

## **Education for Human Rights: Opportunities and challenges arising from Australian Curriculum reform**

**John Buchanan, University of Technology Sydney**  
**Nina Burridge, University of Technology Sydney**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the place of human rights education in Australian schools in the light of the implementation of the national curriculum and unprecedented educational and social/geopolitical turmoil. It also draws on, as part of its literature base, the first nationwide initiative to assess the Australian community's views on human rights issues, by the Australian Government's National Human Rights Consultation Committee (NHRCC, 2009), undertaken by the authors. With global events and technologies challenging previously accepted norms of behaviour, it is vital to consider how school educators can play a more effective role in enabling students to learn about human rights. To assist in a discussion of the opportunities and challenges facing teachers and students, the paper provides background into the development of a human rights education agenda in Australia. It draws on recent studies that analyse legislation, education policy, curriculum documents, and a set of roundtable consultations. In response to difficult political and community contexts, it is our aim to raise the profile of human rights education and prompt discussion on progressing it in schools.

**Key Words:** human rights education, curriculum reform, social justice

### **Author Contact details:**

John Buchanan, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Technology Sydney  
Email: john.buchanan@uts.edu.au. Address: PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007 Australia  
Ph: +61 02 9514 5285

Nina Burrige, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Technology Sydney  
Email: nina.burrige@uts.edu.au  
Ph: +612 9514 5354

**Acknowledgements**

The curriculum study cited by Burrige et al. (2013) was funded by a grant from the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department's Human Rights Education Framework program.

# **Education for Human Rights: Opportunities and challenges arising from Australian Curriculum reform**

## **Introduction**

The unprecedented pace and scale of change is making its impact locally and globally. Australia is not immune to such changes. In a seminal report for Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Hajkowicz, Cook, and Littleboy (2012) identified the main overarching trends facing the nation. Their report pointed to scarcity of resources; severe environmental impact and damage; an ageing population; the rising influence of Asian states; impacts from global interconnectivity; and a cultural megatrend that emphasises the need for intercultural experiences and social relationships. The report provides compelling evidence that in coming decades the Australian population will face substantive change due to global economic, political and social volatility. These issues have profound implications for education and raise concerns about how schools and teachers are preparing children and young people to face the associated challenges. Addressing these challenges raises questions that are directly related to a human rights agenda, such as how school education policy makers and practitioners can best respond to these megatrends as they educate Australia's citizens of the future. One way to strengthen democracy and build a more ethical culture is through a consistent and committed school-based approach to human rights and citizenship education.

In this paper we explore the following questions: What constitutes an appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> Century education that will allow for human flourishing in local, national, and global contexts? How can this kind of education incorporate a social justice dimension? How much emphasis should be accorded to the principles of social justice and human rights within our curricula and within our whole-school communities? More specifically, the paper discusses how education can promote

human rights principles that enable both an equitable and socially just world that values human rights (Burrige, 2014) and an ‘ecology of dignity’ whereby people accord each other human dignity (Tham, 2010). Drawing on the works of Martha Nussbaum (2009, 2010, 2011) and others, we argue for the inclusion in school education of a present- and futures-oriented human rights dimension that underpins the school curriculum. This will enhance local and global citizenship and benefit individuals, their immediate communities and the wider world generally.

### **Australian Historical Background and Context**

As a social democracy, Australia has pioneered substantive legislation of progressive human rights. This includes extending the vote to women and securing workers’ rights and the basic wage (Australian Council of Trade Unions [ACTU], 2015). In 1948, through the leadership of Dr H. V. Evatt, then President of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, Australia was instrumental in the design and implementation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2016a). This was enacted after one of human history’s darkest moments and driven by the aspiration for a more just, equitable and peaceful society that valued human rights through education. Article 26.2 of the UDHR asserts:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (UN, 2016).

In today’s multicultural Australia, geopolitical forces and power struggles have refocused attention on national security and border protection. The impacts of globalisation threaten to undermine hard-won working conditions (Sheil, 2001) and the appreciation of diversity and

difference faces increasing challenge (Markus, 2014). Moreover, Australia's previous leadership standing is being seen by some as having been seriously eroded because of policies such as asylum seeker detention, marriage inequality and the slow uptake of renewable energy sources, as part of what McDonald (2015, p. 651) referred to (under the previous Abbott Government) as "foreign policy as domestic politics". It is therefore pertinent to look anew at the UDHR and the extent to which a culture of rights exists in our school education systems, particularly at a time of national curricular renewal.

