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Role of Education in Achieving Human Rights

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ABSTRACT: The present paper is an attempt to highlight the role of education in the protection of human rights and promotion of human rights awareness and there by emphasizing education as a pre requisite for the protection and promotion of human rights. Education is the pathway for the progress of any nation. It is through proper education, an individual gets aware about his rights and duties. It has potential to inculcate and imbibe human rights values. It is through education human rights are actually put into practice. Human rights are inherent to every person of the society by virtue of being human. It is one of the basic rights for survival. Human rights cannot be discriminated on the basis of nationality, residence, religion, race, status, language or any other consideration. They are indivisible and focus on the dignity of the individuals. National and international laws are there to protect them. No doubt education helps individuals to promote and protect their rights. If a person is educated, he/she is not vulnerable as far as his/her rights are concerned. He/She knows how to protect his/her rights.

KEYWORDS: education, human, rights, laws, vulnerable, society, nationality, individual, awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms" is the foundation of human rights education (HRE). However, before looking at what human rights education is and how it is practised, it is necessary to clarify what "these rights and freedoms" are that HRE is concerned with. We begin, therefore, with a short introduction to human rights. Throughout history every society has developed systems to ensure social cohesion by codifying the rights and responsibilities of its citizens. It was finally in 1948 that the international community came together to agree on a code of rights that would be binding on all states; this was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Since 1948 other human rights documents have been agreed, including for instance the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990.[1,2]

Human rights reflect basic human needs; they establish the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. Human rights are about equality, dignity, respect, freedom and justice. Examples of rights include freedom from discrimination, the right to life, freedom of speech, the right to marriage and family and the right to education. (There is a summary and the full text of the UDHR in the appendices).

Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally and for ever. Human rights are universal, that is, they are the same for all human beings in every country. They are inalienable, indivisible and interdependent, that is, they cannot be taken away – ever; all rights are equally important and they are complementary, for instance the right to participate in government and in free elections depends on freedom of speech.

How can people use and defend human rights, and use and defend them if they have never learned about them? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) acknowledges this in its preamble, and in Article 26 it gives everyone the right to education that should "strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". The aim of human rights education is to create a world with a culture of human rights. This is a culture where everyone's rights are respected and rights themselves are respected; a culture where people understand their rights and responsibilities, recognise human rights violations and take action to protect the rights of others. It is a culture where human rights are as much a part of the lives of individuals as language, customs, the arts and ties to place are.[3,4]

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Since 1948 a huge quantity and variety of work has been – and is being – done in the interests of human rights education. That there are many ways of doing HRE is as it should be because individuals view the world differently, educators work in different situations and different organisations and public bodies have differing concerns; thus, while the principles are the same, the practice may vary. In order to get a picture of the variety of teaching and activities that are being delivered, it is instructive to look at the roles and interests of the various "individuals and organs of society" in order to see how these inform the focus and scope of their interest in HRE.

In 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights declared human rights education as "essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace". In 1994 the General Assembly of the United Nations declared the UN Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and urged all UN member states to promote "training dissemination and information aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights". As a result, governments have been putting more efforts into promoting HRE, mainly through state education programmes. Because governments have concern for international relations, maintaining law and order and the general functioning of society, they tend to see HRE as a means to promote peace, democracy and social order.

The purpose of the Council of Europe is to create a common democratic and legal area throughout the whole of the European continent, ensuring respect for its fundamental values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This focus on values is reflected in all its definitions of HRE. For example, with reference to its commitment to securing the active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level, the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Council of Europe defines HRE as "...educational programmes and activities that focus on promoting **equality in human dignity**¹, in conjunction with other programmes such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities."

The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010)² defines HRE as education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

There are other definitions of human rights education, such as the one of Amnesty International: HRE is a process whereby people learn about their rights and the rights of others, within a framework of participatory and interactive learning.[5,6]

The Asia-Pacific Regional Resource Centre for Human Rights Education makes particular reference to the relation between human rights and the lives of the people involved in HRE: HRE is a participative process which contains deliberately designed sets of learning activities using human rights knowledge, values, and skills as content aimed at the general public to enable them to understand their experiences and take control of their lives.

