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EDITORIAL

Prerequisites and outcomes of human rights education

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The first two decades of the 21st century have seen a growth in research into human rights education (HRE), yet relatively few researchers have examined the right to an inclusive and equitable education as a prerequisite for it. The right to education underpins the United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, setting an ambitious action plan for the UN, its member states, and civil society. The ambition of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) is to provide inclusive and equitable quality education at primary and secondary levels by 2030 and promote 'lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). In relation to HRE, SDG4.7 broadly outlines the focus of quality education:

[To] ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015, SG4.7)

In this rights-based agenda, the focus of education is defined in similar terms to the aims of education spelt out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN,1989), to which member states have already made a binding legal commitment. The right to education is an enabling right (McCowan, 2010), fundamental to the realisation of other rights. UNESCO (n.d) further categorises the right to education, as presented in SG4, as *empowering* of learners.

In the first two articles in this volume, Shabnam Moinipour examines the child's right to education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, drawing on the 4-A framework developed by former Special Rapporteur of the UN High Commission for Human Rights on Education, Katarina Tomaševski (2001). The 4-A framework enables an analysis of the degree to which educational provision is *available*, *accessible*, *acceptable* and *adaptable*. In her first article, Moinipour discusses Iran's response to its obligation to make education available and accessible, and observes how the state reinforces existing gender inequalities, discriminates against religious minorities, and fails to properly address the educational rights of learners with disabilities. Moinipour observes how Iran's reservations to the CRC undermine the convention's effectiveness as a tool for addressing social justice. Her review of the acceptability and adaptability of education, discussed in the second article, identifies the need for substantial reform to realise education's potential in addressing the

needs of the most economically and socially marginalised children and enabling them to fully participate in society.

Previous articles in this journal, notably Parker (2018) and Jerome et al. (2021), have examined the importance of a sound knowledge-base for effective HRE, arguing that greater attention needs to be given to this element of teaching and learning. In a discussion of decolonial human rights education, Anne Becker also reflects on the HRE knowledge base. She considers some possibilities for reshaping conversations on human rights, examining the principles, assumptions and epistemologies on which scholars frequently draw. She calls for an urgent exploration of pluriversal knowledges of human rights. She questions the Eurocentric assumptions and principles which, she asserts, frequently serve as a premise for HRE. Central to her argument is a call to problematise the Human of human rights.

The fourth article in this volume addresses teacher education in Finland. Tuija Kasa, Matti Rautiainen, Mia Malama and Arto Kallioniemi report on a small-scale study of the perspectives of student teachers, and specifically their learning about democracy and human rights. Student teachers believe that democracy and human rights education (DHRE) needs to be explicit and part of their professional education. Although the Finnish national curriculum explicitly addresses DHRE, there is a lack of implementation and explicit teacher education in this field. The authors suggest that this is due to Finnish exceptionalism, whereby it is assumed that democracy and human rights are self-evident. Nevertheless, for the student teachers in this study, DHRE is not self-evident, and they seek explicit support in this area. There are parallels here with recent research in Iceland (Gollifer, 2021). Although democracy and human rights are one of six curriculum pillars in the 2011 Icelandic national curriculum guides, there is insufficient attention given to curriculum implementation, and little explicit human rights education in teacher education, leaving individual teachers concerned with promoting social justice to define human rights in a myriad of ways. Both the Finnish study and that of Gollifer emphasise the responsibility of teacher education in sustaining a human rights culture. Research from Norway (Osler & Skarra, 2021, in press) also suggests a gap between policy formulation and teacher support in relation to HRE. The Norwegian study also found that HRE was implicit and dependent on teachers' individual perceptions of human rights. Together, these studies suggest that the Finnish exceptionalism identified by Kasa and her colleagues might be extended and redefined as a Nordic exceptionalism.

The fifth and final article in this edition of HRER also addresses the outcomes of HRE, specifically challenging negative attitudes towards asylum seekers among Australian children. Lisa Hartley, Caroline Fleay, Anne Pedersen, Alison Cook and Alenka Jeram evaluate a Red Cross programme for prejudice reduction in four primary schools in Western Australia. Using questionnaires, the study compared students' pre-intervention attitudes with short- and long-term attitudinal changes. The authors found that the intervention succeeded in developing schoolchildren's positive identification and increased empathy with asylum seekers and refugees.

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