### **The Role of Education in Informed Active Citizenship**

Education for human development entails engaging young people in mindful, compassionate action. It operates within a framework of promoting education for a just and inclusive society, both globally and locally, and encouraging students to understand, respect and uphold associated rights and responsibilities. Such egalitarian education is based on the entitlement of all human beings to basic human rights, human dignity and opportunities for advancement, irrespective of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic circumstances. In this paper we focus on education for informed, active citizenship and how this might be incorporated into Australia's current curriculum.

Nussbaum (2009) describes education for human development as "the goal of producing decent world citizens who can understand the global problems ... and who have the practical competence and the motivational incentives to do something about these problems"; she proceeds to ask: "How, then, would we produce such citizens?" (p. 10). Nussbaum (2011) also writes of ten central capabilities for human development that are premised on human dignity. Her core capability number 6 (Practical Reason) implies the value of education for "being able to form a

conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life” (p. 34). In core capability number 4 (Senses, Imagination, and Thought), she explicitly mentions education:

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain. (p. 34)

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of how education for active informed citizenship is embedded within a human rights education framework and how developing a culture of rights within a school and its related community will assist in building active, informed citizens who care about their future world. We bring to our discussion, key Australian and international reports and studies that investigate and develop human rights education (HRE) programs for schools.

### *Human Rights Education*

Dyer (2014) succinctly describes human rights as those rights that allow us to live a fully human life. The UN General Assembly (2016) defines HRE as “any learning, education, training or information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights” (p. 3). A comprehensive HRE program will therefore focus on fundamental freedoms, dignity, tolerance,

respect for diversity, freedom of participation, peace-building, social justice and sustainable development, and encompass the development of associated knowledge and skills, values, attitudes and action (UN General Assembly, 2016).

Tibbits and Kirchsclaeger (2010) suggest HRE may be seen as “an emergent field of educational theory and practice” (p. 1). It intersects with citizenship education, peace education, anti-racism education, Holocaust/genocide education, education for sustainable development, and intercultural education. The report of the Human Rights Education Associates (HREA, 2014) says HRE “overlaps attitudes, standards, values and principles of human rights, with *participatory pedagogy*” (emphasis added) (p. 6). It calls for “thorough self-reflection and robust, internal critique” of the sector that “must go beyond programme evaluation to include an intellectual and academic analysis” (p. 10).

The Council of Europe’s (2010) *Charter for Education on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* delineates the differences between citizenship education (with its focus on rights and responsibilities of active civic action) and HRE, and highlights the much broader focus of HRE as being “concerned with the broader spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms in every aspect of people’s lives” (p. 8). The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2011) also notes that the goals of HRE should include the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the development of respectful attitudes, and changed behaviour that reflects human rights values; and the motivation of social action and empowerment of active citizenship to advance respect for the rights of all.

*Citizenship Education*

Citizenship education is generally linked to the development of an understanding of a nation's parliamentary and civic rules and processes. Tudball and Henderson (2013) contend that while the new Australian curriculum provides opportunities to address the civic, political and social components of citizenship education, it needs to focus also on broadening the views, passion and capacity of young people to express their own identities. This would enable young people to become active and engaged citizens in diverse communities – locally, nationally and beyond, as part of a “participatory citizenship that can lead to ‘action competence’” (Henderson & Tudball, 2016). Similarly, Mellor (2010) speaks of “social justice, and the rights of citizens to know their rights and obligations so that they can become more active and engaged in the world” (p. 39), while Vromen, Loader, Xenos and Bailo (2016) emphasise ‘*doing politics*’ in the context of young people’s use of social media, as part of a morally and ethically-driven “civic virtue” (Henderson, 2015, p. 11). Mellor (2010) also notes the key role of schools in giving voice to young people as constituents and empowering them to learn how to make a difference for themselves and others. HRE provides the scope that enables an understanding of active citizenship and the comprehension that all people have a right to live with dignity and have their social, political and cultural rights respected within the bounds of a civil society.

Not all researchers are optimistic about the future and present of citizenship education. Kildea and Smith (2016) lament the lack of knowledge among voters about the Australian Constitution and political processes. We also note Black, Gray and Leahy’s (2016, p. 160) vivid metaphor of the “zombie citizen”, the “slack-jawed, vacant eyed ravenous monster, blindly consuming everything” (p. 159). Hébert (2016) attributes part of the problem to the social alienation of young people. Similarly, Banks (2015, p. 151) identifies a “failed citizenship” among people who feel disenfranchised by the State on the grounds of their religion, language, ethnicity or culture.



