’ responses to this activism have been mixed. In Killingly, Connecticut, even as local Native American groups shared their disapproval of an offensive mascot, the school board chose to reverse an earlier decision to retire their Native American-themed mascot—perhaps the first school of the 21st century to actually reinstate a racist mascot (Beale, 2020).

These are but a few examples of the kinds of advocacy teachers and students are already engaged in, and teacher education programs must prepare future teachers to navigate their roles as advocates, allies, supporters, and mentors. In particular, Standard 5 of the NCSS teacher education standard asserts that educators “must model civic leadership and advocacy” as a core component of supporting student learning but also to advance human rights and social justice as ends in themselves (NCSS, 2018, p. 26). This call is echoed by educators within and beyond social studies in the recent report by the National Academy of Education (2021), which recognized that schools’ civic mission can only be fulfilled if teachers across all content areas are prepared to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for civic life. As contributors to that report

emphasized, the most effective forms of civic learning include rich, authentic, and engaged learning opportunities, where students have supported opportunities to take action in their communities (Conklin et. al, 2021). Such must be equally true for teachers themselves and teacher education programs should also look to foster candidates' civic identities through engaged democratic practice.

Partnerships with human rights organizations can also help teacher education programs explore activist approaches to HRE with teacher candidates and prepare them to support student human rights work beyond the classroom. Amnesty International, one of the oldest and largest global human rights organizations, has developed a number of HRE experiences in which young people actually engage in activism as they learn. Once they gain the skills to advocate, learners have an opportunity for a transformational experience in which they are empowered to advocate for individual and collective rights. Write for Rights is one such initiative. Amnesty offers the Write for Rights toolkit providing a step-by-step guide for individuals to engage in letter writing campaigns to people who have been wrongfully imprisoned and call for their release. At the classroom level, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) developed its first online course for high school and college students, based on its report, *In the Line of Fire: Human Rights and the Gun Violence Crisis in the US* (2018), and recently developed a series of lessons on national security, the *Human Rights in National Security Toolkit* (2017). At the whole school level, AIUSA provides support for schools seeking to become part of the Human Rights Friendly Schools Project (2020), in which they center their values around human rights. For much of this work, the organization has developed a teachers' guide for educators to use in their classrooms to support these programs, and regional offices have presented at the National Council for the Social Studies annual conference in recent years (Amnesty International, 2020).

The Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Memorial Human Rights Center is another human rights organization with a global reach that includes an entire program dedicated to teacher education in human rights. The organization's Teaching Human Rights program, Speak Truth to Power (STTP), "combines powerful storytelling and interactive learning to create a

global citizenry of students and teachers who are ready to end and prevent human rights abuses and violations” (RFK Human Rights, 2021). In addition to facilitating HRE for teachers, the program offers human rights curriculum and public education through its Speak Truth to Power play, art and music contests, and public exhibits on human rights.

At the local level, non-profit organizations are offering HRE in partnership with area schools and educators. The World As It Could Be (TWAICB) is one such example. Based in San Francisco, this organization partners with the University of San Francisco to offer a three-day HRE institute centered around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for teachers in the local area and across the country. TWAICB partners with other organizations such as Human Rights Educators USA (of which it is a co-founder) and the National Council for the Social Studies in creating additional HRE resources for both in-service and pre-service teachers such as curriculum and teaching guides on democracy and racial justice (The World As It Could Be, 2021).

As teacher education programs bring human rights into their curriculum, collaborating with established HRE networks, organizations, and programs such as these can help to facilitate successful integration. These collaborations support teacher candidates in learning to navigate the plethora of HRE resources now available and engaging with these organizations to take advantage of opportunities they offer. In partnering with teacher education programs, HRE organizations can benefit by amplifying their impact and improving their contributions to the field.

Equipping Teachers to Address Systemic Oppression and Inequality

The years 2020 and 2021 brought unique challenges and opportunities for educators and learners due to the immense human suffering from Covid-19, a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans, and a re-energizing of protests in support of Black lives amongst United States' policies and practices that eroded human rights for marginalized groups. In order to care for themselves and meet their students' suffering with attention and empathy

in the midst of these multiple widespread and personal human rights crises, educators need to nurture their own resilience and belong to a community of support. As teacher education in human rights evolves, building in these components will be essential if HRE is to translate into sustained action and change beyond the walls of the classroom.

