

Human Rights Education

a background paper

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
Human Rights Education Working Group - 2003

‘... disseminating human rights education and culture is [a priority] on the basis that the first line of defence of human rights is citizens’ awareness of their rights and their readiness to defend them...’

Casablanca Declaration, 1999, Arab Human Rights Movement

‘...the universalisation of human rights is a continuing story in which both educators and activists play a part...’

Professor Kevin Boyle

Director of the Human Rights Centre, Essex University

Introduction

This paper has been published as a discussion paper on Human Rights Education (HRE) for the Euro – Mediterranean Human Rights Network by members of the Network’s Human Rights Education Group.

It is based on a wide variety of sources including the following:

- The background documents as well as the Plan of Action for the UN Decade for HRE
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981)
- *The Value of Human Rights Education* – a paper prepared by Iain Byrne of the Human Rights Centre, Essex University, for the Second General Assembly of EMHRN
- *The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights Education and Dissemination*, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (2000)
- *Good Practices in Human Rights Education and Training*, Arab Institute for Human Rights (2003)
- *Essential Learning for Everyone: civil society, world citizenship and the role of education and Development Education and Human Rights Education in Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland (North and South)* – two reports from the Development Education Commission.

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Why this paper?

- to outline and explore the values and perspectives of the EMHRN Working Group on human rights education
- to outline a content and approach for human rights education in the Network
- to contribute to broader debates and activities on human rights and human rights education issues within the membership of the Network
- to contribute to the realisation of the goals of the United Nations Decade on Human Rights Education 1995 - 2004
- to relate human rights concerns to other topics such as cultural dialogue, interfaith dialogue on human rights, development, women's rights, environment etc.

Finally, the paper is intended to help shape and guide the many initiatives undertaken by the Network itself.

The paper does not offer practical ideas or suggestions for delivering human rights education in the very different contexts and countries of the Network – this is already underway within the various organisations of the Network. At the outset, we acknowledge that the circumstances of human rights within many countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region vary greatly and that the opportunities for human rights education are often severely constrained – as a consequence, this background paper offers a general framework without reference to the individual country circumstances.

Part One: Human Rights Education

– *Background and Context*

In keeping with the underlying values and approaches of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and the main international human rights treaties), human rights education can be defined as encompassing the following:

- a diverse range of education and information activities designed to build a universal culture of human rights aimed at –
 - strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 - promoting the full development of the human personality and the fundamental value of human dignity;
 - promoting understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship amongst all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;
 - enabling all persons to increasingly participate effectively in society;
 - promoting all dimensions of human rights including social and economic rights alongside civil and political rights;
 - furthering the agenda of activities outlined by the United Nations in its Action Plan for the Decade for Human Rights Education.

‘ ... Human Rights Education contributes to a concept of development consistent with the dignity of women and men of all ages, that takes into account the diverse segments of society.’

As noted by the UN General Assembly (in Resolution 49/184, 1994) declaring the decade:

‘Human rights education should involve more than the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies.

Human Rights Education contributes to a concept of development consistent with the dignity of women and men of all ages, that takes into account the diverse segments of society.’

For the EMHRN, the core concepts underpinning this definition of HRE are:

- it is a life-long process of learning and exploration;
- it is a comprehensive process embodying knowledge or ideas, skills or capabilities as well as attitudes or dispositions;
- it is for all and involves all;
- it is designed to be an empowering process;
- its role as a tool for promoting social justice for all.

In its Plan of Action adopted by the Network’s General Assembly in Copenhagen in 1997, the EMHRN stressed the important role of civil society in the strengthening of human rights and the particular importance of human rights awareness in this context. The Plan noted:

‘In this regard, it (the Network) considers human rights education and capacity building projects to be of the utmost importance.’

Given that the context and capacity of each member organisation differs, the Network advocated a de-centralised approach to HRE.

The Status of Human Rights Education

The United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education runs from 1995 until 2004 and offers a comprehensive Plan of Action. The objectives of the plan include the building and strengthening of human rights education programmes within the community at large as well as within schools, universities, professional training programmes and institutions throughout the world.

Education is itself proclaimed as a human right in the Universal Declaration. It was envisaged by the drafters as one of the key means whereby the new post-war ideals of human rights and freedoms might prosper and have effect. The Preamble calls on every individual and every organ of society:

‘ ...keeping this declaration constantly in mind, to strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.’

