Human rights education and student self-conception in the Dominican Republic

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In 2001, a 3-month course in human rights based on critical inquiry was offered to 8th graders in a slum area of Santo Domingo. The students' attitudes, behaviors and knowledge of human rights principles were measured before and after the course. The curriculum focused on international principles and entrenched local problems such as discrimination against Haitian migrants, police brutality, violence against women and exploitation of child labor in free trade zones. This paper will discuss the field of human rights education, the study's findings about the nature of student response to the course and its impact on student identity, solidarity with victims of human rights abuses and self-confidence as a result of human rights education.

Evaluating human rights education

Education has long been viewed as a vehicle for the socialization of culturally and politically identified values. McGinn (1996, p. 350) finds that 'schools are a product of communities. … These communities organized education to reproduce values and institutions considered central to identity and progress'. The consideration of certain values as central is not always locally defined given complex historical and current power relationships between communities, territories and nation states. Education was identified as a fundamental means for fostering respect for human rights by the crafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Article 26.[1] The United Nations declaration of 1995–2004 as the decade for Human Rights Education has motivated many member states to commit to incorporating human rights into national curricula as an additive feature, often unrelated to or incongruent with other elements of the existing curriculum. The emergence of global human rights standards and advocacy of their promotion through education has very different expressions in

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distinct national contexts at both the policy and implementation levels. Thus, the evaluation of the actual impact of human rights education on students is an integral component of programs seeking to impart human rights principles. Advocating further outcomes of human rights education beyond merely knowledge of principles and situations, Jennings (1994, p. 291) in his study of the 'self-in-connection' of North American human rights workers argues for the following purpose of human rights education:

> Human rights education must move beyond didactic instruction to embrace 'connection and interdependency' as lived experience in the classroom. The goal is to engage students and educators in experiences which impact fundamental self-understandings to the end that they see themselves as defined in part by their connections to the oppressed.

Hence, the evaluation of changes in self-conception is also an area of interest for human rights educators. The central focus of this article is to evaluate student responses to a human rights educational program piloted in the Dominican Republic in 2001. While increased student knowledge of human rights principles is an important feature of the study, I seek to examine how this knowledge of human rights affected self-reported student behaviours, attitudes and beliefs and how students renegotiated their senses of self through the course.

Human rights in the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti and has a population of approximately 8 million residents. Since its independence from colonial rule, the Dominican Republic has had a series of authoritarian regimes, most notably the iron-fisted 31-year tenure of Rafael Trujillo, ended by his assassination in 1961:

> The absolute power Trujillo wielded is almost unimaginable today. A former U.S. Ambassador to the country recalled in his memoirs that 'Telephones were tapped, hotel rooms were wired with microphones, mail was opened. … Worst of all, as the dictator's informers seeped throughout the land, no man could know whether his neighbor, or his lifelong friends, or even his brother or son or wife, might inform against him'. … 'If the police were looking for you,' recalled Dr. Arnulfo Reyes, a survivor of the repression, ' you dared not run away. If you did, they would come and kill all the members of your family' (Gonzalez, 2000, pp. 120–121).

In the post-Trujillo era, little was done to bring members of his government to justice for the tens of thousands of cases of extra-judicial execution, disappearance and torture reported to have occurred. For 22 of the 35 years following Trujillo's assassination, his one-time Foreign Minister and Vice-President, Joaquín Balaguer held the presidency, originally backed by both the United States and the Roman Catholic Church (Wucker, 1999). Dominican scholars have deemed 'the repression under the first six years of that regime even bloodier than the worst excesses under Trujillo', with Balaguer's paramilitary forces killing and intimidating leftists and political opponents (Wucker, 1999, p. 70). One example of the impunity that still reigns for human rights abuses is evidenced by the case of Narciso González, a journalist

who disappeared in 1994 after his strong commentary against the Balaguer administration. Having sought out various national avenues for redress, the case is likely to go before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights since the perpetrators of the crime have not yet been brought to justice (Protagonistas de la Semana, 2001). As such, notions of due process and legal protections are technically part of the Dominican judicial system, but are aspects that many people have seen violated or forgone given the many years of authoritarian rule and quasi-democracy. The strong emergence of civil society in recent years is a countering force, but there is not yet widespread belief in legal guarantees for individual rights.

