

2018

Report on 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education

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Recommended Citation

Flowers, Nancy; Eberbach, Kristina; Rudelius-Palmer, Kristi; and Sirota, Sandra. (2018). "Report on 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education," *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, 2(1).

Retrieved from <https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol2/iss1/12>

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Review

8th International Conference on Human Rights Education
Montréal, Canada
December 2017

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and Sandra Sirota^{****}

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Overview

Fifty-eight different countries were represented at the 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education (ICHRE) in Montréal in early December 2017. Now in its 8th year, this conference has grown from a small, rather traditional gathering of academics and representatives of Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOS) (e.g., the Council of Europe, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) to a global forum for the growing, multifaceted HRE movement.

In addition to academics and IGOs representatives, the 300 participants included a rich diversity of NGOs both large (e.g., Amnesty International, Soka Gakkai International) and small (e.g., Boat People SOS, Defensoria del Pueblo Ecuador, the Ugandan Peace, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls of Canada), foundations and institutes (e.g., The Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Open Society, Danish Institute for Human Rights), artists, teachers, and many undergraduate and graduate students. As traditional with ICHRE, the conference was conducted in English and the language of the host country, in this case, French. Acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of Quebec, many Canadian speakers greeted participants in the local Haudenosaunee dialect, a native drumming group welcomed everyone to the Montreal mayor's reception at City Hall, and many native peoples presented on indigenous human rights issues.

This year's host, the Canadian HRE group, Equitas, made special efforts to ensure that the conference's 70 workshops and plenaries promoted interaction among this eclectic gathering of educators. Thanks to a conference app, everyone could pose questions to plenary panels electronically and communicate with each other via an online directory of all attendees.

Workshops and plenary panels reflected the conference theme of *Bridging Our Diversities*, "featuring the latest tools, knowledge and good practices in Human Rights Education."

The theme of Day 1, November 30, was the *Contribution of Human Rights Education (HRE) to Addressing Global Challenges and Strategies for Greater Engagement of Governments and Civil Society*. The address of Andrew Gilmour (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) stressed that HRE is essential to the realization of freedom, justice and peace: the fundamental goals of the UN. A lively international panel stressed the role of HRE in achieving gender equality. Outstanding among the workshops in English were:

- *Stand up for the Brave: Equipping and Enabling People across the World to Take Action for Human Rights Defenders*: Barbara Weber and Krika Vishwanath, Amnesty International
- *Data Collection for Human Rights Education in Higher Education as Part of Universal Periodic Review (UPR)*: Glenn Mitoma, University of Connecticut, Felisa Tibbitts, Columbia Teachers College, and Kristina Eberbach, Columbia University

Day 2, December 1, addressed *Good Practices for Building Inclusive and Equitable Communities* including people living with disabilities, migrants, refugees, newcomers, and the LGBTQI community. A sampling of workshops under this theme included:

- *Museums: A Space for HRE in Action*: Kristi Rudelius-Palmer, University of Minnesota; Carolyn Rapkivian, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; Mireille Lamontagne, Canadian Museum for Human Rights; Glenn Mitoma, University of Connecticut; and Rebecca Joy Norlander, New Knowledge Organization.
- *HRE and the Role of Government*
- *Homophobia, Human Rights and Diplomacy*, Douglas Jano.
- *Municipal HRE Plan in the City of Sao Paulo*, Eduardo Carlos Bianca Bitiar.

- *Human Rights Cities: A Framework for Integrating Research and Teaching*, Konstatinos Koutsioumpas and Gillian MacNaughton, University of Massachusetts.
- *HRE and the Rights of People Living with Disabilities*
- *Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in China*, Kelley Loper and Lindsay Ernst, Hong Kong.
- *Values in Educational Practice and the Implications for Children with Cognitive Disabilities*, Lena Lybaek, Norway.

