



## UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

**Kishwar Badakhshan, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, Vidyasagar Teachers' Training College, Midnapore,  
Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

### Abstract

Human rights reflect basic human needs. It establishes the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. Human rights are about equality, dignity, respect, freedom and justice. Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally and forever. They 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. 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. This conceptual paper explores on ways of ensuing human rights education in the classrooms.

**Keywords:** education, human rights education, primary learners



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### Introduction

Human rights signify the depth of humanity. *The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948* aptly states that "Every individual and every organ of society ... shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms." 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). Teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms is the foundation of human rights education (HRE).

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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. 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. The United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education defines Human Rights Education as: *Education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights.*

Human rights are important because no individual can survive alone and injustices diminish the quality of life at a personal, local and global level. Human rights violations happen everywhere, not only in other countries but also at home, which is why Human Rights Education 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.

Human Rights Education 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".

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. 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". The human rights education involves the following dimensions:

- **Learning About Human Rights**

It includes knowledge about human rights, what they are, and how they are safeguarded or protected. The key concepts such as: freedom, justice, equality, human dignity, non-discrimination, democracy, sustainability, poverty, universality, rights, responsibilities, interdependence, solidarity, and peace. The idea here is that human rights provide a framework for negotiating and agreeing on standards of behavior in the family, school, community, and the world. The interdependence of civil/political rights and economic/social/ cultural rights. It also recognizes the root causes of human rights issues/concerns and to understand human rights terms and concepts according to age/ grade level.

- **Learning Through Human Rights**

The way human rights education is organised and imparted has to be consistent with human rights values (e.g. participation, freedom of thought and expression, etc.). Human Rights Education aims at improving 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, recognizing forms of manipulation, and making decisions on the basis of reasoned judgement, the ability to work cooperatively and to address conflict positively; the ability to participate in and organize social groups Acting to promote and safeguard human rights both locally and globally.

- **Learning For Human Rights**

The ultimate aims of Human Rights Education is 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. 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 Human Rights Education.

## **Importance of Teaching Human Rights in School Curriculum**

Human rights are part of a child's everyday life and schools have a responsibility to enable children to make sense of the world around them. Knowing about rights and responsibilities, understanding what they are, and learning how they have been struggled for and sustained are important elements in the preparation of all young learners for a life in a democratic and pluralistic society. A rights-respecting school is based on the idea that every child has a right to an education that helps realize their human rights (including rights to health, work, an adequate standard of living, and a sustainable environment); respects their human rights (including rights to dignity, safety, expression, participation and justice. Children of all ages express concerns or outrage at events or situations which they see as unjust in their own lives and the wider world. Human rights education (Human Rights Education) can build on that understanding of injustice and sense of fair play and can explore why certain behavior is unfair. Students enter the classroom with their own prejudices and biases which can prevent them from viewing a societal problem with an open mind. It is the job of a human rights educator to first assess their own prejudices and biases and then to assist students in the great task of opening their minds to new ways of seeing the complexity of the challenges faced in our communities and the world. Human rights education teaches students not only about their rights but also their responsibilities. We all have the responsibility to ensure that we do not infringe upon the rights of others. For example, the right to freedom of expression also carries with it the responsibilities not to hurt, insult, or incite others to prejudicial behavior. Through Human Rights Education, teachers can instill in students a sense of respect toward other human beings and inspire them to become, in their own right, educators and activists who will assist in the defense of human rights. Human Rights Education provides a common framework through which different subject matters may be taught in relation to one another. The topics of globalization, the environment, peace, citizenship, gender equality, democracy, poverty, and intercultural relations all address human rights issues and attempt to build a culture that respects human rights. Rather than teaching about these subject matters in isolation, using a Human Rights Education Framework provides educators and students with a shared value system through which all subjects intersect. Human rights education aims at

- Bringing changes in values and attitudes
- Producing changes in behavior
- Producing empowerment for social justice

- Developing attitudes of solidarity across issues and nations.
- Developing knowledge and analytical skills.
- Promoting effective, participatory teaching and learning practices
- Helping address pressing issues faced by schools, including participation, attendance, classroom management, and academic achievement.
- Creating an inclusive school culture that generates enthusiasm, engagement, and respect for self and others.
- Improving student behavior and relationships; reduces bullying
- Contributing to the development of higher order thinking and literacy.
- Providing a useful lens and “critical toolkit” to view core concepts and explore contentious issues.
- Creating active citizenship, helping students build connections between their own home and the world.
- Increasing teacher satisfaction, improves morale, and reduces burnout.
- Providing a value framework suitable for modern society that is multicultural, multi-faith, and part of an interdependent world.
- Offering young people something positive to believe in and support.