Many educators, policy-makers, foreign donors and members of civil society have advocated civic education in various sectors in the Dominican Republic. Civic education is a required subject in the public education system and various books have been published to supplement the national curriculum in this area, many funded by US-based agencies such as Cabanes (2000), Contreras (2000), funded by the Falcon-bridge Foundation, and Garcia (1999), funded by the Center for Civic Education of Los Angeles. A study on the impact of civic education conducted by USAID across three national contexts, Poland, South Africa and the Dominican Republic, elaborates the objectives of civic education that appear to be those held by various actors promoting civic education in the Dominican Republic, particularly those seeking external funding for such activities. Civic education is designed to achieve three broad goals:

- To introduce citizens to the basic rules and institutional features of democratic political systems and to provide them with knowledge about democratic rights and practices;
- To convey a specific set of values thought to be essential to democratic citizenship such as political tolerance, trust in the democratic process, respect for the rule of law, and compromise;
- To encourage responsible and informed political participation – defined as a cluster of activities including voting, working in campaigns, contacting officials, lodging complaints, attending meetings, and contributing money. (USAID, 2002, p. 7)

Human rights education, while inherently linked with civic education, differs largely in its goals. Whereas one of the main objectives of civic education is to counter citizens' 'unrealistic expectations about what democracy is able to achieve and … [their] difficulty adjusting to the competition, compromise and loss that are inherent parts of the democratic political process' (USAID, 2002, p. 7), human rights education as outlined in the UDHR has as its primary goal the 'strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms', rather than placing a specific value on social cohesion.

Human rights education

While identified in the UDHR (1948) as a component of universal human rights, human rights education as a field of practice and study has largely emerged in the past

15 years. For the purpose of this discussion, the following description of human rights education will be employed:

> We can distinguish two basic directions of human rights education: learning *about* and learning *for* human rights. The first area comprises knowledge of the genesis, history and relevance of human rights and central human rights documents as well as internationally established instruments for their realisation. … Its emphasis lies in the accumulation of knowledge and cognitive skills and the understanding and positive valuing of human rights. All human rights programmes entail this first dimension of HRE [human rights education], and most of them proceed further to the second dimension: learning *for* human rights. Here the empowered individual is the central goal. Empowered subjects can participate in the transformation of society on the basis of human rights (Lohrenscheit, 2002, p. 176).

By looking at human rights education as a means of imparting information about human rights and its function in fostering action, the examination of changes in students' skills, attitudes and behaviors becomes a field of study in addition to the evaluation of increased knowledge about human rights.

The modern field of peace education is inextricably linked to human rights education. Within the field of peace education, the terms 'negative peace' and 'positive peace' are often employed. Negative peace is 'the absence of organized, personal violence, that is approximately the same as nonwar', while positive peace requires 'the absence of structural violence' (Wiberg, in Brock-Utne, 1989). Whereas earlier peace education scholars focused on negative peace or the absence of war, the current inclusion of positive peace in the field creates an opportune link with education for the promotion of human rights:

> The conceptual core of peace education is violence, its control, its reduction, and elimination. The conceptual core of human rights education is human dignity, its recognition, fulfillment, and universalization. … Human rights are most readily adaptable to the study of positive peace, the social, political, and economic conditions most likely to provide the environment and process for social cohesion and nonviolent conflict resolution. … Education for peace should be primarily prescriptive and human rights offers the most appropriate route through which to move from problem to prescription in all the various approaches to peace education (Reardon, 1997, p. 22).

