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## EDITORIAL

# Networking to promote and transform human rights education

Audrey Osler

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway & University of Leeds, UK.

Bjørn Aksel Flatås

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway.

Sev Ozdowski

Western Sydney University, Australia.

Audrey Osler: [a.h.osler@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.h.osler@leeds.ac.uk)  
Bjørn Aksel Flatås: [bjorn.flatas@usn.no](mailto:bjorn.flatas@usn.no)  
Sev Ozdowski: [sevozdo@gmail.com](mailto:sevozdo@gmail.com)

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Audrey Osler

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway & University of Leeds, UK.

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University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway.

Sev Ozdowski

Western Sydney University, Australia.

[a.h.osler@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.h.osler@leeds.ac.uk)

[bjorn.flatas@usn.no](mailto:bjorn.flatas@usn.no)

[sevozdo@gmail.com](mailto:sevozdo@gmail.com)

We launched *Human Rights Education Review* in 2018 as part of a strategic initiative to strengthen human rights education (HRE) teaching and research within higher education. While HRE has taken place in faculties of law for many years, and while there has long been a range of journals in the field of human rights, at the time we planned the initiative there was no specialist journal that provided a home for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of human rights and education. Today *HREER* is one of two new journals in this fast-developing field. We see *HREER* as not only providing a platform for research but also as a means by which HRE researchers can network.

As we celebrate the publication of Volume 2 of the journal, we are also delighted to announce that the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) is a leading partner, with University College London, Institute of Education, in a second initiative to support human rights education research. Earlier this year, one of us, Audrey Osler, put forward a bid, with Hugh Starkey, a member of *HREER*'s International Editorial Advisory Board, to the World Education Research Association (WERA) for an International Research Network (IRN) in HRE. The WERA IRN involves many of our editorial board members and other colleagues across the globe. Our first task is to build an open access database of HRE research, a project we are working on with USN librarians, to ensure that the database remains up-to-date and sustainable.

HRE is now firmly established in the academy. However, its roots are found not only in different countries' law schools, but also in intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. This special edition of *HREER* comes directly from the 9th International Conference on Human Rights Education (ICHRE) at the University of Western Sydney and is a collaboration between *HREER* and the Founding Director of the annual ICHRE, Sev Ozdowski. The ICHRE is special; it is not an exclusively academic conference, but instead brings together human rights scholars and educators and participants who represent a wide range of non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations working in the field of human rights education.

The ICHRE acknowledges that a clear linkage exists between the enforcement of human rights law and public opinion. It also acknowledges that promotion of human rights culture at the community level is of special importance, as human

rights standards are universal and apply to all peoples regardless of their culture, religion, gender or any other characteristic.

The conferences also reflect a concern that many contemporary state actors are not doing enough to advance human rights culture. On the contrary, there seems to be a decline in investment in HRE with national and international curricula, pedagogy and best practices in design and delivery falling behind.

To enhance human rights culture and influence governmental human rights practices, it is necessary to win the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. Human rights must not only a matter of the letter of the law; they must be an expected standard of community behaviour. When international human rights standards are known to and internalised by local communities, they can become effective agents of change.

In developing these conferences, Sev Ozdowski has put a focus on grass roots involvement, human diversity and the role played by concepts such as democracy, justice, and equality in the management of this diversity. The conferences aim to fundamentally reduce the disconnect between the abstract ideals of human rights treaties and principles, acknowledged at the level of the state, and the application of these ideals to everyday life at the community level.

The ICHRE was established in 2010. The first conference was held in Sydney, Australia. Since then, conferences have been held in South Africa, Poland, Taiwan, USA, the Netherlands, Chile and Canada.

Over the decade ICHREs were able to link international human rights standards with human rights defenders in local communities and contribute to the United Nations effort to advance human rights education world-wide. In fact, the movement has grown stronger over the past decade and the conferences now bring together participants from all over the world. This year we will be celebrating a milestone in the social movement for human rights education with the 10th ICHRE being held in Kathmandu, Nepal in December 2019.

The 9th ICHRE conference, *Unleashing the Full Potential of Civil Society*, was held in Sydney in 2018 and attracted some 500 participants. The conference celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) and the 25th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration (OHCHR, 1993), which highlighted the value of human rights education.

