



**HRE USA**  
**Regional Human Rights Educators Gathering**  
Saturday, May 11, 2013  
9:30 – 11:30 a.m.  
Human Rights Watch Office, Los Angeles



**Goals:**

1. Get to know the HRE USA network.
2. Encourage partnerships and resource-sharing among regional members.
3. Determine priorities for HRE USA network within Southern California region.

**Agenda Items / Discussion points**

1. **Welcome, Introductions** (Pam Bruns)
  - Pam welcomed everyone in attendance and introduced Felisa Tibbitts joining us via Skype from Boston.
2. **HRE USA Background** (Felisa Tibbitts via Skype)
  - a. **How the HRE USA network came into being; Mission of HRE USA.**
    - The network developed out of a conference at Harvard of US-based human rights educators, organized by Nancy Flowers and Felisa Tibbitts in September 2011.
      - The strategy paper developed during the conference can be found at: <http://hreusa.net/sites/default/files/HREStrategy.pdf>
    - The history and Mission of HREUSA: <http://hreusa.net/aboutus>.
  - b. **How HRE USA defines human rights education.**
    - You can find HRE USA's definition of HRE at: <http://hreusa.net/aboutus>.
    - The definition focuses on both rights and responsibilities: Everyone has rights, and they also have the responsibility to help promote and protect others' rights.
    - The "social justice" and "peace" terminology was added to the human rights discourse because these are more commonly recognized movements in the United States, and share many of the same values as human rights.
  - c. **Ways to become involved at the network presently**
    - Participate in working groups to promote HRE in U.S.: <http://hreusa.net/workinggroups>.
    - We are building a resource section of the website that will be available in the fall.
      - If you wish to submit materials (both research articles and materials to use in practice), you can let Pam know and/or find the online submission form on the website: <http://hreusa.net/resourcelist>.
    - An e-newsletter for all members is in development.
  - d. **Questions for Felisa.**
    - Question: What are the differences between social justice education and HRE?
      - Answer: Social justice is related to social change, incorporating social movement theories (civil rights, Gandhi). HRE looks at social justice and social change through the legal framework of international HR standards or values. They share similar values of equality, nondiscrimination, participation, and justice, but HRE extends beyond these values and moves us into a legal framework that puts the focus on governments as being responsible for protecting those living within their borders. Because of this focus on governments, HRE has a strong advocacy element.

- Question: I've seen an increasing value of having a continuum in HRE efforts between K-12, college and graduate levels. Does HRE USA provide any opportunities for events or dialogues among these different groups?
  - Answer: We have the potential to do exactly that. The working groups are divided by levels and types of schooling, but the network aims to create connections between educators at all levels and in all settings. At the moment we need to cultivate more supporters in higher education.
- Question: Do you have any resources to connect to social justice charter schools? Are there social justice magnets anywhere else or are they rare?
  - Answer: These schools are present and becoming more common; most common in larger metropolitan areas. Social justice educators would have a natural affinity for the network. I encourage you to reach out to them and connect them to the network. We officially launched in December 2012 and continue outreach. You can help us build the network's membership.

### 3. Finding Our Place and Purposes in HRE

(Todd Jennings)

- PowerPoint presentation attached. Slide number is noted in parenthesis below.
- (2) Teachers and educators are the only profession mentioned in the preamble of the UDHR – this underscores their importance in ensuring a rights-respecting society.
- (3) Opponents of HRE say we are coming in with a very narrow definition and somewhat threatening political agenda. This comes usually from people who naively think education is politics-free. However, HRE is aimed at the full development of human beings (similar to the role of an educator). There is a history of ways we can talk about HRE that is inclusive, which can work to our benefit.
- (6) HRE can be so comprehensive there are very few needs we can't speak to. There is some element of HRE that can address any kind of circumstances schools and communities are wrestling with – HRE becomes relevant to many school needs.
  - Adding HRE into discussions about environmentalism changes the conversation into one about human consumption and environmental stewardship – adding the people back into the equation.
  - "Any conversation about HRE will move people from a position of victim to a position of agent"
- (7) HRE can be a key tool in helping students connect what they are learning to their private and public lives – one of the most important and difficult jobs of an educator is to get students to recognize that what they are learning is *relevant*
  - Why not teach literacy skills using materials that include HRE content? etc.
- (8) A lot of people won't start incorporating HRE into their curricula because it's too overwhelming. However, we want to dissuade the notion that you have to become an expert to do HRE. You only have to be one hour ahead of your students.
  - Know how HRE fits into your professional philosophy of education and purpose – crucial to articulate a greater motivation beyond the notion of "I love kids"
- (9-10) It is important that students have a personal connection to and motivation for learning about human rights.
  - Incorporating HRE into the classroom often starts with a student-led needs assessment of what is needed in the school and the greater community.
  - Tailor use of HRE to students' age and developmental characteristics. Younger children live in the concrete and identify strongly with ideas of fairness. For older children, HRE can help students to understand their own identity, solve their own problems, and cultivate a sense of agency.
  - Encouraging students to use their understanding to analyze their own experiences can be threatening because of what happens when students realize there are violations in their own lives. You have to be willing to deal with the consequences. If you don't want to become a human rights advocate in ways you might not anticipate, you shouldn't start this conversation. But if this is part of why you became an educator, then HRE invites those challenging conversations.