The link between respect for human rights and sustainable peace is clear in international documents and declarations that highlight the importance of rights as the foundation of international peace. The thirty articles of the UDHR create a framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of principles and allows for the concretization of sometimes abstract notions of peace. Reardon (1997) also emphasizes the role of human rights education in using codified principles to elucidate multicultural, conflict resolution, development and environmental education. Thus, human rights education is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of peace education programs.

Different models or frameworks for human rights education have been developed in recent years. While most human rights education programs fit within the broad rubric set forth by Lohrenscheit (2002) of learning *about* human rights and learning *for* human rights, there have been elaborations on this general theme that merit

discussion in exploring the changes in students' skills, attitudes and behaviors through the process of human rights education. Given the differing constructions of human rights education in different contexts, it is important to note that programs will and should take on local modifications that better suit the information and mode of instruction deemed appropriate for the specific learning community. Tibbits (2002, p. 160) finds that conditions at the national level will determine the focus of human rights education programs:

> In developing countries, human rights education is often linked with economic and community development, and women's rights. In post-totalitarian or authoritarian countries, human rights education is commonly associated with the development of civil society and the infrastructures related to the rule of law and protection of individual and minority rights. In older democracies, human rights education is often conjoined favorably with the national power structure but geared towards reform in specific areas, such as penal reform, economic rights and refugee issues.

While it is relevant to look at the national context in which curricula on human rights are often formulated, it is also important to note the differing constructions of human rights problems across communities even within the same nation state. As such, different foci of human rights education are often employed in different contexts to better adapt instruction to the needs of the community: 'The rationales for each model are linked implicitly with particular target groups and a strategy for social change and human development' (Tibbits, 2002, p. 163). Tibbits (2002) further defines three human rights education models: (i) the values and awareness model; (ii) the accountability model; (ii) the transformation model. The values and awareness model seeks to impart general information about human rights and their history and to create a consciousness about international standards among learners, while 'learners are made to be "critical consumers" of human rights' (Tibbits, 2002, p. 164). Public awareness campaigns and the inclusion of human rights material into already existing lessons on civic education, history and social studies would fall under the author's definition of the values and awareness model. The accountability model assumes that learners will be 'directly involved in the protection of individual and group rights' and that 'the violation of rights, therefore, is seen as inherent to their work' (Tibbits, 2002, p. 165). Concrete skills development is a focus of this model and training in human rights for lawyers, judges, police officers, health service providers and other professionals would constitute activities that follow this model. The Transformation model is an approach that favors the development of attitudes and behaviors that respect human rights and is aimed towards the holistic development of 'human rights communities' (Tibbits, 2002, p. 166). While these programs can take place in schools, transformational human rights education often occurs with the involvement and sustained participation of members of the family and local community. Tibbits (2002, p. 167) characterizes these three models as forming a 'learning pyramid' in which 'all levels are mutually reinforcing, but certain models are obviously more essential to promoting social change'. Taking into account the development of models in the field of human rights education, the exploration of a case study of a pilot project in the Dominican Republic can help

shed light on some of the implications of human rights education for the development of student attitudes, behaviors and skills related to human rights.

As a contribution to the research on human rights education, the Partners Program, a group of lawyers, educators and researchers in Minnesota, developed a study to evaluate the impact of a human rights curriculum written by the Partners in Human Rights Education Program on urban public school students in 1997. The Minnesota study found that students in the human rights education group were indeed affected by the instruction in human rights and, compared with a control group, students demonstrated significant changes in their knowledge of human rights, behaviors, skills and attitudes. In 2001, seeking to replicate the study conducted by the Partners Program and in order to compare the results,[2] the human rights education project in the Dominican Republic identified a class of 8th graders in an urban slum area to participate in a 3-month interactive course on international human rights principles, designed in consultation with educators and human rights activists. As a Fulbright grantee in the Dominican Republic, I coordinated the research project, liaising with activists, educators and the students and staff at the selected school.