The 2018 Sydney ICHRE focused on the contributions made by human rights education in furthering democracy and the rule of law, as well as the promotion of intercultural dialogue, social harmony and justice. It recommended measures to strengthen human rights education for people everywhere. The resulting Sydney Declaration (Western Sydney University, undated) stressed that human rights are about empowerment; that all people's voices are important; and that human rights education is not about preserving the status quo but about advancing towards a just and better society. A wide range of lively and engaging papers was presented at the Sydney conference, and we have selected four submissions by conference presenters for this special edition of *HREER*.

Huong Thi Minh Ngo presents *HREER*'s first paper from Vietnam, discussing opportunities and constraints in addressing HRE within Vietnamese universities, specifically in the context of a one-party state where academic freedom is limited. She notes that the Vietnamese government, having ratified a number of key international human rights instruments in the 1980s and having proclaimed *Moi Doi* (Economic Renovation) and introduced economic policies that promote global

economic integration, is now approving human rights degree programmes. These new courses include both internationally agreed standards and the specific rights of Vietnamese citizens. The paper reveals a number of strategies used by scholars to open up discussion of human rights within the universities, notably through the exploitation of internationalisation processes in which universities are engaging globally. Effectively, they have created small spaces in which HRE can occur within higher education, despite on-going restrictions on academic freedom. What is striking is the attention that this paper gives to UNESCO's standards relating to the status of higher education teachers and researchers (UNESCO, 1974, 1997, 2017), standards that are less frequently referred to in established democracies where academic freedom has often been, until quite recently, taken for granted. These, standards, and other internationally agreed ones, are key instruments on which we can all draw, in an era where political authoritarianism appears to be gaining ground globally. We observe that academic freedom is increasingly debated and reviewed in a number of long-established democracies (Karran & Mallinson, 2019; Williams, 2016).

Genevieve Hall's research takes us outside of the academy to consider how young activists engage in human rights learning. She examines factors that influence and motivate young adults to become activists, noting that they tend to explain their altruism and commitment by referencing family experiences rather than their schooling. Nevertheless, peer education seems to be significant and it is through joining non-governmental organisations that human rights and political engagement develop.

Carmen Huser's paper discusses children's participation rights, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1989). She recognises the CRC as foundational for rights education and discusses how it can support children's decision-making on matters concerning their own lives. Her research explores 4-5-year-olds' perspectives on play in Australian early childhood education settings and discusses ethical and methodological considerations informed by a children's rights-based epistemology, arguing that children are competent to reflect on and exercise their participation rights. Her findings and discussion highlight ethical aspects of children's choices to participate in research, including conditional assent, dissent, and their impact on research processes. The paper provides a welcome insight into the ways in which children choose to participate and proposes reflective questions for realising children's participation rights. The paper concludes with implications for research that acknowledge children's demonstration of their participation rights in a physical, creative, and social-emotional space.

Lynda-ann Blanchard and Mike Nix introduce us to research as storytelling; they explore the possibilities and challenges of a 'radical pedagogy' through stories. The stories come from student voices taken from an international collaborative study entitled *Investigating Diversity, Human Rights and Civil Society in Japan and Australia*. They start with a pedagogical focus on students' active learning about human rights, asking 'what is human rights education?' Their study points towards a pedagogy wherein the conception of human rights education is dialogic, in which knowledge about human rights and diversity is negotiated, and where active learning requires active unlearning. Blanchard and Nix argue for a pedagogy with the potential to create conditions for more ethical relations between mainstream and marginalised groups. They aim to address otherness in human rights research. Theirs

is a project that values relationship-building between academic institutions, civil society and community groups, and individuals.

In putting together this special edition of *HREER* in collaboration with the 9th International Conference on Human Rights Education, we have extended the journal's reach and opened a dialogue with researchers in Vietnam and Australia. The papers from Huong Thi Minh Ngo and from Lynda-ann Blanchard and Mike Nix highlight the very different contexts in which higher education takes place, where the terms 'radical' and 'innovative' may describe very different practices in different socio-political situations. When we set these accounts of HRE practices in higher education alongside Genevieve Hall's research into human rights learning in NGOs, we are reminded not only of HRE's diverse roots but also that the possibilities for transformative human rights learning when learners take greater control over learning processes. These three papers address the experiences of adult learners, and present research on adult learners. Carmen Huser's research, by illustrating the possibilities of engaging young children in research processes, raises ethical questions not only for researchers working with this age group, but also for anyone who wants to challenge asymmetrical power relations in teaching and research.

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