- Question: Do you have any suggestions for how to deal with students from “dominant” groups feeling guilt when discussing issues?
  - When I’m dealing with students from dominant populations, I often frontload the conversation about what it means to come from a dominant group and what they are going to experience when discussing human rights. There will be a discomfort when they find themselves moved from center to margin. They are going to constantly ask, where are their responsibilities and should they feel bad?
  - Guilt is not a constructive emotion – leaves people feeling powerless. Even when the concern comes out of a moral sense that “something needs to be done and I want to do something about it,” it reflects their lack of agency and power. If you can shift the focus to responsibilities, the student can develop their own sense of agency. Encourage students to use their understanding of HRE to understand others.
- (11) The common core allows us to move away from strictly behaviorist ways of education and back to more constructivists. By doing this we are able to make this discussion more egalitarian. In the past these types of critical discussions have been available only to the elite, and from the social justice perspective there is a real opportunity within the common core.
  - Comment: The new core standards introduce more flexibility in different subject areas, so they open a big window to be able to integrate HRE.
- (13) We have to give up the notion that control leads to peace. In some cases, the best you can do is to rethink what appropriate classroom behavior looks like and not mistake silence for productivity.
  - Moving away from punitive reaction / punishment and toward restorative action, engaging students and families
  - Democracy and respecting rights are always messy!

4. **Student Perspective on HRE** (HS Students Linda Gordon and Matthew Ware)

a. **Linda’s introduction of Santa Monica HS’s “Professional Development.”**

- Recently, a group of students at Santa Monica HS hosted a professional development session for 12 educators, to provide them with techniques to include HRE in their classrooms. It was disheartening to learn how little HRE was used in schools, so we turned this into empowerment by taking action.
- If students have a foundation of HRE, we will be able to move forward and be advocates for human rights no matter our profession. Students will get involved if they feel empowered that there is a lot we can do. The trick is unlocking students’ passion because we have extremely malleable minds.
- Students are saying “we want HRE now and we are willing to work for it.” It is extremely important to our development as global citizens. We’ve done surveys on campus that have established a need to educate our students about issues around the world. We noticed a huge drop off in engagement in the local versus international right to education campaign. It’s disheartening for me to see fellow students quit the club because they won’t see the same results on a local level because they don’t understand the concept of HRE in the US. Using student-teacher collaboration is a good way to change that.

b. **Matthew’s presentation of HRE in Language and Culture to teachers.**

- This presentation is similar in content and format to what I did at our professional development workshop, focused on human rights in language classes.
- PowerPoint presentation attached.

c. **Q & A for Linda and Matthew.**

- Question: What were the results of this workshop?
  - Answer 1: There were many workshops being offered simultaneously and they were limiting it to 15 teachers per workshop. Everyone who attended filled out an evaluation and they were universally high. We sent them follow-

up. We have a date for next spring to do SAMO University again, so the concept of student participation in professional development is ongoing.

- Answer 2: The day after the workshop, a teacher approached Linda to help her incorporate HRE into her classroom. Doing more of these workshops and encouraging student-teacher relationships and making these lesson plans more available would be helpful.
- Question: Have you thought about monitoring those activities? Having a proven track record would be a really useful way to convince administration and demonstrate the impact of what you have done and serve a model for other people. Maybe this is a way the network can be involved if this project continues.
  - Answer: Out of the 12 participants, half weren't classroom leaders. We knew if we made a great impression the first time around, word would build and we could do it again.
- Question: It sounds like you're asking teachers to value what you care about. How do we know what you value unless we have some kind of relationship with you? Do you have relationships with your teachers?
  - Answer 1: Students can go talk to teachers but it's really only at lunch. We usually discuss our interests amongst ourselves and speak to teachers in groups. It's the same in our STF club. Having events like SAMO University or professional development, announcements to students about participating in workshops, will also create the opportunity for student-teacher collaboration.
  - Answer 2: Clubs and after-school groups engage students (with teachers) in ways they might not otherwise be included.

## 5. Discussion of participants' current use/incorporation of HRE (Nancy Medina)

- We ran out of time to discuss current use/incorporation of HRE techniques, but asked participants to focus on survey questions 4-6. We plan to launch this discussion online and make it the focus of our next regional meeting. Every time we've done a workshop, we always get the request we want more concrete materials, so this is critical for us.
- Discussion of resources that some attendees have to offer:
  - Amy Carnes – Amy oversees monitoring and evaluation of all educational programs, domestic and international, at the USC Shoah Foundation. She also works on special projects, including bridging HRE with Holocaust education in the Ukraine. The Shoah Foundation recently launched an educational website called “iWitness” that features testimonies from the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide. This is a growing program. There is a student challenge that addresses the theme of everyday actions that inspire international action. <http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/>.
  - Jasmina Repak – Jasmina is a founding member of HRWSTF and, until recently, was living in Bosnia and is now working at the Downtown Women's Center.
  - David Suarez has offered to share his research on the emergence of HRE.

## 6. Next steps

- This is a beginning of the conversation, and hopefully today's survey will provide us direction on where to go in the next step. We have interns in place to help with follow-up. We encourage you to sign up for the HRE USA network and help bring in other educators or people in non-academic settings.
- Stay tuned for resource sharing opportunities and the next meeting of the HRE USA Regional Human Rights Educators.