Methods

Sample

A group of 36 8th graders from a public school in the community of Buenos Aires de Herrera on the outskirts of Santo Domingo were chosen as the experimental group. An 8th grade class from a school in the same community, with students from similar socio-economic backgrounds, was chosen as a control group. The community of Buenos Aires de Herrera is an industrial and highly populated area. Few of the students' parents had participated in higher education, with the majority of fathers working as day laborers, construction workers, taxi and public car drivers and mothers as domestic workers, factory workers and informal saleswomen. Nearly all of the students in the human rights and control groups lived directly adjacent to a large *cañada*, a long river that ran through the city and had become the dumping ground for trash, sewage and industrial waste. The accumulation of waste occurred at the more open base of the *cañada*, located within Buenos Aires de Herrera, posing various public health concerns for the residents of the community.

The student demographics were as follows: 36 students participated in the human rights class, comprising 23 young women and 13 young men aged 12–15 years. The control group consisted of 11 male and 15 female students between the ages of 12–17. All of the students were of African descent, the majority self-identifying on the pre-test as *mulato/a* (14), *moreno/a* (10) or *indio/a* (24).[3]

The experimental group's teacher was given a 1-day training and sustained follow-up on the 25 lessons, each intended to last approximately 60–90 minutes, in human rights education and inquiry-based pedagogy and conducted them focusing on domestic human rights issues in the Dominican Republic as documented by local and international human rights monitoring bodies. All lessons included significant time for discussion and reflection.

Table 1. Student demographics

	Experimental (*n* = 36)	Control (*n* = 26)
Sex		
Male	13 (36.1%)	11 (42.3%)
Female	23 (63.9%)	15 (57.7%)
Age		
12	3 (8.3%)	9 (34.6%)
13	23 (63.9%)	5 (19.2%)
14	9 (25%)	7 (26.9%)
15	1 (2.8%)	3 (11.5%)
16		1 (3.9%)
17		1 (3.9%)

Similar to the Minnesota study, students in the control and experimental groups were given a pre- and post-test before and after the 3-month course to measure any changes in their knowledge of human rights issues, perception of personal abilities, interest in non-violent conflict resolution and willingness to intervene in situations of abuse. Using a similar research structure as the Partners Program, evaluation instruments were translated and modified according to local human rights issues and original curricular materials were developed for the 3-month course in the Dominican Republic. The survey consisted of 41 items and while the changes in many of the variables before and after the course are interesting for discussion, specific features have been selected to highlight student changes in self-conception through participation in human rights education. The pre- and post-test method has been highlighted as particularly useful in studies of evaluating changes in knowledge, attitudes and behavior related to concepts of democracy, civic participation and human rights. In a comparative study on civic education conducted by USAID, researchers recommend this method given its relevance for project development: 'One of the best ways to ensure effective measurement of impact is to survey program participants before they begin a program to gauge their level of political participation and knowledge to determine their support for key democratic values. Surveying them again after the course yields a clear comparison, and impact is much easier to assess using far simpler methods' (p. 29). To enrich the quantitative data collected through the pre- and post-tests, students were selected at random throughout the 3-month course for in-depth interviews. At the end of the course, students were also given a four-page questionnaire with open-ended questions about human rights issues, the course and their individual attitudes and aspirations. Eighteen months after completion of the course 12 students from the experimental group convened for a follow-up focus group discussion on the human rights course. The data presented is from the pre- and post-tests, the open-ended survey, interviews with selected students and the follow-up focus group.

Findings of the pilot study

The changes in student responses are divided into four categories: (1) knowledge of human rights issues, (2) perception of personal abilities and preferences, (3) commitment to non-violent conflict resolution and (4) willingness to intervene in situations of abuse and solidarity with victims.[4] The first three categories are represented through quantitative data gathered through the pre- and post-tests and the fourth category was measured based on data provided through a survey with open-ended questions given to the students.

With regard to knowledge of human rights issues, the course focused on four major issues identified in recent human rights reports on the Dominican Republic: (1) police brutality and extra-judicial executions; (2) discrimination against and illegal deportations of Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent; (3) low wages, poor working conditions and use of child labor in free trade zones; (4) physical violence against women.