### **How to Teach Human Rights Education in the Classroom?**

Human rights education is more than just subject matter, it's a way of thinking about the world. It's about putting the underlying principles of human rights to work — fairness, respect for human dignity and difference, tolerance, and equality. For teachers, this means demonstrating a personal commitment to human rights values through their teaching methods, being able to present lessons that go beyond content, and helping students put their ideas into practice. In order to teach human rights education, the teachers are expected to include the integrated activities in their teaching learning process. Learner-centered, participatory, and dialogical activities, action-oriented activities not just knowledge acquisition, relevance and practical to the lives of the participants and learning of life skills of preparing for active citizenship.

Implementing quality human rights education that achieves these goals is dependent upon the commitment, enthusiasm, and creativity of teachers and the other stake holders in human rights education. Following is a brief discussion on how to effectively teach the concepts of Human Rights Education at different grade levels.

- ❖ In pre-kindergarten through Grade 3, human rights learning focuses on respect for self, parents, teachers, and others.
- ❖ In Grades 4–6 the focus moves to social responsibility, citizenship, distinguishing wants and needs from rights.
- ❖ For Grades 7 and 8, the focus shifts to introducing and enhancing specific human rights.
- ❖ At the high school level, Grades 9–12, the focus expands to include human rights as universal standards, integration of human rights into personal awareness, and behavior.

## **The Stakeholders in the Human Rights Education**

### **Teachers**

A teacher can adopt Human Rights Education by teaching human rights and learn in an environment that models it. A teacher can negotiate a set of classroom rules and responsibilities with the students. Teachers can connect the classroom to the community by involving various community members in Human Rights Education such as students, education authorities, parents, business leaders, local advocates and more.

### **Students**

Students are to be given more responsibility and freedom to participate in matters affecting their own lives. Schools are the primary institutions in which children develop an understanding of what it takes to become an active and informed citizen who is aware of and exercises their fundamental human rights and responsibilities in everyday life. Student councils, for example, will provide an effective forum for involvement. The council can be part of school decisions at every level — including curriculum and staff selection. Student participation on the school board is also an effective way for students to be involved in decision making, provided the involvement goes beyond tokenism and gives the student proper training and support.

### **Principals**

Principals play a major role in leading the school in the development of human rights-based education. The purpose of adopting Human Rights Education is to improve the school's ability to meet the needs of the students and the aspirations of the community. Effective principals use their self-knowledge and sense of caring for the members of the school community to build an evolving consensus around the values that underpin their professional work. They recognize that the school's leadership is accountable for making a difference in the

lives and learning of their students. They have a clear set of goals, and intentionally pursue them to ensure success for all. They focus on closing the gaps between the highest and lowest achieving students in order to raise learning standards and outcomes for all. They create schools that welcome and include all members of the community

### **Parents/Guardians/Caregivers**

For Human Rights Education to be effective, schools must take into account the rights and duties of parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for their students and their right to choose the kind of education that is given to children. Schools must also provide appropriate direction and guidance to parents/guardians in the exercise by the child of their human rights. To encourage this, schools could lead workshops or involve parents/guardians in human rights teaching in the school

### **School Boards**

In a rights-based approach to education, the school board's over-arching goal is to ensure the realization of the right to education for children in their schools. This means that the education their schools provide must be aimed at the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and preparation for responsible life in society. Schools boards can use this framework to develop curriculum based on human rights principles. A human rights framework can also be an indispensable part of a school board's toolkit for effective school governance.

### **Community**

Community involvement is at the heart of Human Rights Education. Whatever injustice and intolerance exists in the community will be present in its schools as well. Young people need to not only learn how to recognize human rights abuses but be able to do something about them as well. Developing collaborative work with appropriate partners (such as community organizations, NGOs, or representatives) to plan and implement social action activities, will bring to life the reality of human rights in a way no lesson can.

### **Conclusion**

*The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard*

*on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom*

Human beings are under and above all their values and sentiments. Human Rights Education if understood according to its contemporary, comprehensive holistic scope will lead to an ethical, civic and international education that is crucial for contemporary societies in survival and perfecting. The revamping of entire education system will instil respect for human dignity in each child.

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