

Education: The Key to Human Rights
An Essay by Adrienne Hurst

Of all the important aspects of life, education inevitably ranks among the highest. By educating the young people of the world we create a strong basis for the future; in this sense, it is not the next generation of people that determines the future of the world, but how the current age bracket deals with this generation. Nothing is more important in the maintaining of peace and human rights than teaching and strengthening these rights—it is the only way to make them last. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education should do exactly that: promote tolerance, freedom, and “the strengthening of respect for human rights” (“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”). It is because of this that I find Article 26 to be not only the most significant portion of the document, but ultimately the most vital and time-tested reality for today’s society.

It seems as if the individuals who penned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 saved the “best for last” in terms of universal worth. Towards the end of the document, Article 26 states the following: “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.” It is within this statement that we can find the kind of wisdom that is applicable to all people and to all periods of time. Always, education plays a significant role in how the world’s future is shaped, and it is vital that we make this future a peaceful and tolerant one. Say, for example, that teachers the world over instructed their students to engage in acts of violence, telling them that peace and

tolerance were absolute nonsense—the young people of the world would grow up believing such things, and as they applied their knowledge to their everyday lives, our future world would become a violent and narrow-minded one. On the opposite end of the spectrum, imagine a world in which tolerance is deeply encouraged daily and from a young age, a world in which children are taught as much about peace as they are about spelling and addition. Tolerance would become a priority in the minds of these children, and this mindset would be reflected in every society. I feel that education today involves a great deal of acceptance, but it does not have quite as much of an emphasis on such things as the Declaration of Human Rights suggests it should. Children replace us; they are the future of the world and making sure they all receive a fair and proper education should always be of great importance.

As stated, in terms of maintaining fundamental human rights, children don't just have a right to learn—they have a *necessity*. Not only must every child be given the opportunity to learn—each one of them contributes to the maintenance of future peace—but they must also be taught the right subject matter. Again, this subject matter includes tolerance for people of all kinds, which is the basis of Human Rights as a whole. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explains just how vital this is, and I myself find it to be the most important article of the entire document. Publisher Malcolm Forbes could never have said it better: “Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”