

Using new media and Info Technologies in Human Ri

By Frank Elbers, Deputy Director: Human Rights Education Associates (HREA). Please note that this is part of a longer paper that was submitted for AI's HRE specialist meeting held in September 2004.

Only 10 years ago the fax machine was a revolutionary communication tool, compared to regular mail, express mail, and the telephone. The only education and learning alternatives to print were video tapes and television. Today, in 2004, distance learning courses via the Internet, campaign websites, interactive CD-ROMs, and other e-learning tools offer many possibilities for interactive education and learning. It is estimated that by 2010, almost half the world's population will own, or have access to, a computer and 45 per cent will have some kind of access to the Internet.

I would like to explore how NGOs can best use these new and emerging media and information technologies (IT) to deliver effective HRE. In particular, focusing on how distance/e-learning methodologies, CD-ROMs and the Internet can be used in HRE.



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Author in a recent workshop on the use of ICT and HRE/EDC (Education for Democratic Citizenship).

Synchronous versus asynchronous learning

Despite the rather user unfriendly terminology, this makes a useful distinction for distance learning methodologies, between simultaneous two-way communication, like a traditional classroom or training setting, and non face-to-face learning, where most distance learning takes place. Distance learning courses are often offered using a mix of technologies like web pages, file transfers, e-mail, listservs, bulletin boards, audio and video, and are based on peer-to-peer learning.

Tutorials and other self-directed materials

Unlike distance education/learning courses based on group interaction in a course context, some Internet materials allow for individual, self-paced learning without a tutor or other classmates. These web tutorials can use audio and video, links to source materials, case studies and multiple-choice questions, to allow learners to test their acquired knowledge and skills. HREA are developing examples of such tutorials (on the rights of refugees) at: <http://www.hrea.org/learn/tutorials/refugees/> Other organizations such as the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong have also developed similar tutorials on different themes or human rights principles at: <http://www.hrschool.org/index.php>

CD-ROMs

These are an excellent medium to distribute self-paced learning materials as they store large amounts of data, are easy to produce and can be copied very cheaply. CD-ROMs also don't need an Internet connection. A very interesting and successful training programme to use CD-ROMs is the police training modules developed by the Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute (COLPI) in Hungary. The CD-ROMs include simulations of situations that police face in their daily work, such as the appropriate use of force or assistance to victims, for example, and are based on a combination of video, audio and written materials.¹

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Mixed delivery modes

Although some courses, like HREA's, are completely self-contained on-line, distance learning can also be used to supplement an existing course or training, either as a pre-course or post-course component. Some universities have used on-line tutorials to prepare summer course participants so they share the same base level of knowledge before the course starts. An interesting example is the International Summer University of Human Rights that offers an on-line introduction to the UN human rights system, which participants have to study before they arrive in Geneva for their two-week course.²

Listservs

These are a new addition to our means of communicating and facilitate networking and exchange of information. They differ from electronic newsletters in that they are not unilateral in terms of who is sharing information with whom. Listservs also differ from teleconferences, in that they enable a less intensive, more prolonged communication timeframe.

Evaluating the impact of IT on Human Rights Education

The methods for evaluating the application of IT in HRE are similar to those outlined in Felisa Tibbitts' *Evaluation in the Human Rights Education Field: Getting Started* although IT allows the collection of more quantitative data, such as periodic or instant feedback through on-line surveys.³ However, as is the case in other areas of HRE, few evaluations exist on the impact of HRE on the learner(s). Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that IT is especially strong in imparting knowledge and – to a somewhat lesser degree – skills. Yet, as with “conventional” HRE programmes, instilling or changing attitudes and values is harder to accomplish.⁴

In summary:⁵

- IT can be used to distribute education and training materials in many regions and languages.
- IT allows for on-line learning or distance learning, which is particularly useful for the continuing education of professional groups.

Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) is an international non-governmental organization that supports human rights learning; the training of activists and professionals; the development of educational materials and programming; and community-building through on-line technologies. HREA is dedicated to quality education and training to promote understanding, attitudes and actions to protect human rights, and to foster the development of peaceable, free and just communities.

Distance learning also has a lot of further potential for use in continuing education for professional groups and in preparation of, or as a follow-up to, human rights courses offered by universities or human rights organizations. Some universities have used on-line tutorials as preparation of participants of summer courses and have them acquire the same level of knowledge before a course starts.

- IT applications like the Internet can be applied for specific pedagogical approaches, like case studies, simulations or quizzes.
- IT can reach many target groups, including primary and secondary school students, youth, teachers, universities, professional groups, human rights advocates.
- CD-ROMs allow for easier access to large amounts of data such as case law, collections of human rights treaties, etc.
- IT can facilitate the creation of virtual communities of activists, educators and other professional groups, who can share information and lessons learned and consequently improve the quality of their work.

With IT, HRE can reach out to learners that have not been reached before, both geographically and in terms of target groups, such as youth, general public, larger number of secondary school students in different languages and some professional groups.⁶

The evolution of information technologies will continue to present opportunities and challenges for global HRE. Robert MacIver wrote that technology is the most subtle and the most effective engineer of enduring social change. We must all remain informed about these developments and to creatively seek ways to improve our collective work in HRE.

¹ COLPI has recently been renamed the Open Society Justice Initiative. For more information about the CD-ROMs see:

<http://www.osi.hu/colpi/programs/PRpolmode.htm>

² <http://www.droitshumains.org/uni/Formation/00Bienvenu.htm>

³ See for a useful overview of evaluation methodologies in HRE: Tibbitts, Felisa *Evaluation in the Human Rights Education Field: Getting Started*, HREA and Netherlands Helsinki Committee, 1997. Available from:

<http://www.hrea.org/pubs>

⁴ Reports of evaluations are often only intended for internal use and thus the distribution of such reports for public use is limited.

Internal evaluations by HREA of its Distance Learning Programme during the period 2002-2004, for example, indicate that distance learning courses for human rights advocates, monitors and NGO staff is as effective as regular in-person trainings. For the report see: <http://www.hrea.org/DLP>

⁵ Based on a summary provided by the author for the report *Workshop on HRE issues in Human Rights NGOs*, Arab Institute for Human Rights/Documentation, Information and Training Centre for Human Rights of Morocco, Marrakech, 2002.

[http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc_id=2103&category_id=4&category_type=3&group=] Available in English and French.

⁶ “Report of Workshop on ‘Use of Modern Information Technology’”, facilitated by Frank Elbers and Naceur Kéfi during *Workshop on human rights education and training issues among NGOs working in the field of human rights*, Marrakech, Morocco, 1-4 June 2002.