Police abuse has been noted as an entrenched problem in the Dominican Republic. In 1998 human rights activists documented 168 extra-judicial killings, in 1999 the number rose to 221 (Tamayo, 2000) and in 2001, the US State Department reported the number of police killings at '300 plus' (Simons, 2002, p. 1). Killings usually occur due to aggressive police behavior and vigilantism, with only 5–10% resulting from legitimate self-defense concerns (Tamayo, 2000). In the community where the pilot study took place, during the human rights course, many students knew a young university student killed on her way home by a stray bullet from the police during an altercation with a suspect. While students condemned this behavior, in the pre-test many students responded that a criminal suspect had few rights or legal protections.

At present, two cases are pending in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights against the Dominican government for its treatment of Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Various international monitoring bodies have documented discrimination against these groups in illegal round-ups and deportations and restricted access to identity documents: 'An additional obstacle to obtaining proof of citizenship is posed by racially discriminatory profiling. Civil registry officials sometimes presume that a child's parents are Haitian because they are black, even if they have *cédulas* proving Dominican citizenship' (Human Rights Watch, 2001, online). Without identification documents, students cannot access public services such as healthcare or education. Given these discriminatory practices and widespread contempt for Haitian immigrants due to complex cultural and historical factors, student identification with victims of human rights abuse with regard to the population of Haitian descent registered low on the pre-test.

The US Department of Labor (2002) reports that approximately 50% of Dominican children work either exclusively or in combination with attending school. The presence of children in internationally owned factories under often dangerous conditions has drawn the attention of advocates both domestically and internationally: 'Tens of thousands of children begin working before the age of 14. Child labor takes place primarily in the informal economy, agriculture, small businesses, clandestine factories, and prostitution. Conditions in clandestine factories are generally poor,

unsanitary, and often dangerous' (US State Department, 2000, online). The location of the experimental group in an impoverished neighborhood perhaps affected student inability to identify child labor under difficult conditions as a human rights abuse.

Violence against women is a significant issue in the Dominican Republic, where according to a study by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2002), some 32% of women have experienced physical violence, mostly perpetrated by the victims' partner. Given the prevalence of domestic violence and the general impunity for abusive partners, the international community has encouraged the Dominican Republic to take steps towards fulfilling its international obligations under the conventions it is a party to, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 1999).

Based on these salient human rights issues, curricular materials were developed to sensitize students to the violations of human rights domestically. The following are the changes in student responses to questions of whether a described situation was a human rights abuse.

Among the students in the experimental group, self-reported knowledge of human rights issues increased by 39% and 100% of the students could explain what universal human rights were after the course. On the issues mentioned above, student ability to identify police abuse increased from 66.7 to 94.4% in the experimental group. With regard to discrimination against Dominicans of Haitian descent, 33% more students identified this practice as a violation of human rights after the course, and there was a 48% increase in student ability to recognize child labor in internationally owned factories as abusive. With regard to impunity for domestic violence, prior to the course 77.8% of students identified this as a violation of human rights, whereas 94.4% of students did after the course, a change that was determined to be significant using a χ^2 test with a p value of 0.001.

With regard to perception of personal abilities and preferences, students were asked to identify qualities that described them. After the course, there was a 20% increase in students self-reporting as 'intelligent', with a slight increase to 22% among the young women. There was a 26% increase in self-reporting as 'generous' among the
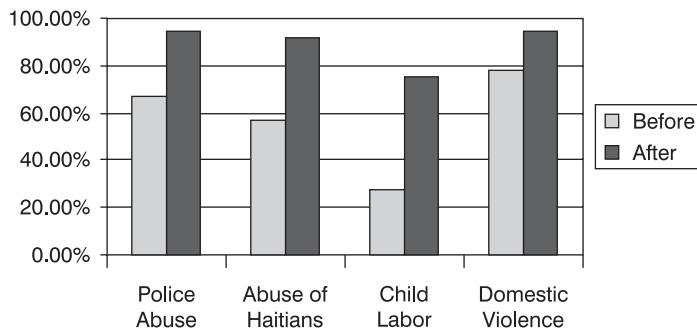

Figure 1.   Student ability to identify situations of abuse before and after human rights education

experimental group, while self-reporting of both of these qualities declined among the control group. Students in the experimental group also reported a 14% decrease in interest in watching violence on television, and this difference was significant, with a *p* value of 0.003.