Gibson and Mcallister (2015) note a failure of instant online information to recruit more politically-literate citizens, or to increase political knowledge among more than a small politically-literate elite.

Nevertheless, there appears to be room for optimism with regard to the prospects of civics and citizenship education in Australia. In his critique of Australia's *Discovering Democracy* program, Richiert (2016) observes advances in making citizenship more active and democratic in secondary schools, and concludes that "Australian schools laid the foundation of prospectively increasing numbers of active democratic citizens during the past two decades". Struthers (2015) calls for more international support to aid and abet national initiatives in fostering human rights education.

The remainder of the paper will investigate Australian government policy responses and curriculum activities that promote HRE as a key pathway to a better understanding of global issues and concerns. This will be done in the context of a range of initiatives by the UN.

### **The United Nations and Human Rights Education**

Support for HRE over recent decades has been led by the UN. The 1993 UN *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2016a) sets out to codify human rights and responsibilities. Its Section D (items 78–82, in particular) focuses on the contribution of education. Item 82 states: "Governments, with the assistance of intergovernmental organizations, national institutions and non-governmental organizations, should promote an increased awareness of human rights and mutual tolerance."

Subsequent to the Vienna Declaration, the UN declared the *Decade of Human Rights Education*, which ran from 1995 to 2004 (OHCHR, 2016b).

In 2005 the UN endorsed the *World Programme for Human Rights Education* (OHCHR, 2016c). Among its objectives were: developing a culture and common understanding of human rights, operating on a national, regional and global scale; encouraging collaboration; evaluating current practice and highlighting best practice. To be compatible with democratic leadership approaches, the appropriate pedagogy for HRE would be one that is “participatory, learner-centred, experiential and action oriented, and takes into account cultural considerations” (p. 8).

The *UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training* (HRET) was adopted in December 2011 (UN General Assembly, 2012). It asserts that everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about their human rights and fundamental freedoms. It recognizes that HRET is a society-wide, lifelong process. This non-binding declaration also defines HRET as encompassing “all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN General Assembly, 2012, p. 3) and calls for intensive efforts to promote the universal respect and understanding of HRET. Together, these UN undertakings created an international framework for HER and prompted HER and democratic citizenship programs in schools around the world (Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR], 2009). Other international networks, such as the HREA were also set up to distribute HRE information and materials. The HREA (2014) report acknowledges that the UN’s OCHCR supports HRE in three main ways: dissemination of good practice and other information; technical support; and delivery of training in human rights.

## **Australian Government Policy Responses to the Focus on Human Rights Education**

These UN developments in HRE have stimulated Australian policy makers to address international obligations and build a national culture of HRE that also engenders respect for individual and collective rights, encourages collaborations between schools and civic bodies, and enhances social cohesion. Bradbery (2013) calls this “a holistic education that provides emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities with intellectual environments that produce not only competently technical, but also secure, caring, literate and actively participatory human beings” (p. 10). The establishment in 1986 of Australia’s Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), renamed in 2008 the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), constituted the first independent statutory body to provide oversight of human rights issues, conduct research, and provide community-based education. In 2009, the Australian Government’s National Human Rights Consultation Committee (NHRCC, 2009) was the first nationwide initiative to assess the Australian community’s views on human rights issues. Drawing on the consultation’s findings, the Australian Government developed the *Australian Human Rights Framework* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010) to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights through education. This Framework

encompasses a comprehensive suite of education initiatives to ensure all Australians are able to access information on human rights. This includes the development of human rights education programs for primary and secondary schools, the community and for the Commonwealth public sector. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. 5)

The Australian Government subsequently produced the 2012 *National Human Rights Action Plan* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), which mapped out the government’s commitment to

prioritising HRE. It offered funding to non-government organisations to deliver community education and engagement programs and for the development of an education and training package for the public sector. It also increased funding to the AHRC for its community education program and other ongoing work with school jurisdictions and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in order to ensure that human rights and principles were included in the national curriculum (BurrIDGE et al., 2013, p.16).

### **The Australian Curriculum and Human Rights Education**

Given that Australia's school education system involves the curricula of eight state and territory jurisdictions, national curriculum reform is problematic. Since 2009 a national initiative has brought all jurisdictions and sectors together to develop and implement an Australian Curriculum across eight key learning areas: the Arts; English; Health and Physical Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Languages; Mathematics; and Science and Technologies (ACARA, 2016a). In addition, there are seven general capabilities: literacy; numeracy; information communication and technology capability; critical and creative thinking; personal and social capability; ethical understanding; and intercultural understanding (ACARA, 2016b). There are also three cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; and Sustainability (ACARA, 2016c). As well, attention to technology, including ethical use of social media and cybersafety, is an important component of HRE (ACARA 2015).

