Editorial

How might we better educate for justice and peace?

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The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed shortly after World War Two, asserted a noble purpose for human rights, namely that the rights of all human beings 'is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (UDHR, 1948: preamble). Veteran New York-based peace educator, Betty Reardon, who sadly died this year, expressed it succinctly: 'Human rights education is as fundamental and constitutive to peace education as human rights are to peace' (Reardon, 1994, p. 82). She asserted that most global problems could be viewed as issues of human rights. We recall this key purpose of human rights, and therefore of human rights education—'*the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world*'—as we prepare this issue of HRER for publication in November 2023, for the world is again at war.

The war in Ukraine, which began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, has continued for almost two whole years, and has seen a reshaping of the refugee population in Europe, with

many Ukrainian citizens joining those from Syria and elsewhere seeking safety in countries across the continent. Yet levels of global warfare and civilian deaths have escalated since October 2023, following an attack on Israeli citizens by Hamas fighters in which some 1,200 people died. Israel's subsequent and unprecedented deadly attack on occupied Gaza, killing more than 15,000 Palestinians in October and November 2023, is a human rights disaster. More than 6,000 Palestinian children have died in this same period, and the population of Gaza, which has been under a blockade since 2007, has experienced siege and aerial bombardment, which has denied them access to basic human rights, such as food, water, shelter, and health care, and for children, a halt to their schooling. The United Nations has warned that 'time is running out to prevent genocide and humanitarian catastrophe' (UN, 2 November 2023). Despite huge citizen protests around the world, calling for a ceasefire and for peace, at the time of writing there is no clear end in sight.

Other wars, such as that in Sudan, which broke out in April 2023, have been eclipsed by these two conflicts. Individuals and communities, watching from afar, may feel a sense of helplessness and despair, since parallel to the physical warfare is an information or propaganda war. Journalists in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have not been protected. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says November 2023 has been the deadliest month since records began three decades ago, with 48 members of the press dying in Gaza as a result of the Israeli military offensive (Tait, 2023). Long before these events, it had become apparent that our international institutions, designed to protect human rights, have been weakened and undermined in recent decades (Hopgood, 2013). News media too have generally become less trusted by the public (Lewis, 2019).

What then are we to make of the phrase: 'human rights education' in the difficult context of conflict and warfare? We start with the term human. Human means us all. Human rights stress our common humanity, and human dignity (Reardon, 1994). Educators have a duty to highlight the insidiousness of dehumanising language, regardless of the target group. It is important to recognise the enemy as human.

We move to rights. Rights are not something to be abandoned in situations of conflict. We need to defend the rights of all, including those with whom we disagree, and to recognise human rights as universal. In times of conflict, more than ever, we rely on the legal literacy of teachers and journalists, an element of the HRE project about which there remains much to be done. Humanitarian law applies in conflict situations, and teachers need to be made aware of these rules of warfare: the importance of the distinction between civilians and combatants; the prohibition on attacking those not directly engaged in hostilities; the prohibition to inflict unnecessary suffering; the principle of necessity; and that of proportionality (UNODC, undated).

We move finally to education. Education cannot make good the failures of either international organisations or of national governments. Our international organisations, instruments and mechanisms are imperfect, but they are the best we have. For this reason, we need to support them and draw from them the best they can offer. When they fail to hold governments and their leaders to account, we may turn to peaceful citizen-based solutions, such as People's Tribunals, to fill a gap in international law (Byrnes & Simm, 2018).

Within democratic nation-states, a population educated in human rights is necessarily in a stronger position to hold its government to account. Yet it would seem that much of the human rights education that takes place in schools is learning about an idealised set of rights, and knowing what to do when immediate infringements of rights take place. Teaching that governments are responsible for upholding the rights of those within their jurisdiction and what actions can be taken to address violations of those rights, if and when they occur, might be properly addressed as part of education for engaged citizenship.

For education to contribute to justice and peace in the world, much of history education needs to be reviewed. We cannot reply on textbooks that reproduce narrow national histories (Freedman et al., 2008; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013). Peace cannot be achieved without justice. So, for example, students looking at the conflict between Israel and Gaza need to understand a longstanding troubled relationship between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, dating back 75 years. As in any historical study, a multi-perspectival approach is important (McCully, 2012), rather than a simplified narrative. We need first a politics of hope (Osler & Stokke, 2020) and then a pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1994/2021) to work for justice and peace.

One of the reasons *Human Rights Education Review* was established in 2018 was to provide a resource for future researchers and educators for human rights, justice and peace. To secure our journal for the future, and strengthen our contribution of human rights education, we established the International Association for Human Rights Education – IAHRE – in Dublin, in June 2023. More information will follow, but importantly, the Association will hold its first conference in London in April 2023. More details can be found in [the announcements section of the HRER platform](#).

This issue of HRER includes both theoretical and empirical studies examining human rights education, justice and peace from a range of perspectives, including innovative practices, institutional-led initiatives and grassroots action-orientated youth initiatives. Education in human rights needs to be an exercise in hope and commitment to changing things for the better. For this reason, we are particular glad to welcome Ricardo Römhild's contribution to this edition of *Human Rights Education Review*: 'Learning languages of hope and advocacy – human rights perspectives in language education for sustainable development'. The author asks: 'What if the way we (teach and learn to) speak about human rights crises is part of these crises?' In this conceptual article, Ricardo Römhild combines the fields of human rights

education, critical pedagogy, language education and sustainable development. The paper explores a human rights-informed pedagogy of hope in the context of language education. By connecting human rights education with critical pedagogy, Römhild argues that language education can offer stories of hope and transformation that help learners engage with the climate crisis in an action-oriented way and empower them to take action to create a more sustainable future. He argues that such a human rights-informed language education may ultimately empower learners to contribute to realising a more sustainable and just world.