The United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education defines HRE as: Education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights. A comprehensive education in human rights not only provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them, but also imparts the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life. Human rights education fosters the attitudes and behaviours needed to uphold human rights for all members of society.

II. DISCUSSION

The People's Movement for Human Rights Learning prefers human rights learning to human rights education and places a special focus on human rights as way of life. The emphasis on learning, instead of education, is also meant to draw on the individual process of discovery of human rights and apply them to the person's everyday life.

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Other organs of society include NGOs and grassroots organisations which generally work to support vulnerable groups, to protect the environment, monitor governments, businesses and institutions and promote social change. Each NGO brings its own perspective to HRE. Thus, for example, Amnesty International believes that "human rights education is fundamental for addressing the underlying causes of human rights violations, preventing human rights abuses, combating discrimination, promoting equality, and enhancing people's participation in democratic decision-making processes"[7,8]

At the Forum on Human Rights Education with and by Young People, Living, Learning, Acting for Human Rights, held in Budapest in October 2009, the situation of young people in Europe was presented today as one of "precariousness and instability, which seriously hampers equality of opportunities for many young people to play a meaningful part in society [...] human rights, especially social rights and freedom from discrimination, sound like empty words, if not false promises. Persisting situations of discrimination and social exclusion are not acceptable and cannot be tolerated". Thus, the forum participants, concerned with equality of opportunity and discrimination, agreed that, "Human rights education must systematically mainstream gender awareness and gender equality perspectives. Additionally, it must include an intercultural learning dimension; [...] We expect the Council of Europe to [...] mainstream minority issues throughout its human rights education programmes, including gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, ability and sexual-orientation issues".

Governments and NGOs tend to view HRE in terms of outcomes in the form of desired rights and freedoms, whereas educational academics, in comparison, tend to focus on values, principles and moral choices. Betty Reardon in *Educating for Human Dignity*, 1995 states that, "The human rights education framework is intended as social education based on principles and standards [...] to cultivate the capacities to make moral choices, take principled positions on issues – in other words, to develop moral and intellectual integrity".⁴ Trainers, facilitators, teachers and other HRE practitioners who work directly with young people tend to think in terms of competences and methodology.

We hope we have made it clear that different organisations, educational providers and actors in human rights education use different definitions according to their philosophy, purpose, target groups or membership. There is, nonetheless, an obvious consensus that human rights education involves three dimensions:

- Learning about human rights, knowledge about human rights, what they are, and how they are safeguarded or protected;
- Learning through human rights, recognising that the context and the way human rights learning is organised and imparted has to be consistent with human rights values (e.g. participation, freedom of thought and expression, etc.) and that in human rights education the process of learning is as important as the content of the learning;
- Learning for human rights, by developing skills, attitudes and values for the learners to apply human rights values in their lives and to take action, alone or with others, for promoting and defending human rights.[9,10]

It follows that when we come to think about how to deliver HRE, about how to help people acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes so they can play their parts within a culture of human rights, we see that we cannot "teach" HRE, but that it has to be learned through experience. Thus HRE is also education through being exposed to human rights in practice. This means that the how and the where HRE is taking place must reflect human rights values (learning in human rights); the context and the activities have to be such that dignity and equality are an inherent part of practice.

In *Compass*, we have taken special care to make sure that no matter how interesting and playful the methods and activities may be, a reference to human rights is essential for learning about human rights to be credible. There are also various suggestions for taking action.

