

Planning Strategies for Linking Human Rights Education to Adolescent Development and the California Content Standards

Todd Jennings
California State University, San Bernardino

In secondary grades, teaching human rights concepts and content should capitalize upon two developmental characteristics and intrinsic motivations of adolescents. First, adolescents are working to answer the question: *Who am I?* This includes “who am I” relative to particular beliefs and values as well as the various social identities (gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality). Second, adolescents are working to understand how their emerging identities fit into the world around them. In other words, they wonder “how are my various identities (as a racial group member, a gendered person, and a sexual person) going to shape my place in the world and the actions I take?” How is the world going to treat me, help me, hurt me, or support me, based upon who I see myself to be and who others see me as being?” “How am I going to affect, or fail to affect, the world around me?”

As human rights educators, we want human rights concepts and content to relate to these central themes in adolescents’ development. One way to do this is by using HRE to help students answer identity-based questions. This will entail helping them with critical questions like: “Where are the human rights violations that occur in my community or that I might face as someone with my particular identity?” “What are the human rights violations people with identities other than mine face?” “Where are my rights respected but the rights of others assaulted?” “Where are my rights assaulted and the rights of others respected?” “What are my responsibilities in promoting my own rights and advocating for the rights of those outside my identity group—including those outside my own nation?”

In History the standards for high school grades are filled with places where you can teach human rights while also teaching the standards. In some cases, such as Standard 10.5.5 you are to teach human rights straight out. In other places, you can make other standards more interesting to students by teaching it from a human right perspective. For example, in 11th grade, Standard 11.5.2. states: *Analyze the international and domestic events, interests, and philosophies that prompted attacks on civil liberties, including the Palmer Raids, Marcus Garvey's "back-to-Africa" movement, the Ku Klux Klan, and immigration quotas and the responses of organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Anti-Defamation League to those attacks.* The human rights themes here are evident and you can easily include teaching about human rights in this standard by demonstrating how civil liberties are a subclass of human rights (human rights are often overlooked when we teach just civil and political rights). Further, as students reflect upon their own identities as members of racial or ethnic groups, the standard can be linked to adolescent identity development and self concept. Standard 11.5.5 states: *Describe the Harlem Renaissance and new trends in literature, music, and art, with special attention to the work of writers (e.g., Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes).* This is an opportunity to teach about human rights by specifically addressing Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as they relate to cultural expression and the arts and how particular artistic expressions emerged out of racial and ethnic identities perhaps shared by your students. Another example, from Grade 10, Standard 10.3.4 states: *Trace the evolution of work and labor, including the demise of the slave trade and the effects of immigration, mining and manufacturing, division of labor, and the union*

movement. Here you can address slavery, trade unions, and labor from a human rights perspective. Help students understand the employment histories of their families as reflective of larger human rights issues (e.g., migrant labor in CA).

In English Language Arts there are routinely themes within literature that can be examined from a human rights perspective. These can include gender, poverty, slavery, justice, fairness, etc. Most great literature can easily be related to human rights themes, conflicts, and lessons. The same is true for the Visual and Performing Arts which are closely tied to cultural and social rights (not to mention that much of Art engages human rights themes as its content--this includes popular art forms such as rap and hip-hop music). In Mathematics you can use human rights data when teaching specific calculation skills and concepts. Numbers, as a form of literacy, can be used to teach something about human rights as well. Showing students that mathematical literacy can be used to interpret the world, promote, and understand justice and fairness—including human rights. Number and calculations can be used to express both human rights violations and achievements. Mathematic teachers can use hunger rates/ratios, poverty rates/ratios, domestic violence data, or any numeric data used to describe various human rights related conditions around gender, race, or social class. In short, you can help them learn computational and reasoning skills via numeric data that teach them about human rights from a numeric perspective. In Kinesthesiology, there are number examples of human rights issues related to sports and sports history that can be found in the web resources above and elsewhere. These include issues of racial integration and sports as well as gender and sports. In addition, there are issues of ability/disability and human rights that find natural expression in kinesthesiology and physical education. In Biology the standards related to ecology or similar themes can be used to teach human rights. In Earth Sciences, students can look at environmental pollution and ecological systems from a human rights perspective. For example, tying in to student race and ethnicity (identity again), students can explore environmental justice issues *vis a vis* race in Southern California and the world. There is a way to teach something about human rights or some type of human right in each and every content area--and the points of intersection are already within the CA standards.

Relating your efforts to the standards is crucial in showing that human rights education is not an “add on” and does not take students away from what they are required to study per the state standards. In fact, it can enhance the meaning students associate with what you are teaching, help them understand the material better, and help them better relate the material to their private and public lives (increasing their motivation to engage with the material by showing its relevance to the identity questions most salient to their lives).