Day 3, December 2, focused on *HRE Tactics and Tools to Ensure Impact*. In the opening plenary panel, Elena Ippoliti (Methodology, Education and Training Section, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) and Vincenza Nazzari, (Director of Education, Equitas) examined the importance of measuring HRE outcomes. Rui Gomes (Youth Department, Council of Europe) offered insights into strategies for using technology in developing HRE tools. Related workshops included:

- *Development of Teacher Training and Materials for Learners*, Patricia Watson, National Department of Basic Education, South Africa; Commissioner Mohamed Ameerma, South African Human Rights Commission.
- *Integrating Multimedia Materials into Human Rights Education Pedagogy/ Methodology/ Curriculum*: Elana Haviv, Generation Human Rights.

For a full listing of workshops in both French and English see <http://ichre2017.equitas.org/fr/programme/>.

The conference concluded with endorsement of a Declaration, which sets forth forward-looking recommendations for HRE's future in regard to national and local governmental authorities, higher education institutions, civil society organizations, and IGOs that will be of interest to all human rights educators. See <http://ichre2017.equitas.org/en/declaration/>.

By tradition, the conference moves to a different continent each year. The 9th ICHRE will be held in Sydney, Australia, where the initial ICHRE was launched. Human rights educators, including activists, academics and students, are encouraged to consider submitting workshop proposals.

Two Workshops at a Glance:

One network that has built on the connections made at previous conferences is the University and College and Consortium for Human Rights Education (UCCHRE). To provide greater insight into the interactive nature of the ICHRE and some of the issues that were covered, we describe two of the workshops in which UCCHRE was involved in detail.

DATA COLLECTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AS PART OF PREPARATION OF THE MIDTERM REVIEW REPORT OF THE UPR: THE EXAMPLE OF USA

The Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA) Network and the University and College Consortium for Human Rights Education (UCCHRE) presented their collaborative research project on human rights and higher education institutions in the United States. The goal of this project was to prepare a report to the UN Human Rights Council in anticipation of the U.S. mid-term review process for the Universal Periodic Review.

This project took place in 2017 and involved faculty, staff, and students at Columbia University (New York, NY) and the University of Connecticut (Storrs, CT) on behalf of HRE USA and UCCHRE. Online information was reviewed for 133 higher education institutions regarding school missions and visions, courses, program requirements, learning objectives, student groups, and research centers for each school. This information was analyzed according to whether (a) a direct or explicit reference to human rights was made; (b) a reference to human rights related topics, such as civil liberties, social justice, humanitarian law and ethics, non-discrimination, equality, peacebuilding, and respect for human dignity, was made; or (c) no reference to human rights or human rights related issues was made.

During the workshop, Kristina Eberbach, Glenn Mitoma, Felisa Tibbitts, and students who supported this project, Michelle Chouinard from Columbia University and Curt Murad from the University of Connecticut, briefly presented their research project and methodology. Participants were then asked to engage directly with the primary data. Working in small groups that focused on schools of education, social work, and military training, participants were asked to make determinations regarding whether particular courses should be considered to be “direct” human rights courses, “related” human rights courses, or “unrelated” courses. Participants discussed the advantages and challenges of the research methodology/project and examined the extent to which a similar research model could be readily duplicated and modified for future practice and advocacy-based initiatives. As discussed during the workshop, this initiative modeled a collaborative process and reporting structure that could be duplicated for longitudinal analysis and future UPR submissions, which could be adapted for use by others.

Building on the discussions from the workshop, this project concluded in 2018 with the submission of a [report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council. The document highlights the need for HRE across higher education institutions in the United States, recognizes promising practices, particularly in schools of social work, and calls on the U.S. government to encourage and support HRE in those institutions operated by the government or receiving federal funding.

This 2018 report builds on the first-ever Stakeholder Report on the status of HRE that was submitted as part of the UPR review in 2015. This first report, carried out by HRE USA in cooperation with the US Human Rights Network, overviewed the status of HRE in U.S. schools, drawing on a survey administered to members and incorporating other information from secondary sources, such as policy reports and legislation. HRE USA emphasized the importance of the U.S. government in supporting HRE within state-level curriculum standards, teacher training, and whole school attempts to reduce violence.

The full report is available online [here](#).