Human rights have gained a greater presence in schools through the inclusion of mandatory human rights courses as well as specific content focused on particular events and on ensuring diverse cultural representation. In Connecticut, the state passed a mandate to include Holocaust and genocide education as well as courses in African-American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino studies in all public schools. In other cases, efforts to integrate such courses have been met with intense backlash such as when schools in Arizona introduced Mexican American studies courses. An intense legal battle ensued which, at one point, resulted in the courses being banned. Ultimately, a federal judge reversed that ruling, allowing the courses to proceed. Yet, challenges continue to arise. In Florida, a law was passed requiring public university faculty and students to share their political beliefs around the same time that Florida's Board of Education banned critical race theory in schools. In fact, as of this writing, at least 26 states have introduced bills limiting the teaching of critical race theory, racism, and/or sexism to varying degrees (Education Week, 2021).

In this contentious environment, the advancements in student activism and human rights content in schools point to the need for human rights educator training that covers both content and specific pedagogies of instruction. Pedagogies that are critical, decolonizing, and anti-racist offer engaged learning opportunities in which educators and learners think collaboratively about how to dismantle the oppressive societal structures that perpetuate human rights abuses and support those structures that reinforce the realization of human rights. These pedagogies must be integrated into teacher education in human rights. They require educators to confront their own positionality including how they are privileged and oppressed as well as prejudices they may hold as they will be working with students who are grappling with these ideas for themselves. Further, educators must feel comfortable addressing discriminatory remarks in the classroom and policies

and practices among faculty and administrators. This requires educators to allow their own and others' emotions in the classroom as they confront humanity at its most vulnerable.

Conclusion

The future of HRE depends in large part on the future of human rights education for educators. To build on the successes of the HRE movement in recent years, leverage the strategies of stakeholder collaboration, and emphasize the human rights of educators and learners, we offer the following recommendations.

First, policymakers have the opportunity to embed HRE principles and practices at all levels of the education system in ways that would support human rights teacher education. In particular, we recommend aligning teacher licensure standards, school integration and equity initiatives, and efforts to diversify the teacher workforce with HRE approaches. The recently released NCSS National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers is a promising start and should be emulated in other fields. More broadly, government regulators should adopt licensure requirements that explicitly require teachers to demonstrate competency in key human rights areas, particularly with regard to ensuring students' rights are respected and protected in the classroom and school. As they seek to address the educational inequities that have resulted from systemic racism and other forms of oppression, policymakers should make reference to international human rights standards that recognize the fundamental human right to education (i.e., UDHR, United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) as well as such instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)—among the few to which the United States is a full party—that specify the need for de facto not just de jure racial equality. Finally, recognizing the critical need to recruit and retain more teachers of color as a core aspect of achieving equitable outcomes for all students, policymakers should ground efforts to diversify the teacher workforce in

human rights principles so that the primary aim of those efforts—realizing the right to education for all students—remains centered.

If teachers are to claim their rightful place as key actors in the broader human rights movement and be equipped with the skills to support their students' activism, human rights civil society organizations will need to expand their engagement with this important constituency. Prominent human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Open Society Foundations, and others should highlight the interconnection and interrelationship between HRE and the broader struggle for human rights and democracy, recommitting support for education-focused programs and initiatives. Those organizations already focused on HRE should prioritize engagement with SJE organizations, building on each other's strengths in collaborating to end injustice, and the formal education sector, going beyond the development of curricular resources to work with pre-service teacher education programs as well in-service teachers and teacher networks to support ongoing professional development.

At the same time, we recommend teacher education programs begin to integrate HRE content and pedagogies into the curriculum in collaboration with similar forms of education such as SJE, global education, and intercultural education, provide opportunities for subject-area specific elaboration and connection with HRE, and foster the development of a professional identity for teachers as human rights advocates. As with all of higher education, teacher education programs have a responsibility to ensure their students—future teachers—have access to HRE. Pre-service teachers should be introduced to foundational human rights values, principles, and mechanisms, particularly as they relate to the education sector, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Liberatory pedagogical approaches—critical, participatory, decolonizing, anti-racist, and culturally sustaining—should be made central to both the expected competencies of pre-service teachers as well as the instructional design of teacher education programs themselves. Within the various specializations, the rich range of HRE teaching and learning materials that have been developed across a wide range of subject areas and for students of all ages and abilities should be made available for teacher candidates to explore, adapt, and implement in their

practice. Finally, given that the UDHR privileges teaching and education as a primary mechanism to advance human rights broadly, teacher education programs should place this responsibility at the center of teachers' professional identity. Such a centering would help to ensure that teachers are better prepared to advocate for human rights within and beyond the classroom.

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