

Chapter I

Human Rights Education and Compass, a Brief Guide for Practitioners

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Understanding Human Rights Education

What is Human Rights Education?

“... educational programmes and activities that focus on promoting equality in human dignity, in conjunction with other programmes such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities”

Official definition of Human Rights Education for the Council of Europe Youth Programme

A long-term aim

There are many definitions and a number of different approaches, but human rights education is best described in terms of what it sets out to achieve. The long term aim of such programmes is to establish a culture where human rights are understood, defended and respected. Thus, anyone who works with other people may be said to engage in human rights education if they have this end in mind and take steps to achieve it – no matter how or where they go about it.

There may be slightly different views about the best or most appropriate way to move towards such an end, but that is as it should be. No two individuals, or groups of individuals, or cultures have identical requirements, and no one educational approach will suit all individuals, all groups, or all societies. This only goes to show that effective human rights education needs to be, above all, learner-centred: it has to begin from the needs, preferences, abilities and desires of each person, within each society.

A learner-centred educational approach recognises the value of personal action and personal change and also takes account of the social context in which learners find themselves, but this need not mean that educators have to work in isolation, or that they cannot learn from others who may be working in different contexts. What draws human rights educators together from around the globe is a common enterprise – a desire to promote and inhabit a world where human rights are valued and respected. There are general guidelines, tried and tested methods, educational materials, and many people working in the field – all of which can help us to achieve this common aim. This manual is intended as another contribution.



What do you understand by human rights education?

Breaking it down

The long view is important but for practical purposes we sometimes need a more down-to-earth picture of our aims. It can help to break these down into more concrete objectives: to look at the different components that go to make up a culture of human rights, and then to think about how we might be able to approach these individually. A human rights culture, after all, is not merely a culture where everyone knows their rights – because knowledge does not necessarily equal respect, and without respect, we shall always have violations. A human rights culture is a

“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”.

Article 26, UDHR

"A journey of one thousand kilometres always begins with a single step."

Lao-Tse

network of interlocking attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, norms and regulations. Understanding these can give us hooks on which to hang the work we carry out within our groups.

Towards a human rights culture

The following points derive from the essential elements of such a culture. They can provide us with general objectives for human rights education:

- to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- to develop a sense of individual self-respect and respect for others: a value for human dignity
- to develop attitudes and behaviour that will lead to respect for the rights of others
- to ensure genuine gender equality and equal opportunities for women in all spheres
- to promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, particularly towards different national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities and communities
- to empower people towards more active citizenship
- to promote democracy, development, social justice, communal harmony, solidarity and friendship among people and nations
- to further the activities of international institutions aimed at the creation of a culture of peace, based upon universal values of human rights, international understanding, tolerance and non-violence.

Outcomes of HRE

What are the aims for my group?

We have identified a global aim for human rights education, and some long-term goals. But we can move, even closer to home, and think about the needs of individual groups and communities: changing in the world, by working locally!

The world, at the moment, is a world where there are violations of human rights all around us. In an ideal case, it might be enough to instil in the members of your group a sense of respect towards other human beings, and to hope that they, at least, will not be among those who will violate the rights of others in the future. This is one important aspect of the work we do as educators for human rights.

But we can aim for more: we can aim to inspire the young people with whom we work to act not only on themselves but also on the world around them. We can try to inspire them to become, in their own right, mini-educators and mini-activists who will themselves assist in the defence of human rights – even when the issues do not appear to touch them personally. There is nothing unachievable about that aim: it does not mean that we should expect young people to devote their lives to the defence of human rights, but only that they should be aware of the issues, concerned by the issues, and capable of acting to alter the existing state of affairs where they feel that this is necessary.

With this idea in mind, existing models of human rights education sub-divide objectives into three main areas:

- Promoting awareness and understanding of human rights issues, in order that people recognise violations of human rights

- Developing the skills and abilities necessary for the defence of human rights
- Developing attitudes of respect for human rights, so that people do not willingly violate the rights of others.

? What can you identify as the main concerns for the young people that you work with?

Knowledge, skills and attitudes

What type of knowledge is necessary for young people to gain a deeper understanding of human rights issues? Which skills and attitudes will be required for them to help in the defence of human rights?

The lists below provide some of answers to these questions; these were the objectives that we used in putting together this manual.