NEW FRONTIERS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This workshop focused on the ways in which universities and colleges promote education about, through, and for human rights. With this goal in mind, one exercise that is of particular note centered on programmatic learning goals, which may arguably be considered core competencies for HRE programs within higher education (such as a major, minor, concentration or other degree).

Participants were given a list of learning goals that pertained to knowledge/understanding, skills/action, and attitudes/values (see Table 1 below). They were then asked to individually select seven learning goals, with the option of determining how they would like to allocate their “vote” among these three general categories. For example, a participant could choose to only prioritize knowledge/understanding and skills-oriented competencies. Participants then were asked to work in groups to agree upon seven competencies for the group. Interestingly, only two competencies were selected by more than one group. Participants commented on how challenging this process was and that it was a helpful exercise in facilitating more purposeful planning and reflection on what programs are, and should be, trying to achieve.

Building on the success of this activity, UCCHRE organized a small survey, which was distributed to its listserv. A thematic webinar followed in which the results of the survey were presented with continued discussion.

With less than a week’s notice, eighteen out of sixty people responded to the survey. Strikingly, in both the workshop and online survey, the same competency in each category was most popular - thematic knowledge in the knowledge/understanding category, critical thinking in the skills category, and respect for human dignity in the values category. Eleven online participants selected thematic knowledge. Twelve online participants chose critical thinking. Thirteen online participants chose respect for human dignity. This is notable, particularly since during the workshop, members of small groups had to agree on competencies while the online survey respondents had to make the decisions as individuals.

Yet, beyond the most popular competency in each category, opinions diverged. For example, seven of the 18 online participants selected *critiques of human rights* as an essential knowledge/understanding competency, while no one in the workshop chose it. Six participants selected justice as an essential values competency, while, again, no one in the workshop did.

It would be helpful to share this survey with a wider audience in the field of HRE in higher education to gain a more nuanced understanding of how much agreement, as well as divergence, there is in the field. UCCHRE is planning to conduct a broader survey in the near future that further identifies the priorities selected by educators with more respondent data. The purpose is not to develop a single, all-inclusive list of learning objectives that would be appropriate for every degree program in human rights. Rather, the hope is that this list and additional research will facilitate a helpful dialogue regarding some key objectives that should be addressed by HRE programs and, at the very least, facilitate greater awareness regarding the decisions that are, or are not, being made.

TABLE 1

Knowledge/Understanding

- Thematic knowledge (women’s rights, children’s rights, Indigenous Peoples rights, refugee/immigrant, self-determination, LGBTQIA rights, UN SDGs, rights of individuals with disabilities, rights of minorities, etc.)
- Categories of rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural; positive and negative; first, second, and third generation; individual and collective)
- Relationship between rights (for example, points of interdependence and tension)
- Human rights principles
- Legal rights vs. moral rights
- Origins/history/evolution of human rights
- International human rights law
- National legal systems/institutions vis-a-vis human rights
- UN & regional mechanisms
- Critiques of human rights
- Human rights philosophy
- NGOs and key actors
- Social justice movements
- Roles/responsibilities of various actors vis-a-vis human rights
- Factors that contribute to rights violations (institutional, political, social, cultural, economic, etc.)
- Systemic oppression and discrimination

Skills/Actions

- Research
- Analysis
- Written communication
- Verbal communication
- Social media/technology
- Critical-thinking
- Argumentation
- Campaign development
- Grassroots mobilization/community organization
- Public engagement
- Advocacy
- Awareness-raising/education
- Documentation
- Development/fundraising

- Personnel management
- Project management and development
- Strategic planning
- Teamwork
- Emotional intelligence/empathy/interpersonal competence
- Cross-cultural competence
- Examining/challenging assumptions
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Conflict resolution/reconciliation
- Leadership
- Problem-solving and creative thinking
- Self-expression and storytelling/truthtelling
- Decolonizing skills and practices

Values/Principles/Attitudes

- Non-discrimination
- Respect for human dignity
- Appreciation for diversity
- Cosmopolitanism
- Equality/Equity
- Inclusion
- Responsibility
- Justice
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Universalism
- Integrity
- Commitment to community engagement and active participation in civic life
- Empathy
- Personal values in relation to international standards