This message is reinforced in Article 26 of the Declaration, which identifies the objectives of education as being

‘ ...directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’ .

The Declaration envisages education at all levels within formal schooling and within the community. Many innovative and important education programmes have been developed for both non-formal and formal education sectors in different parts of the world.

The importance of human rights education and its relationship to the overall purpose of education of young people is elaborated most completely in, arguably,

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the best known of the international human rights instruments - the Convention of the Rights of the Child (or Children's Convention). In Article 29 of this treaty the States agree that education of the child should be directed to the:

'...development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their full potential'

The Convention clearly lists the rights to which children are entitled as well as the responsibilities associated with such rights. These include the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her cultural identity, languages and values, for national values and respect for civilisations different from his or her own, as well as the development of respect for the natural environment.

The Children's Convention also prescribes as an educational aim,

'...the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.'

The importance attached to the Convention throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region and its emphasis on 'life in a free society' is a major challenge to many states where such a free society does not yet exist. Such objectives reflect human rights values and are underpinned in the Convention by the inclusion, as an aim of education,

'...the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.'

These provisions in the Children's Convention which has now achieved universal ratification (with the exception of the United States and Somalia), clearly and firmly establishes education on human rights as a key objective of young people's education in all parts of our world. However, as we all know,

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much more needs to be done both by Governments and educators to integrate that objective into educational curricula at all levels. One goal of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education is to ensure that by its end all countries will have incorporated their human rights education programmes into their schools for which the requisite local teaching and resource material will be provided through the assistance of Governments and international donors.

The human rights values and approaches referred to above find many echoes and common ground in the importance attached to education on development, environmental, multicultural and citizenship issues at various UN Conferences including, for example:

- World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs – Thailand 1990;
- UN Conference on Environment and Development – Brazil 1992;
- World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy – Montreal 1993;
- The 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights;
- International Conference on Population and Development – Cairo 1994;
- World Summit for Social Development – Copenhagen 1995;
- World Conference on Women – Beijing 1995.

They are also strongly endorsed in the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century – *Learning the Treasure Within*. Within this context, it is important that the EMHRN acknowledges the work already underway to promote human rights education and the links and parallels it has with related areas. EMHRN should resist the temptation for human rights education to *'go it alone'*.

Why is Human Rights Education Important?

A key aim of human rights education must be to provide a thorough understanding of how we fit into the world at every level and how decisions taken at one level affect us and others.

Human Rights aim to protect the inherent dignity of the human person and to develop understanding, tolerance and respect for others. All rights bring with them responsibilities – to ourselves, our families, our friends, and, further, to those we do not know and will never meet. If these are some of the aims of human rights, then the role of education in protecting these rights, and identifying those responsibilities, must be to teach about the world in which we live and the people with whom we share that world. Within that broad framework more specific issues can be addressed by human rights education:

- why is our world as it is and why are human rights so unevenly respected?
- what is my place in that world?
- how can I contribute to changing it?

It could be argued that such education deals only with global issues that are remote from children's lives. However, the world in which we all live works on many interconnected levels – locally, nationally, regionally and globally. A key aim of human rights education (and of allied areas such as development education) must be to provide a thorough understanding of how we fit into the world at every level and how decisions taken at one level affect us and others. Human rights education should be rooted in what people already know and what is closest to them – family, local community, school etc. In all of these spheres, we have both rights and responsibilities to ourselves and to others.

Only with a proper understanding of how the world is, and how the world should be, can we achieve one of the most basic and universally accepted tenets of educationalists everywhere - education should prepare people for life.

In the family we have a duty to respect our parents and siblings; in our community, we have the right to take part in the life of that community, and the duty to allow others to do so; in school we realise our right to education and, as the Convention of the Rights of the Child implies, we have a duty to exercise that right.

These same principles of learning about our rights and responsibilities apply at other levels, including the teaching of democracy at local, regional and national levels, on the right to vote and our duty to exercise it in order that we can have a say in the decisions that affect us. We also have duties to ensure that those denied the right to vote (or to vote freely and fairly) are supported in their struggle. Only with a proper understanding of how the world really is (fundamentally unfair and unequal for very many peoples) and how the world should be, can we achieve one of the most basic and universally accepted tenets of educationalists everywhere - education should prepare people for life. In this context human rights and related educations stand alongside and equal to the more traditional subjects as a vital means of enabling learners to enjoy and fulfil their potential.