In response to the first set of school curriculum documents released by ACARA, the AHRC in 2011 identified the need for human rights and Australian values to be integrated into the general capabilities statements and cross-curriculum priorities, and across all learning areas (AHRC,

2011). It recommended the inclusion of a General Capability on Human Rights and Australian Values that would focus on: human dignity; universality; equality and non-discrimination; respect and responsibility; accountability; and participation (p. 6). The Civics and Citizenship Shape paper (ACARA, 2012) includes reference to “lawful dissent” and “respect for human rights” (p. 5), and more specifically, to “civil, political, social, economic, cultural” human rights (p. 8), as well as “civic duty and human rights in a modern democracy” (p. 10).

Although a nation-wide Australian Curriculum has yet to be fully implemented, its development has provided opportunities for educators to address human rights, social justice and civics issues in key learning areas, subjects and topics. BurrIDGE, Chodkiewicz, Payne, Oguro, Varnham and Buchanan (2013) conducted the first national investigation into the place of human rights education in the school curriculum. Our underlying philosophy is that curricula should implicitly and explicitly embody a human rights dimension, as part of their role in leading and shaping HR as an area of study and action. The investigation sought to map and analyse opportunities for and threats to Human Rights Education across all states and territories, according to criteria such as: ages and stages of learning; subject areas; compulsory or optional status of subjects; implicit or explicit inclusion of HR topics, and curricular or extracurricular opportunities (BurrIDGE, Chodkiewicz, Payne, Oguro, Varnham & Buchanan, 2014, p. 172).

The project’s findings drew on an analysis of available curriculum documents and a series of national roundtable discussions involving key education curriculum bodies, education authorities, teacher associations and community organisations in each Australian state and territory. In all, about 70 people took part in discussions. The study was also futures-oriented, identifying within the curriculum some explicit and implicit opportunities teachers might use to address, develop

and extend student understanding of human rights issues and the concepts and principles that underlie them. All roundtable discussions were recorded, transcribed and closely analysed both individually and as cross-case analysis, to identify common or peculiar to various jurisdictions.

One of the subject areas identified as providing an important focus on civil and political rights is Civics and Citizenship, which sits within the Humanities and Social Sciences Learning Area and has a curriculum for Years 3 to 10 (ACARA, 2016d).

Importantly, each of the three Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priorities offers potential opportunities to address the global, regional and local implications of social justice and human rights issues. These include the rights of Australia's Indigenous peoples, Australia's Asian neighbours and various humanitarian and economic implications of the impacts of climate change and global population pressures on food and the environment. Indeed, ACARA's (2016c) Sustainability priority "is futures-oriented and calls on students to act sustainably as individuals and to participate in collective endeavours that are shared across local, regional and global communities". The second priority, focusing on Asia, recognises that prioritising Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia has the potential to develop "active and informed citizens working together to build harmonious local, regional and global communities" (AHRC, 2011, p. 33).

Since June 2014 there has been considerable political distancing from the AHRC framework and the implementation of the Human Rights Action Plan, with all funding for HRE programs curtailed by the Australian Government. The Government has also undertaken a review of the

Australian Curriculum (Australian Government, 2014). A major finding of the review was that the primary curriculum, in particular, was overcrowded and hence teachers might have difficulty implementing it fully. This may leave little room for studying human rights issues. The review criticised the Australian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priorities, declaring a "seemingly political determination of these three 'priorities'" (Australian Government, 2014, p. 3). It also argued that the curriculum paid insufficient attention to the impact of Western civilisation and Judeo-Christian traditions. While focusing on Judeo-Christian heritage appears inconsistent with a non-sectarian public education system in a multicultural context, it may nonetheless afford scope for the study of human rights:

In the context of the [2008] Melbourne Declaration's aspiration that the national curriculum would enable students to understand the 'spiritual and moral' dimensions of life, there appears to be a distinct imbalance in the Australian Curriculum as these key aspects have been neglected. (Australian Government, 2014, p. 5)

Values present another 'fault line' that can cause reluctance to address human rights issues. HRE worthy of the name will have an edge to it and may meet resistance, despite, or perhaps because of, its inherent critical thinking aspect. For Paul (1992), a pioneering scholar in the field of critical thinking, an absence of critical thinking in educational institutions leaves learners open to bias, propaganda and unexamined self-interest. Accordingly, the ability to reason, unless imbued with an ethical dimension, may be more harmful than benign:

Skillful thinking is commonly a tool in the struggle for power and advantage, not an angelic force that transcends this struggle. (p. 11)

We can easily construe situations so as to see selfish desire as self defense, cruelty as discipline, domination as love, intolerance as conviction, evil as good. (p. 14)

We note that the *Review of the Australian Curriculum* (Australian Government, 2014, p. 5) casts some doubt on inquiry-based learning and student-centred learning, which many teachers and teacher educators see as crucial to developing critical thinking skills (Burrige et al., 2013). As Parkes (2015) points out, “Ignoring the critical leaves us haunted by the past, trapped within the rules and traditions we have inherited” (p. 53).

