A Global Perspective: Investigating Human Rights Education in Higher Education Institutes

Chrystal Lynch, Graduate Student

Email: umlynchc@myumanitoba.ca

University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education

Introduction

The proposed study aims to investigate global perspectives concerning the development and implementation of human rights education (HRE) in higher education institutes (HEIs). The research undertaken will be guided by the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) and the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE). Furthermore, the research will explore how HEIs situate HRE into teaching/training practices; programming and policies with the aims of disseminating knowledge and creating learning opportunities that foster the protection, provision and promotion of all human rights.

Rationale for Proposed Research

A desk-based review of literature has produced initial findings on human rights education and its current position within the spectrum of tertiary education. There is a scarcity of research and literature on HRE and its global dispersion throughout institutes of higher education. This qualitative study was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the availability of HRE within HEIs. The research being explored will attempt to delineate the approaches and initiatives that human rights scholars/specialists/advocates have integrated into their academic and practical work experiences in order to establish and make HRE accessible in HEIs.

Conceptual Framework

The research being explored is underpinned by the 4A Framework; originally developed by the late Katarina Tomasevski. The 4A Framework recognizes that the education process is not only the responsibility of national governments, but also other stakeholders and agencies that are directly and/or indirectly involved with delivering education programs at multiple levels (Tomasevski, 2004). The 4A Framework provides a set of broad standards to assess programming based on the right to education. The 4 A’s are availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability; these elements can be widely attributed to the development and implementation of HRE in HEIs.

Research Questions

- What role can higher education institutes play in the development and implementation of HRE?
- In what ways do human rights instruments influence the establishment and promotion of HRE in academia?
- What legislations or institutional policies exist in countries/regions that prescribe HRE within HEIs? Who are the key actors?
- What training materials and methodologies are used to support human rights education in HEIs?
- What factors support or impair the application of HRE in higher education?

Methodology

In methodological terms, semi-structured interviews will be used as the qualitative method of inquiry. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because they allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. These types of interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data to enhance the study’s findings. The researcher will combine a pre-determined set of open-ended questions to prompt discussion; however, particular themes or responses, pertaining to HRE, will be explored in more depth as they emerge throughout interviews with participants. In addition, respondents will be given the opportunity to discuss and raise issues that may not be addressed in the interview guide.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that the findings will provide an overview of international perspectives on the advancements and work that has taken place pertaining to HRE in HEIs. Information gathered throughout this study has potential to provide awareness and recommendations for future research and practices within the areas of human rights education, as well as identify additional gaps on this multifaceted topic. Moreover, the researcher is hopeful that results from the study will evoke interest and continued efforts that encourage the ‘movers and shakers’ to address processes and policies that will improve and advance HRE in various disciplines and sectors.

Next Steps

- Recruitment of study participants
- Facilitation of semi-structured interviews
- Data analysis/Synthesize research findings
- Documenting results, discussion and recommendations
- Dissemination of research

References and Acknowledgements

- UNDHRET (2011) & WPHRE (2005-present)