Of course human rights education does not stand alone. As a subject in which the teaching of justice is inherent at every level, human rights education also relates to other social and political educations - education in development, peace studies, the environment and citizenship. Many educational materials naturally focus only on one of these areas, but the time is now right to recognise that these are all fundamental to a balanced curriculum. In the same way that the different levels of our world are interconnected, so are the subjects that seek to describe and explain that world.

Human rights education at the secondary level of formal education is particularly vital as a key component in a wider strategy ...

The 1993 Declaration of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights speaks of democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms being ‘... *interdependent and mutually reinforcing.*’

Education in the next millennium, should surely reflect this thinking, not only by placing human rights education firmly in the curriculum, but also by recognising the links between human rights education and other subjects. The framework outlined in the Essential Learning Report of the Development Education Commission reflects such an approach.

Human rights education at the secondary level of formal education is particularly vital as a key component in a wider strategy that requires us to teach respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Firstly, it provides a foundation upon which education in the wider society can be built. The UN Plan of Action for the Decade for Human Rights Education stresses that there is not only a real need for human rights education in schools, but also above and beyond the classroom, involving training of public servants such as the police, military, judiciary, and government officials. Secondary education can provide this grounding.

Secondly, it can offer the last chance in many cases to reach all our children and encourage and support in them fundamental rights principles. Once these students leave school they will disperse into a variety of vocations – many of course will never again be in full-time education. Although their horizons may broaden and their responsibilities grow, they may never again have another opportunity to learn about such important principles. For all the work that may be done in non-formal human rights education, schooling still provides one of the most effective and easiest ways of educating people about their rights and responsibilities.

Why the international dimension is important

The following points on the international dimension within human rights education were identified by a group of students and teachers during a workshop to mark the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration.

- it reinforces the idea of a common humanity amongst all people everywhere. It is an inevitable consequence of the idea of the universalisation of human rights;
- it strengthens our sense of international interdependence;
- upholding the UN Declaration means upholding the rule of law and morality over and above those of governments or markets;
- upholding the international dimension of human rights is crucial as it provides a forum (or court) where citizens in any country can appeal internationally about human rights abuses in their own country;
- human rights abuses in so many countries are widespread, often systematic and frequently extremely brutal. The victims of such abuses urgently need support now;
- by upholding the international dimension of human rights, we are upholding Article 29 of the UN Declaration which says that we not only have a duty to defend our own rights we also have a corresponding duty to uphold the rights of others;
- being aware of human rights issues abroad will help make us better informed about similar issues at home;

Human rights education embodies, by definition, a diverse range of content, partner groups, contexts and circumstances, interpretations and understandings and specific programme and country needs.

- recognising the international dimension helps us realise that we are not alone in struggling for human rights but are part of a worldwide movement;
- being concerned about human rights abroad is not a choice – it is an integral part of being concerned about our own rights – it is therefore a duty.

Human rights education embodies, by definition, a diverse range of content, partner groups, contexts and circumstances, interpretations and understandings as well as specific programme and country needs. There are very many real and substantive differences within human rights education possibilities as well as approaches – it is of positive and lasting value to recognise, explore and value such differences. Nonetheless, our experiences highlight the fact that it is possible to identify and describe a number of common elements. The remainder of this paper explores these elements as well as some of the key challenges facing HRE.

Part Two: Human Rights Education

– *describing and exploring a framework*

The framework outlined below builds upon the work of the Development Education Commission (an initiative exploring human rights education and development education in Ireland and Britain) and is presented to stimulate detailed debate and discussion on the key dimensions of HRE.

The Four Key Dimensions

In our view, human rights education must take into account **four key dimensions** - all of which need to be addressed in order to achieve desired ends. Each of these dimensions is of equal importance and one should not be prioritised above another. In such a context, education for human rights is the **active process** by which people, through **personal experience** and **shared knowledge**:

- gain experience of, develop and practise **values and dispositions** which are crucial to a just, democratic and peaceful society which respects and promotes the human rights of all;
- engage with, develop and apply **ideas and understandings** which help explain the origins, diversity and dynamic nature of society, including the interactions and contradictions within and between societies and cultures, individual identities and environments and the core role of human rights in mediating these interactions;

- engage with, develop and practise **skills and capabilities** which enable investigation of society, discussion of issues, problem-tackling, decision-making, working co-operatively and negotiating with others;
- take **actions** and have access to **essential experiences** that are illuminated and initiated by these ideas, values and skills and which might contribute to the achievement of a peaceful and democratic society.