Despite strong advocacy for programs and for explicit inclusion of human rights education in the Australian Curriculum, we wonder, therefore, about the strength of will among educational policy makers and governments to ensure the inclusion of HRE in school curricula and culture. For successful school and community programs, human rights institutions must have the support of governments and educational policy makers. This view is strongly echoed by organisations such as the HREA (2014). In Burrige et al.’s (2013) study, teachers raised concerns about how school curricula deal with HRE, and they advocated for more support and training. For teachers in faith-based schools, some of their concerns arose specifically from their teaching contexts. It may be easier to debate issues such as the sacredness of life versus abortion rights and euthanasia in secular than in faith-based settings. Resistance can also arise from within the broader school community. The HREA (2014) report refers to opposition on the part of some students and parents to the inclusion of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender rights in a school’s curriculum. The report also recommends improved training for teachers to help better respond to such resistance.

Buchanan (2013) has identified several constraints to the teaching of human rights in schools. These include the overcrowded curriculum; a curriculum that is too content-driven, leaving



insufficient time to discuss and consider issues in depth; inadequate teacher training and resultant lack of confidence on the part of teachers to treat HRE; the contested and contentious nature of human rights; and resource availability. Another curriculum constraint observed by Burrige, Buchanan and Chodkiewicz (2014) was how the elective status of many senior History subjects that incorporate HRE, such as Legal Studies, Society and Culture and Aboriginal Studies, renders student exposure to HRE as a hit or miss affair. A preoccupation with basic skills testing is a further potential impediment to focusing on higher order quests such as HRE (Buchanan, 2013). These and other market-driven trends that threaten the inclusion, quality and outcomes of HRE need to remain under our scrutiny. As Nussbaum (2009) suggests:

Education based mainly on profitability in the global market magnifies these deficiencies, producing a greedy obtuseness and a technically trained docility that threaten the very life of democracy itself-and that certainly impedes the creation of a decent world culture. (p. 13)

Marsh and Hart (2011) point out the need for discussion of human responsibilities alongside human rights. Ailwood et al. (2011), however, note the absence of human rights and civics education in Australian curriculum documents for the early childhood years (to about Year 3). This is at odds, they contend, with a widely accepted understanding of children of this age range being capable of comprehending issues of social justice. According to the AHRC (2011) report, a more formal treatment of the global and local dimension of human rights should begin no later than the senior years of primary school, so that by the end of Year 6, “through exploring human rights and Australian values, students learn to apply human rights to different situations related to their lives as well as more complex situations in their community, society and globally” (p. 13). By the end of Year 10, this should extend to “a more nuanced understanding of human rights

issues and dilemmas in Australia and globally” (p. 14). The AHRC (2011) recommends, for example, that HRE should include the incorporation of human rights in studies of regional and global issues, and Australia’s contribution to the codification of human rights in the wake of World War II.

There remain, nonetheless, other entry points for HRE into the Australian Curriculum. An example is the Civics and Citizenship subject, which secures a place for HRE along with a critical approach to history education. The use of social and other media should also serve to sharpen students’ criticality, particularly when it is action oriented. Levy (2013) speaks of simulated environments and vicarious experiences, such as witnessing someone else’s political victory. Buchanan (2013) suggests that because successful political involvement is likely to be highly reinforcing for young people, teachers might be able to use problem- or project-based approaches to engineer opportunities for students to gain political victories in classrooms and schools. This may equip them with the knowledge, confidence, skills, passion and persistence to pursue bigger battles subsequently.