With respect to non-violent conflict resolution, when asked how students would respond to a conflict at school, prior to the course 58.3% reported that they would seek a non-violent solution to the conflict, while after the course 72.2% selected a non-violent solution of talking with the other person involved or a teacher, rather than fighting. Students in the experimental group increased their self-reporting as 'non-violent' from 41 to 61%, versus a substantial decline in the control group.

The qualitative data gathered through the open-ended questionnaires, observations and individual interviews contributed to the larger picture of student changes in self-conception through the human rights course. Looking at self-reported responses when posed situations of abuse, the following are excerpts from the experimental group's responses on the open-ended survey to the question, 'The police detain a student from your school and beat him because they think he sells drugs. They put him in jail without a trial. What would you do?'[5] The following are selected responses from the student surveys:

- 'I would talk to the students to have a strike and talk to the president of the police to make justice' (Maria, 14).[6]
- 'I would say this is very bad because they didn't have proof to put him in jail and even so, without giving him a trial' (Cecilia, 15).
- 'I would send a letter to the president so that he could fix this problem in the police and so that this doesn't happen again' (Fernando, 14).
- 'If I am a witness, I would argue in favor of my friend at least until they found contrary proof or applied some of the articles of human rights' (Manuel, 15).

All the students in the human rights class responded with some action they would take on behalf of the student, whereas only 33% of students in the control group responded that they would intervene. Most of the control group responded that they would do nothing in such a situation. In response to the question, 'On the bus, you see a couple fighting. The man begins to hit his wife. What would you do?', students articulated how they might intervene in this situation:[7]

- 'I would detain him and look for a police officer so that he could be brought to justice'(José, 14).
- 'I would stop him and make sure he was put in jail' (Joaquín, 14).
- 'I would call the police and tell them that a man was beating his wife and that he is violating the rights of women' (Carmen, 13).
- 'First of all I would look for help so that the man stopped, and then I would teach him about the rights of women so that he would respect them' (Clara, 13).
- Situations like this always scare me, but the most I could do would be to try to talk with an adult, to see if between the two of them we could resolve this problem, talking to the man to tell him what he is doing is bad' (Celia, 13).

The student responses indicate a sense of agency and ability to intervene in situations of conflict as a third party. The development of empathy is the basis of Jennings (1994, p. 286) construction of human rights education: 'The curriculum should expand students' sense of global connection other than their own, including the oppressed in other countries. The result would be an intolerance of harm inflicted upon those in other countries to who one is connected, compelling the person to act as advocate for them'. As such, the student responses that indicate a concern for others suggest the development of this 'global connection' that can foster initiative and willingness to act on behalf of others. The follow-up focus group offers evidence that, more than knowledge of human rights principles, it was this sense of solidarity that persisted among participants.

In a follow-up focus group with students from the course 18 months after its completion, students discussed their changed role in their secondary schools as mediators or leaders given their status as graduates from a course on human rights. One student from the course mentioned his leadership role in challenging a teacher's authoritarian style and his successful petition to the principal that more student involvement and participation occur in her class. Other students mentioned that the course material had been read by their siblings and other members of the family and had been used for further coursework. Student identification as individuals knowledgeable about human rights had also resulted in their participation in human rights activities in the larger community. The Sunday following the focus group session, there was to be a city-wide march celebrating the UN-sponsored annual International Human Rights Day and several students noted that they were planning to attend.

