

**Editor: Social Justice Perspectives**

**Human Rights Education: What you need to know and how to get involved**

**Gloria Alter, Steering Committee, HRE USA**

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I find a healing presence in the work of human rights educators, advocates, and activists, an antidote to the evil in our world. Their work embodies compassion, commitment to others regardless of their identities and even laying down their lives for others — powerful weapons in the struggle for human rights. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the ongoing reports of human rights abuses in the United States and around the world and to believe that there is nothing we can do about it. The authors of the articles that follow show us there is much we can do. They are wise advocates of human rights and determined leaders in this struggle.

Dr. Felisa Tibbitts is the Founder and Senior Advisor of Human Rights Education Associates (HREA – [www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org)), which she directed from 1999-2010. She has been an adjunct faculty member at numerous institutions, including Harvard University, Columbia University and the UN University for Peace. She has worked with numerous government and international agencies in developing curriculum and policies that support the integration of human rights into teaching and training, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States and numerous non-governmental organizations, such as Amnesty International. Dr. Tibbitts has engaged in adult trainings in over 20 countries, serves on numerous advisory committees and has published articles, book chapters, and manuals addressing such topics as HRE in schools and the empowerment model of HRE. She received her Bachelor's degree and two Masters degrees (Public Policy, Education) from Harvard University and her D.Phil. from the Otto-von-Guericke Universität of Magdeburg.

In “Human Rights Education Here and Now: U.S. Practices and International Processes,” Dr. Tibbitts shares her impressive Human Rights Education Community Scholar lecture from the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies. Coordinating the work of the Human Rights Education Community that brought Felisa to NCSS is Rosemary Blanchard.

Rosemary Ann Blanchard is the Co-Vice-Chair of Human Rights Education-USA (HRE USA - [www.hreusa.net](http://www.hreusa.net)). She recently retired as Associate Professor of Education at California State University, Sacramento. She has extensive experience in community controlled Indigenous education, having worked as a policy analyst for the Division of Diné Education, as a consultant to grassroots Navajo education organizations, and as Dean of Instruction to what is now Navajo Technical College. She also has extensive experience in the legislative process and has been involved in researching and drafting legislation in the fields of human rights, education, mental health, and services to persons with disabilities. Her current research interests include the principles and

historical development of global human rights and international humanitarian law together with curricular and policy research to support incorporating their study into American social studies education.

In “Mainstreaming Human Rights Education – A New NCSS Community Looks Forward,” Rosemary writes about the work of the new Human Rights Community of NCSS and the need to integrate human rights education across the social studies curriculum. She details the challenging political aspects of creating and implementing state standards and guides to standards development (C3), from her own first-hand experience.

Two documents in particular highlight the increasing relevance of HRE: First, the HRE Community-sponsored resolution—the NCSS Position Statement on Human Rights Education that identifies “education about human rights and humanitarian law [to be] an essential component of democratic citizenship and civic education”  
[http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human\\_rights\\_education\\_2014;](http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human_rights_education_2014;)

And second, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training

[http://www.hrea.org/resource.php?base\\_id=1323&language\\_id=1](http://www.hrea.org/resource.php?base_id=1323&language_id=1)

that defines HRE to include taking action— learning *about* human rights, *through* human rights (“in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners”), and *for* human rights (“to enjoy and exercise [your] rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others”). In both national and international contexts broad-based support for HRE is emerging. HRE organizations are also collaborating with each other (Global Coalition for Human Rights Education, for example) and state level projects are beginning to align HRE with state standards (see HRE USA project, HRE New Jersey Curriculum Integration Guide, led by Bill Fernekes).

The following articles provide a strong introduction to many of the complexities of HRE at the national and international levels and help readers to become better informed and more actively involved in this important work.

If you are interested in human rights education and training, connecting with like-minded colleagues and taking action on issues that matter to you, see HREA ([www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org)) and join HRE USA ([www.hreusa.net](http://www.hreusa.net)) and the Human Rights Community of NCSS (there are no membership fees for either group). The Advocates for Human Rights (<http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org>) also has a wealth of resources.

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

Nelson Mandela