Knowledge and understanding

- Key concepts such as: freedom, justice, equality, human dignity, non-discrimination, democracy, universality, rights, responsibilities, interdependence and solidarity.
- The idea that human rights provide a framework for negotiating and agreeing standards of behaviour in the family, in school, in the community, and in the wider world;
- The role of human rights and their past and future dimension in one's own life, in the life of communities, and in the lives of other people around the world.
- The distinction between civil/political and social/economic rights;
- Different ways of viewing and experiencing human rights in different societies, different groups within the same society, and the various sources of legitimacy - including religious, moral and legal sources;
- Main social changes, historical events and reasons leading to the recognition of human rights;
- Major international instruments that exist to implement the protection of human rights - such as the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR), the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR);
- Local, national, international bodies, non-governmental organisations, individuals working to support and protect human rights.

learning about human rights

Skills

- Active listening and communication: being able to listen to different points of view, to advocate one's own rights and those of other people;
- Critical thinking: finding relevant information, appraising evidence critically, being aware of preconceptions and biases, recognising forms of manipulation, and making decisions on the basis of reasoned judgement;
- The ability to work co-operatively and to address conflict positively;
- The ability to participate in and organise social groups;
- Acting to promote and safeguard human rights both locally and globally.

learning for human rights

Attitudes and values

learning through human rights

- A sense of responsibility for one's own actions, a commitment to personal development and social change;
- Curiosity, an open mind and an appreciation of diversity;
- Empathy and solidarity with others and a commitment to support those whose human rights are under threat;
- A sense of human dignity, of self-worth and of others' worth, irrespective of social, cultural, linguistic or religious differences;
- A sense of justice, the desire to work towards the ideals of freedom, equality and respect for diversity.

An inclusive approach

"The word 'education' implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge."

UNESCO
Recommendations, 1974

In this manual we have taken an inclusive approach to HRE in a number of different senses. Firstly, we have tried to embrace every one of the three different dimensions – knowledge, skills and attitudes – to an equal degree. Secondly, the activities have been designed with a broad audience in mind – both in terms of age range and in addressing the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors simultaneously. Thirdly, we tried to link human rights education through participatory and active learning activities to relevant local and global issues such as development, environment, intercultural relations and peace. We do not suggest that HRE can only be approached as a separate discipline.

The use of such participatory activities has been central. Studies show that co-operatively structured small group work helps in building group cohesion, and in reducing biases between group members. Co-operative group work also helps to improve understanding of complex concepts and increases problem-solving skills, enabling participants to devise solutions that demonstrate greater creativity and practicality. All of these outcomes are important aims of human rights education. That means that we need to 'include' young people themselves at every moment of learning process. We should not fall into the trap of assuming that we, the educators, are in possession of an ultimate truth, which must be passed on to passive learners. Such an approach can easily transform human rights education into the worst type of 'ideological' education. An essential feature of the methodology contained in this manual involves the idea that young people will bring to any educational process a rich pool of experience, which must be actively drawn upon to ensure an interesting and effective development of the educational activities. Questions, often even conflicts, should be regarded as fundamental educational resources, which can be addressed in a positive manner.

HRE with young people

It is increasingly accepted that attention should be devoted to human rights education for young people, not only because it is important for society, but also because young people themselves appreciate and benefit from the type of activities that this work involves. Contemporary societies and, in particular, the youth population are increasingly confronted by processes of social exclusion, of religious, ethnic and national differences, and by the disadvantages – and advantages – of increasing globalisation. Human rights education addresses these important issues and can help to make sense of the different perceptions, beliefs, attitudes

"I hear and I forget.
I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

Confucius

and values of a modern multi-cultural society. It helps individuals to find ways of using such differences in positive ways.

Perhaps more importantly, young people care about human rights, and in that sense, they provide the main resource for human rights education. Young people today are often criticised for being apathetic and uninterested in politics; but a number of studies appear to suggest that the opposite is actually the case. Research carried out for the European Commission in 2001, for example, reminded us that young people do participate in society - not least, through associations and youth clubs. On average, within the countries of the European Union, more than 50% of young people either participate in, or belong to, an association of some type¹ (although there are significant differences from one country to another).

As far as interest in political issues goes, a study of young people's attitudes to the European Union revealed that human rights issues rank among their top priorities. Beaten only by the issues of unemployment and crime, young people would most like their governments to address the protection of human rights, protection of the environment, the fight against racism, and inequality between the sexes².

? **Is it your experience that young people are not interested in political issues? If so – why do you think this might be?**

Experience from around the globe has shown the energy and commitment that young people will devote to such issues if they can themselves take joint responsibility for what they do and how they learn, and if the issues are presented in relevant and interesting ways.

As educators, we need to harness that energy. That they will take up these ideas and run with them is evident from the numerous existing programmes for young people - from the small scale activities carried out on a relatively *ad hoc* basis in individual youth clubs or schools, to the major international programmes conducted by the Council of Europe and other organisations.

? **Which types of issues are most likely to raise the interest of members of your group?**

Formal and non-formal educational settings

The most appropriate way of involving participants and structuring an educational process depends to a large extent upon the setting in which an educator is working. You may have more or less freedom regarding content, timing and form of activity depending on whether you are operating within a formal, informal or non-formal educational context. The activities presented in this manual have been designed to be flexible enough for use in all such contexts: within youth clubs, schools, summer camps, informal meetings, and so on.

Informal education refers to the lifelong process, whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, neighbours, marketplace, library, mass media, work, play, etc.).

Formal education refers to the structured education system that runs from primary school to university, and includes specialised programmes for technical and professional training.

Non-formal education refers to any planned programme of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competencies, outside the formal educational curriculum.

“Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential”

From the 1990 Jomtien Declaration.