The pilot study offers promising results for those seeking to prove the benefits of human rights education. Student knowledge of human rights issues, perception of personal ability, commitment to non-violent conflict resolution and willingness to intervene in situations of abuse all increased among the experimental group who participated in 3 months of human rights education in comparison to their responses prior to the course and compared with the control group. While other socio-political factors may have been shaping student changes in responses to the questions, it seems that the instruction in human rights created a special status among the human rights education students since they were receiving a course that other 8th graders from their school and community were not.

Limitations of the study

The study, however, has certain limitations that should be mentioned. One limitation is methodological. This evaluation relies on self-reports of behavior, which are not always the best indicator of actual behavior. Further, in order for student responses to be compared before and after the course, the surveys were not anonymous. With regard to the control group that was selected from another local school, while it seemed like a similar group of students, it is not known whether some other type of selection occurs between the two schools. Given the different age range of the students in the control group class, it may be possible that students in the

experimental group were in fact in a more accelerated class and more apt to absorb any course material more rapidly. Another alternative explanation for student interest in human rights education and positive response to it could be located within the community. In a marginalized community with few public services, the introduction of a course with interactive lessons, guest speakers, a foreign researcher sitting in on each class and course materials are departures from what is generally experienced in the 4-hour public school day.[8] Perhaps this experience fostered an unusual interest since students knew that they were the only group of students in the school receiving such attention.

The pilot study in the Dominican Republic also points to the importance of teacher training in both human rights content and critical pedagogy. Given the lack of a widespread 'culture of human rights', the absence of teacher training can result in inaccurate information being transmitted about human rights. One such example from an early lesson in the human rights course in the Dominican Republic was an activity on domestic human rights concerns. Students were to brainstorm human rights problems and develop recommendations for their resolution. In the example offered by the teacher, the problem identified was violence in the community, and the solution suggested was the death penalty. The Dominican Republic does not have capital punishment and the students were confused as to the relationship between the teacher's example and the tenets of domestic law and the UDHR. More comprehensive teacher training in the pilot project and other human rights education programs would create a solid understanding among teachers of the origin, specifics and nature of human rights principles. Teacher training is a key component of further human rights education endeavors that seek to inculcate knowledge of and respect for human rights:

> To be most effective, the education of a teacher sensitive to human rights should involve all five of the following dimensions: (1) explanation, requiring intellectual examination and understanding of human rights issues or themes; (2) example, identifying or serving as models of human rights activists to emulate; (3) exhortation, urging everyone to act in accordance with human rights principles on behalf of those in need; (4) experience, providing opportunities to act to improve a human rights condition; and (5) environment, creating a classroom and institutional culture grounded in human rights principles (Flowers & Shiman, 1997, p. 162).

Without a grounding in international standards and an understanding of their significance at the local level, teachers may find it difficult to explain how notions of universal human rights relate to students' lives.

Additionally, Meintjes (1997, p. 77) notes the difficulty of evaluating human rights education programs, particularly when notions of 'empowerment'[9] are static and binary: 'This means that a particular education program is only as good as the substantive human rights knowledge that has been taught. More important, however, this approach totally ignores the development of an authentic critical consciousness, i.e. of a truly liberated mind'. Essential to any evaluation is the development of dynamic criteria for defining and measuring 'empowerment' that could better evaluate the development of what Meintjes calls a 'critical human rights consciousness',

suggesting the development of qualitative research over time that may better uncover the impact of human rights education.