We contend that the Australian Curriculum needs to strengthen the direction it provides for the general capabilities. It should focus more on building a culture of HRE that includes an appreciation of what frames ethical behaviour and how that would enable all people to live with dignity. At a time when national and international tensions and technologies are heightening our sense of insecurity, and communication technology is enabling the propagation of misinformation as much as legitimate evidence-based knowledge, it is crucial that students are skilled to critically appraise what is put before them. This is underscored by Nussbaum (2010), who argues:

A catalogue of facts, without the ability to assess them, or to understand how a narrative is assembled from evidence, is almost as bad as ignorance, since the pupil will not be able to distinguish ignorant stereotypes purveyed by politicians and cultural leaders from the truth, or bogus claims from valid ones. (p. 94)

Regrettably, as critical thinkers, perhaps we must nurture mistrust of education, even as we highlight its vital contribution to our being. As Harber (2004) observes:

Ignoring or playing down the issue of the goals of education can be very dangerous as education systems have been consciously designed and used for purposes of violent evil, have actively participated in the reproduction of violence or, through the sin of omission, have not attempted to educate people to resist violent ‘solutions’ to social divisions. (p. 15)

### **Resources for Human Rights Education**

Resources are the *sine qua non* of curriculum reform. We are well aware that teachers are often too time poor and overburdened with the demands of the curriculum to embark on ventures such as developing new teaching units. This is particularly the case when the content is less specifically embedded in the syllabus, but rather forms part of an overarching framework of general capabilities or cross-curriculum priorities. Partnerships with key NGOs and the involvement of teacher associations are therefore vital in assisting teachers to take up available curriculum opportunities. The AHRC has produced a comprehensive series of resources for teachers and students in the *RightsEd* program (AHRC, 2016b), including human rights examples in five subject areas – English, History, Geography, Science and Maths – that can be used across the school years from Foundation to Year 10 (AHRC, 2016c). Various systemic Catholic and

State and Territory school jurisdictions also produce resources related to HRE issues. In some state jurisdictions these are only accessible by staff within each jurisdiction. As well, a number of key non-government agencies such as Amnesty International, Save the Children, Refugee Council of Australia, Global Education Project, and World Vision Australia have produced valuable teaching resources that address human rights, children's rights and poverty (Burrige et al., 2013, p. 51).

In response to these constraints on accessing and using resources, we recommend a greater provision of in-service education to teachers of HRE, including a key facilitating role for teacher associations. Further, we suggest that teachers be provided with access to professional development training in human rights and global issues as part of their accreditation process. This would be a way of ensuring that they have the confidence and skills to engage students in meaningful learning experiences that are not just required by the formal curriculum but also part of the educational journey of becoming active, informed and engaged local and global citizens. The gathering together of teachers who are like minded and like hearted will generate ideas, enthusiasm and boldness for civic causes. As human rights barrister Geoffrey Robertson (2009) points out:

'Human Rights' is not history because it isn't past. It's not law because it's still in flux. It's not philosophy although it does provide ethics for our time. Nor is it religion because it's secular and not dogmatic. It's not politics because it's not populist. It is, however, drawn from all these disciplines, and more, in its efforts to define and enforce human values; values which a democratic society can't be neutral about and nor can education. It has the capacity to induce the self confidence that comes from a

sense of dignity because these rights sustain and reflect the dignity of the human person. (p. 8)

Education about, and observance of, human rights are essential components for building societies that seek to affirm inclusion while avoiding both uniformity and fragmentation.

## **Conclusions**

Australia has a mixed record in supporting the development of HRE and embedding a rights culture in schools. Building a human rights-based school requires a whole-school approach (Struthers, 2015), where each school is seen as an inclusive learning community with a governance culture that respects rights and global perspectives and reaches out to all stakeholders in their locality and beyond.

We believe that a number of dynamics now operate to slow the progress of HRE in Australia. The new Australian Curriculum seems to be rather cautious about HRE and more concerned with instrumentalist outcomes than the promotion of critical thinking. This leads to a reticence among teachers, particularly of younger children, to approach controversial issues (Burridge et al., 2013, p.16). As well, the Curriculum's emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills raises the question of, 'literacy for what purpose?' We return, then, to our broader question of education for what purpose. We contend that as teachers and policy makers move into positions of power and influence, they need to engage with the kind of future they want students to aspire to. Pursuit of this may entail building a culture of respect in schools where students are well informed, critically aware and have the understanding and confidence to know what it means to live with trust, dignity and humanity in a global community. Despite some of these potential obstacles, we

join with Peterson and Bentley (2016, p. 1) in calling for “cautious optimism” with regard to the future of human rights education, or citizenship education more broadly.

## References

Ailwood, J., Brownlee, J., Johansson, E., Cobb-Moore, C., Walker, S., & Boulton-Lewis, G. (2011). Educational policy for citizenship in the early years in Australia. *Journal of Education Policy*, 26(5), 641-653.