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten”

B. F. Skinner

"learning [is]...a process that is not only related to the function of school or other organised educational settings. This conception of learning is based upon the idea and observation that a considerable number of our meaningful learning experiences happen outside the formal education system: in workplaces, families, different organisations and libraries..."

Dr. Pasi Sahlberg in Building Bridges for Learning - The Recognition and Value of Non-Formal Education in Youth Activity.

Non-formal education as practised by many youth organisations and groups is :

- voluntary;
- accessible to everyone (ideally);
- an organised process with educational objectives;
- participatory and learner-centred;
- about learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship;
- based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach;
- holistic and process-oriented;
- based on experience and action, and starts from the needs of the participants.

Formal, non-formal and informal education are complementary and mutually reinforcing elements of a lifelong learning process. This manual has not been designed as a 'course' in HRE, and the individual activities can usefully be applied in very different contexts, in formal or less formal settings, and on a regular or irregular basis.

HRE as a starting point for action

At the core of human rights education is the development of critical thinking and the ability to handle conflict and take action. We have included among the aims of this manual the encouragement of solidarity-based activities and the organisation of events in the community, both because these are important for the development of skills and abilities closely connected with HRE, and because they are in themselves a means towards the end of developing a positive human rights culture. Young people can make a direct difference to the world around them, and this has been an important theme in the manual. We have included an individual section on taking action (Chapter 3) which provides a series of simple ideas for community activities related to human rights.

In addition to this section, each of the activities in Chapter 2 has been designed with the aim of helping to develop certain key skills useful for organising and carrying out actions in the community. We have tried to adopt a pluralistic approach and a *learning-by-doing* perspective, in line with, for example, the Council of Europe's Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) project recommendations. Here, HRE is presented as a daily practice that should be based on experiential learning and learning-by-doing, with the aim of mobilising competencies and initiatives in a continuing and changing process.

The following recommendations for educational policies are drawn from "Education for democratic citizenship: a lifelong learning perspective", and are intended to support this spontaneous process of change:

- directly involving practitioners in designing, monitoring, implementing and evaluating their own educational innovations;
- encouraging the solving of concrete social issues, using the know-how and practical experiences of reflective practitioners;
- promoting bottom-up educational change;
- working towards greater autonomy of educational agents so that they can work out specific forms of action and linkage with the local community, civil society and social partners;
- encouraging networking, joint projects and activities, as well as communication between practitioners and decision makers.

"Never be afraid to raise your voice... against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world... would do this, it would change the earth."

William Faulkner

International support for HRE

The Council of Europe

For the Member States of the Council of Europe, human rights are meant to be more than just assertions: human rights are part of their legal framework, and should therefore be an integral part of young people's education. The European nations made a strong contribution to the twentieth century's most important proclamation of human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The European Convention on Human Rights, which has legal force for all member states of the Council of Europe, drew its principles and inspiration from the UN document, and was adopted two years later.

Recommendation No R (85) 7 to the Member States of the Council of Europe (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 14 May 1985) is related to teaching and learning about human rights in schools. This document emphasises that all young people should learn about human rights as part of their preparation for life in a pluralistic democracy; and this approach is slowly being incorporated into different European countries and institutions.

At the level of the European Union, at a meeting in Luxembourg in December 1997, the European Council recommended that all states should work towards:

- strengthening the role of civil society in promoting and protecting human rights;
- promoting activities on the ground and developing technical assistance in the area of human rights;
- strengthening training and education programmes concerning human rights.

Youth Policy

In April 1998, the European Ministers responsible for Youth met in Bucharest, and agreed on the aims and objectives of the Council of Europe youth policy³:

- to encourage associative life and all other forms of action which embody democracy and pluralism, and to help all young people to participate more fully in the life of the community;
- to adapt current partnership patterns to social change and to other types of youth organisations and youth work which have so far been under-represented, and further develop the concept of active participation by young people;
- to take full advantage of the valuable contribution which young people can make as active, responsible citizens;
- to develop citizenship education projects which make it possible to involve young people more quickly and more effectively in the life of the community, while respecting differences;
- to implement, from local to European level, an inter-sectoral, integrated and coherent youth policy, based on the principles of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter.

United Nations

In December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly officially proclaimed 1995-2004 the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. This followed a recommendation at the

"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

H.G. Wells

1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, which stated that human rights education, training and public information were essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. The Vienna Conference had recommended that States should "strive to eradicate illiteracy and should direct education towards the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". It had called on all States and institutions to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings. The UN Decade has taken up that challenge.

UNESCO

One other area of relevance is the increasingly multicultural and multi-faith nature of modern societies. The importance of "learning to live together" within and across different societies is central to the whole idea of education - the "necessary utopia" that was recommended by the 1996 UNESCO report about education in the twenty-first century⁴. Human rights lie at the core of the concept outlined in the UNESCO report – for example, in the ability to mediate conflict and to find common perspectives in analysing problems and planning future directions. Facilitation of non-violent change is of fundamental importance and of urgent concern both within and between societies. It should occupy a central role in educational efforts.

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