By better elaborating the impact of human rights education on student empowerment, the field of human rights and peace education can better situate itself in the tradition of empowerment or liberatory education. Inspired by the seminal work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, empowerment education seeks to move beyond the binary of the hierarchical student–teacher relationship in order to discover possibilities for meaningful dialogue and transformation: 'Education must begin with the solution of the teacher–student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). It is through this process that Freire believed students can become agents and critical thinkers able to interpret and engage with their social reality. Freire focused on educational methods and pedagogy in describing how 'banking' education, or education that treats students as objects rather than subjects, dehumanizes students. He advocated processes of dialogue, shared learning, engaging with social issues and participatory methods in the educational process. These concepts are highly linked to the methods and purposes of peace and human rights education. Meintjes (1997, p. 66) finds that 'human rights education as empowerment requires enabling each target group to begin the process of acquiring the knowledge and critical awareness it needs to understand and question oppressive patterns of social, political and economic organization'. I would extend his notion of 'target group' to assert that individuals from socially or economically privileged groups would also benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of these 'oppressive patterns'. The field of empowerment education is highly interconnected in both pedagogical practices and aims to the field of human rights education. While the pilot study seemed to increase student knowledge of human rights, empathy with victims of abuse and promote a greater sense of personal abilities, further longitudinal research is needed to corroborate these initial findings and determine the course's long-term impact, if any, on students' lives and sense of empowerment.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I offer the following suggestions for further research in the field of human rights education. Studies on human rights education can evaluate how student behavior, attitudes and skills are affected by instruction in human rights and can offer a combination of qualitative and quantitative data aimed at the effective development of human rights education programs in the formal and informal sectors. Student self-conception should be at the heart of any study aimed at evaluating the impact of human rights education. Varying needs of students in different contexts for individual and social growth require that programs be flexible and adaptable to local needs and concerns. While some scholars call for human rights education as a positive 'progression towards the establishing of a world education system' (Lenhart & Savolainen, 2002, p. 145), I would argue that, instead of this absolutist perspective, human rights education be viewed as a diverse prism rather than a one-size-fits-all

approach. While many educational reforms are presented to be a panacea for all social ills everywhere, advocates of human rights education run the risk of creating unrealistically high expectations with overly enthusiastic evidence in favor of the all-healing power of human rights education. The global economy and particularly its constraints on the poor, in addition to continuing state-sponsored repression in many countries, create realities that are often insurmountable by even the most aggressive educational interventions. With an eye towards the development of a 'critical human rights consciousness' (Meintjes, 1997, p. 77), human rights educators must strive to produce research that better equips students, professionals and entire communities with the tools necessary for self-determination and community action in the face of increasing challenges to the achievement of all human rights for all people. Thorough research and evaluation are the most effective methods to gauge the impact of such human rights education programs. It is only then that human rights education can be developed in a comprehensive and diverse manner as a strategy for the 'full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' as set forth in the UDHR as a promise for the peaceful future of humanity.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Article 26 of the UDHR states that 'Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'.
2. I am indebted to the Partners Program for sharing their findings and research methodology in the development of this project.
3. Howard (2001) in his study of race in the Dominican Republic defines the term *indio/a* in the following manner: '*Indio/a* is an ambiguous term, not least because the vast majority of the indigenous population of Hispaniola died or was killed within fifty years of Columbus' arrival. Historically, *indio/a* has been used as a term to describe a brown skin color, and it was not until the dictatorship of Trujillo that *indio/a* was established as an official and popular description of Dominican race. … The use of *indio/a* evidences a denial of African ancestry and a rejection of Haiti—a racial cover-up. The situation is similar to Degler's (1971) concept of the Brazilian "mulatto escape hatch" in which a racial category is created that cannot claim to be white, but somatically distances itself from being black' (41–43).
4. These categories are similar to the distinctions made in the data collected by the Partners Program in 1997.
5. Un policía agarra un estudiante de tu escuela y lo golpea por pensar que él vendía drogas. Lo meten preso sin darle un juicio. ¿Qué harías?

6. Names have been changed and responses translated.
7. En la guagua, tu ves a una pareja peleando. El hombre empieza a dar golpes a su esposa. ¿Qué harías?
8. Dominican public school children attend school in different *tandas* or cycles, either in the morning, afternoon or evening to accommodate the high demand for education and the limited capacity of schools.
9. Given the contested nature of the term 'empowerment', I would employ Seth Kreisberg's (1992, p. 19) definition as the following: 'Empowerment is a process through which people and/or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives'.

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