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III. RESULTS

Human rights are important because no individual can survive alone and injustices diminish the quality of life at a personal, local and global level. What we do in Europe has an effect on what happens elsewhere in the world. For example, the clothes we wear may be made by means of child labour in Asia, while the legacies of European colonial history contribute to the political and religious turmoil in Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan, which send desperate asylum seekers knocking on our doors. Similarly, millions of people in Africa and Asia are being displaced due to the consequences of climate change caused largely by the activities of the industrialised nations. However, it is not just because human rights violations in other parts of the world rebound on us; the duty to care for others is a fundamental morality found across all cultures and religions. Human rights violations happen everywhere, not only in other countries but also at home, which is why HRE is important. Only with full awareness, understanding and respect for human rights can we hope to develop a culture where they are respected rather than violated. The right to human rights education is therefore increasingly recognised as a human right in itself.

HRE is not only a moral right, but also a legal right under international law. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to education and 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. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace". Furthermore, Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, "School discipline shall be administered in a manner consistent with the child's dignity. Education should be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and abilities, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, responsible life in a free society, understanding, tolerance and equality, the development of respect for the natural environment".[11,12]

The success of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme has also been built on:

- The support for key regional and national training activities for trainers of teachers and youth workers in the member states, organised in co-operation with national organisations and institutions
- The development of formal and informal networks of organisations and educators for human rights education through non-formal learning approaches at European and national levels
- The mainstreaming of human rights education approaches and methods in the overall programme of activities of the youth sector of the Council of Europe
- The development of innovative training and learning approaches and quality standards for human rights education and non-formal learning, such as the introduction of e-learning by the Advanced Compass Training in Human Rights Education
- Providing the educational approaches and resources for the All Different – All Equal European youth campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation
- The dissemination of the Living Library as a methodology for intercultural learning, combating stereotypes and prejudices
- The provision of the political and educational framework for intercultural dialogue activities[13,14]

IV. IMPLICATIONS

In 2009, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, a youth forum on human rights education – Learning, Living, Acting for Human Rights – brought together more than 250 participants

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- securing adequate levels of multiplication and relaying through projects and partners at national and local levels, and through developing optimal communication between the European, the national and the local levels of action;
- seeking alliances between formal and non-formal education actors and with human rights institutions for the setting up of national human rights education programmes;
- developing the capacity of non-governmental partners while seeking greater involvement of governmental youth partners;
- supporting trans-national co-operation and networks for human rights education;
- deepening awareness about specific human rights issues affecting young people (e.g. violence, and exclusion);
- including a gender awareness perspective and an intercultural dimension as inherent to the concept of equality in human dignity;
- closely linking human rights education activities with the realities of young people, youth work, youth policy and non-formal learning;
- considering the necessary overlapping and the complementary nature of human rights education with children and with youth;
- recognising and promoting human rights education as a human right, and raising awareness about this;
- taking into account the protection of the freedom and security of human rights activists and educators;
- mainstreaming minority issues, including gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, ability and sexual-orientation issues;
- supporting the active participation and ownership of young people and children in educational processes;[15,16]
- raising awareness of the responsibility of states and public authorities in promoting and supporting human rights education in the formal and non-formal education fields.

V. CONCLUSIONS

A human rights culture 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. So how can we describe a human rights culture and what qualities would its adherents have? The authors of this manual worked on these questions and have formulated some (but not exclusive) answers.[19,20] A human rights culture is one where people:

- Have knowledge about and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Have a sense of individual self-respect and respect for others; they value human dignity
- Demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that show respect for the rights of others
- Practise genuine gender equality in all spheres
- Show respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, particularly towards different national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities and communities
- Are empowered and active citizens[21]
- Promote democracy, social justice, communal harmony, solidarity and friendship between people and nations
- Are active in furthering 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.[17,18]

These ideals will be manifested differently in different societies because of differing social, economic, historical and political experiences and realities. It follows that there will also be different approaches to HRE. There may be different views about the best or most appropriate way to move towards a culture of human rights, but that is as it should be. Individuals, groups of individuals, communities and cultures have different starting points and concerns. A culture of human rights ought to take into account and respect those differences.[22,23]

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