Piers von Berg is also concerned with change, and indeed the potential of a global citizenship programme in a university setting to support transformative HRE, rather than supporting the more commonly practiced market-driven model of citizenship learning. In his discussion of his research into his own practices, 'How research into citizenship education at university might enable transformative human rights education', he uses participatory theatre as a pedagogical technique. His goal is to draw on students' lived experience of injustice, with the aim of enabling them to build on their knowledge to become more aware of prevailing power structures and ready to display solidarity and empathy, recognising the common humanity and dignity of the excluded other.

We are delighted to include two articles addressing HRE in Turkey in this issue. While Hopgood (2013) and others have identified the weakening of inter-governmental organisations, in the first article Kerim Sen highlights a case where the support of the United Nations and the Council of Europe has provided a space in which a human rights education curriculum has been enacted in Turkey. In his article, 'International organisations and human rights education curriculum reform', he discusses the influence and role played by these organisations in this significant curriculum project. The article focuses on two versions of an elective high school course, Democracy and Human Rights, introduced in 1999 and renewed in 2013. Central to Sen's analysis are the political-ideological influences of the factions that held power when these HRE programmes were developed, namely militant-secular nationalism, which was later replaced by Islamist nationalism. Sen's assessment is that the Democracy and Human Rights programme has survived and developed over time due to its relative detachment from government influence. Nevertheless, he observes that this is a 'sanitised' HRE curriculum, with examples of human rights struggles, activists, lists of human rights and campaigning and protest strategies completely absent, potentially allowing it to become disempowering: 'The provision of such a sanitised curriculum is not likely to create a substantive transformation in the meaning-making resources of students.' Sen makes two proposals to strengthen the influence of the international organisations in curriculum design: first, that they establish independent, extra-governmental monitoring mechanisms for HRE quality; and second, that they develop legally binding instruments to support the implementation and continuation of HRE.

Our second article addressing Turkey focuses on teacher education. In Faramarz Yaşar Abedi and Seval Fer's contribution, 'Human rights education implementation in Turkish teacher education: faculty members and teacher candidates' views', they highlight how HRE has not been a central part of teacher preparation in Turkey up until now. They suggest that through both the formal curriculum and extra-curricular activities, it should be possible to properly integrate HRE into teacher preparation. Drawing on data from a survey and interviews in which they gathered the views of both teacher candidates and faculty members, they highlight the benefits and challenges of this endeavour. Their work might inspire others not only to conduct similar research but also to develop teacher preparation programmes accordingly. Just as schools might be expected to offer both curricular and extra-curricular activities to cement HRE into their day-to-day activities, they propose that teacher preparation programmes follow a similar twin track approach to reinforce the importance of HRE for teachers.

The final two articles in this issue move away from the institutionalisation of HRE in schools, professional and higher education, to the field of social activism for justice and peace. These contributions augment contributions exploring the relationship between social activism and human rights education addressed in previous articles in the journal (Hall, 2019; Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020) and contribute to a rich multidisciplinary seam of literature analysing social activists' engagement with the international human rights framework as a means of mobilising and extending justice and rights through changes in law, policy and practice. Activists have frequently focussed on how human rights norms might be translated into their respective communities. Scholars have analysed their activities to consider how such social engagement may uphold justice and protect human rights (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Ropp et al., 1999; Merry, 2006; de Búrca, 2021).

In recent years, activists, policy makers and scholars have become increasingly aware of the threat to peace posed by environmental and climate injustice (Gilliam et al., 2023; Ide et al., 2023). The final two articles in this issue focus on the work of youth activists and their efforts to advocate for climate justice and consider the relative effectiveness of their social engagement in learning, educating, and taking action for human rights.

In their article 'Enabling grassroots activism and human rights-based education for sustainability: case studies of Australian youth organisations', Genevieve Hall and Libby Tudball investigate the strategies and activities of youth-led organisations committed to sustainability and climate justice at local and global levels. Drawing on Danish educational theorists Jensen and Schnack, who were interested in developing an educational pedagogy for environmental activism, the authors analyse documentary evidence from three such organisations. They conclude that the young people display high levels of 'social action competence' in their actions and various educational activities, such as climate strikes, online

campaigning, and youth-facilitated school workshops. The young people in question frame their activities in human rights terms, thus leading the authors to conclude that their organisations are directly engaged in the development of human rights-based education for sustainability, aimed at empowering others to enjoy and exercise their rights in keeping with the pedagogy of human rights education affirmed in the 2011 UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training.

Gabriela Martinez-Sainz and Amy Hanna's article 'Youth digital activism, social media and human rights education: the Fridays for Future movement' focusses on the use the movement made of digital technologies when obliged to abandon their climate strikes in the wake of lockdowns generated by Covid-19. Drawing on a digital ethnography of social media activity on Twitter, the authors show how using digital technology helped to foster a collective identity between activists and to raise awareness about the climate crisis. They elucidate how participants made implicit connections between the climate crisis and human rights, in particular, the right to a healthy environment; and how they were able to learn about their rights to political participation, assembly and expression as they exercised these rights in the digital space. The authors identify a degree of 'rights competence' among activists, but stop short of interpreting this as 'rights consciousness', given the lack of explicit rights knowledge or mechanisms of rights protection displayed in their online posts. They nevertheless argue that activists' interactions in the digital environment help to develop values, attitudes and behaviours essential for human rights and point to pedagogical opportunities (as well as challenges) for HRE in supporting social movements' activities in the digital space.

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