Australian Council of Trade Unions. (2015). *The Harvester judgement and Australia's minimum wage*. Retrieved from <http://worksite.actu.org.au/the-harvester-judgement-and-australias-minimum-wage/>

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016a). *Learning Areas / Subjects*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/learning\\_areas/learning\\_areas.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/learning_areas/learning_areas.html)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016b). *General capabilities*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/general\\_capabilities.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/general_capabilities.html)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016c). *Cross-curriculum priorities*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/cross\\_curriculum\\_priorities.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/cross_curriculum_priorities.html)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016d). *Civics and Citizenship*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum\\_1/learning\\_areas/humanities\\_and\\_social\\_sciences/civics\\_and\\_citizenship.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum_1/learning_areas/humanities_and_social_sciences/civics_and_citizenship.html)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2015). *ACARA News 2015 02*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/news\\_media/acara\\_news/acara\\_news\\_2015\\_02.html#20150218](http://www.acara.edu.au/news_media/acara_news/acara_news_2015_02.html#20150218)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2012). *The shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship*. Retrieved from [http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Shape\\_of\\_the\\_Australian\\_Curriculum\\_\\_Civics\\_and\\_Citizenship\\_251012.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum__Civics_and_Citizenship_251012.pdf)

Australian Government. (2014). *Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final report*. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review\\_of\\_the\\_national\\_curriculum\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review_of_the_national_curriculum_final_report.pdf)

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2011). *Human rights education in the national school curriculum: Position paper of the Australian Human Rights Commission*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/human-rights-education-national-school-curriculum-position-paper-australian-human>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2016a). *Australia and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/australia-and-universal-declaration-human-rights>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2016b). *Human rights in the school classroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/human-rights-school-classroom>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2016c). *Human rights examples for the Australian Curriculum*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/human-rights-school-classroom>

Banks, J. (2015). Failed citizenship, civic identity, and education. *Kappa Delta Pi Record* (51)4, 151-154.

Black, R., Gray, E., & Leahy, D. (2016). Zombies, monsters and education: The creation of the young citizen. In V. Carrington, J. Rowsell, E. Priyadharshini & R. Westrup (Eds.). *Generation Z: Zombies, popular culture and educating youth*. New York: Springer. Pp. 159-172.

Bradbery, D. (2013). Bridges to global citizenship: Ecologically sustainable futures through children's literature. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 29(2), 221-237.

Buchanan, J. (2013). *History, Geography and Civics education: Teaching and learning in the primary years*. Williamstown, Vic: Cambridge University Press.

Burridge, N. (2014). *Education for a just and inclusive society*. Retrieved from [http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/Portals/0/upload/resfile/Education\\_for\\_a\\_just\\_and\\_inclusive\\_society\\_2011.pdf](http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/Portals/0/upload/resfile/Education_for_a_just_and_inclusive_society_2011.pdf)

Burridge, N., Buchanan, J. & Chodkiewicz, A. (2015). Human rights and history education: An Australian study. *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3). 17-36. <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol39/iss3/2/>

Burridge, N., Chodkiewicz, A., Payne, A., Oguro, S., Varnham, S., & Buchanan, J. (2014). Human rights education in the Australian Curriculum. In Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center. *Human rights education in Asia-Pacific*. (Vol 5). Pp. 167-202.

Burridge, N., Chodkiewicz, A., Payne, A., Oguro, S., Varnham, S., & Buchanan, J. (2013). *Human rights education in the school curriculum*. Report compiled for the Attorney General's Department.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). *Australian Human Rights Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.ag.gov.au/Consultations/Documents/Publicsubmissionsonthedraftbaselinestudy/AustaliasHumanRightsFramework.pdf>

Commonwealth of Australia. (2012). *National Human Rights Action Plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.ag.gov.au/Consultations/Documents/NationalHumanRightsActionPlan/National%20Human%20Rights%20Plan.pdf>

Council of Europe. (2010). *Charter for Education on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.coe.int/en/web/educ/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>

Dyer, J. (2014). Teaching for human rights, social justice and peace. In R. Gilbert & B. Hoeppe (Eds.) *Teaching humanities and social sciences: History, Geography & Citizenship* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). South Melbourne: Cengage Learning.

Gibson, R. & Mcallister, I. (2015). New media, elections and the political knowledge gap in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), 337-353

Hajkowicz, S.A., Cook, H., & Littleboy, A. (2012). *Our future world: Global megatrends that will change the way we live. The 2012 Revision*. Australia: CSIRO.  
Retrieved from <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP126135&dsid=DS2>

Harber, C. (2004). *Schooling as violence: How schools harm pupils and societies*. Milton Park, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.

Henderson, D. (2015). Exploring the Potential to Educate “Good Citizens” through the Australian Civics and Citizenship Curriculum. In Print, Murray & Tan, Chuanbao (Eds.) *Educating “Good” Citizens in a Globalising World for the Twenty-First Century*. Rotterdam: Sense Publications. Pp. 11-32.

Henderson, D. & Tudball, L. (2016) Democratic and participatory citizenship: Youth action for sustainability in Australia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 5(1), 5-19.

Hébert, Y. (2016). Youth in plural cities, multiculturalism and citizenship: Policy challenges and opportunities. *Dialnet*. Retrieved from <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5354743>

Human Rights Education Associates. (2014). *The role of national human rights institutions in advancing human rights education*. Retrieved from [http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base\\_id=1723&language\\_id=1](http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=1723&language_id=1)

Kildea, P. & Smith, R. (2016). The challenge of informed voting in constitutional referendums. *The University of New South Wales Law Journal*, 39(1), 368-400.

Levy, B. (2013). An empirical exploration of factors related to adolescents’ political efficacy. *Educational Psychology*, 33(3), 357-390.

McDonald, M. (2015). Australian foreign policy under the Abbott Government: Foreign policy as domestic politics? *Australian International Affairs*, 69(6), 651-669. doi: 10.1080/10357718.2015.1056514



- Markus, A. (2014) Attitudes to immigration and cultural diversity in Australia, *Journal of Sociology*, 50(1),10-22.
- Marsh, C., & Hart, C. (2011). *Teaching the social sciences and humanities in an Australian Curriculum* (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson, Australia.
- Mellor, S. (2010). Insights from formal testing of civics and citizenship learning in Australia. *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 25-42.
- National Human Rights Consultation Committee. (2009). *National Human Rights Consultation Committee Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/submission-national-human-rights-consultation-2009>
- Nussbaum, M. (2009). Education for profit, education for freedom. *Liberal Education*, 95(3), 6-13.
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not for profit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2009). *Human Rights Education in the School Systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America: A Compendium of Good Practice*. Warsaw, Poland: ODIHR.
- Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2016a). *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Vienna.aspx>
- Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2016b). *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/Decade.aspx>
- Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2016c). *World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/Programme.aspx>
- Parkes, R. (2015). What paradigms inform the Review of the Australian Curriculum: History? What does this mean for the possibilities of critical and effective histories in Australian education? *Curriculum Perspectives*, 35(1), 52-54.
- Paul, R. (1992). Critical thinking: What, why, and how? *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 77, Spring.
- Peterson, A. & Bentley, B. (2016). A case for cautious optimism? Active citizenship and the Australian Civics and Citizenship Curriculum. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1-13.  
**DOI:** 10.1080/02188791.2016.1142424

Richiert, F. (2016). Learning for active citizenship: Are Australian youths *Discovering Democracy* at school? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*. doi: 10.1177/1746197915626090

Robertson, G. (2009). *The public good and the education of children*. Keynote address, National Public Education Forum. Retrieved from <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Publications/2009/NPEF/GRobertson.pdf>.

Sheil, C. (2001) (Ed.) *Globalisation: Australian impacts*. Sydney: New South Wales University Press.

Struthers, A. (2015). Human rights education: Educating *about, through* and *for* human rights. *International Journal of Human Rights*, 19(1), 53-73.

Tham, J. (2010). Challenges to human dignity in the ecology movement, *The Linacre Quarterly*, 77(1), 53-62.

Tibbits, F., & Kirchsclaeger, P. (2010). Perspectives of research on human rights education. *Journal of Human Rights Education*, 2(1). Retrieved from [http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/peace/files/2013/05/tibbits\\_kirchsclaeger\\_research\\_hre\\_jhre\\_1\\_2010.pdf](http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/peace/files/2013/05/tibbits_kirchsclaeger_research_hre_jhre_1_2010.pdf)

Tudball, L., & Henderson, D. (2013). *A new Civics curriculum in Australian schools: Is it national education?* Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

United Nations. (2016). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

United Nations General Assembly. (2016). *Plan of action for the Third Phase (2015-2019) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/ThirdPhase/Pages/ResolutionsReports.aspx>

United Nations General Assembly. (2012). *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/ga/66/resolutions.shtml>

Vromen, A., Loader, B., Xenos, M., & Bailo, F. (2016). Everyday making through Facebook engagement: Young citizens' political interaction in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. *Political Studies*. doi: 10.1177/0032321715614012