The Four Key Areas Explored

Values and Dispositions

Respect and caring for self – As a society struggles to become more just and democratic, respect and caring for self is central to the flourishing of the well being of both the individual and the wider community. Respecting and caring for oneself brings both the capacity to act autonomously and to be self-motivated. It is an essential pre-requisite for an understanding of how to care for others and creates the potential for inner peace in a world of change and uncertainty.

Respect and caring for others – As societies become more democratic, the disposition to respect and care for others is central to living interdependently. The positive relationships forged among individuals and groups are essential to the development of qualities such as co-operation, interdependence, and respect for a diversity of people and cultures which allows us to live and work in the realities of the world of today and the future.

A sense of social responsibility – In a society geared to the general well-being of all it is essential to develop a commitment to social responsibility based on the critical scrutiny of information and evidence within an awareness of existing power

In a just and democratic society, respect and caring for self is central to the flourishing of the well-being of both the individual and the wider community.

relationships, social mores, principles and traditions. Such a disposition to social responsibility should also entail a commitment to living in an environment that is held in trust for the future.

A sense of belonging – Citizenship and community depend on a disposition to be part of the enterprise as a whole, a commitment to common purposes that go beyond personal interests, a willingness to participate as an active citizen, engendered by an understanding of the world as a place where each individual feels valued and where both group and individual concerns and opinions are respected.

Ideas and Understandings

The centrality of relationships – In an increasingly pluralist and interdependent society, the need to recognise and foster economic, social, cultural and political relationships based on equality and reciprocity as well as a recognition that mutual benefits follow from such relationships.

The importance of compromise and negotiation – In a context of moving away from violence towards the possibility of peace and human rights, the need to develop an awareness of the importance of negotiation and compromise. And the ability to recognise what is essential and what is subsidiary.

The concepts of democracy, governance, community and citizenship – The promotion of understanding and action to underpin democratic practices and procedures and the duties of all. An appreciation of the history of the struggle for democracy and human rights and the need to safeguard them as well as the recognition of the responsibilities of governments and civil society at large.

Cultural identities, conflicts and conciliations – At a time of rapid internationalisation, we need to foster a recognition of the equal value of all cultural identities and the dangers of ethnocentricity, which fuels conflict and

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aggression. The value of conciliation and the skills necessary to achieve it also need to be developed and practised.

Rules, rights and responsibilities – Equality, participation and democracy require the active involvement of all citizens in all countries. The recognition that all are born with inalienable rights must be matched with a recognition that there are also parallel responsibilities. A recognition also that the promotion and protection of rights and responsibilities is not simply the duty of government but of all.

Gender identities – In order to realise the full humanity and dignity as well as the potential contribution of all, we need to foster a recognition of the equal rights of all regardless of gender and that discrimination on that basis is immoral and increasingly illegal. We need to rediscover stories which have been hidden from history because of gender discrimination and we need to explore and foster new and different gender roles for the future.

Skills and Capabilities

Communication Skills – including the ability to: listen, discuss, make oral presentation, debate, interview, communicate competently across all language modes and in a range of media, write for a purpose, defend a position, express one's interests, beliefs and viewpoints through an appropriate medium, perceive and understand the interests, beliefs and viewpoints of others, be empathetic and make appropriate use of information technology.

Research and Problem-tackling Skills – including the ability to research and evaluate information and ideas, interpret media 'texts', identify bias and prejudice, recognise discrimination and the use of stereotypes, organise information, apply reasoning skills to problems and issues and to perceive the consequences of taking, or not taking, specific actions in particular contexts.

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Social Skills – including the ability to develop satisfying and interactive human relations in different cultural contexts and across domains of power, take responsibility and make decisions, establish democratic working relationships, sustain dialogue within and across cultural settings and negotiate and make necessary compromises.

Action skills – (this dimension is frequently neglected and yet is central to a curriculum for peace and democracy) including the ability to identify and understand the objectives and impact as well as the importance of appropriate action, participate in group decision making, effectively engage in participative and appropriate democratic action and organise meetings and engage with representatives of different social, political and cultural groups.

Experiences and Actions

If all of the above are to translate into action, they need to be fostered by means of a variety of methodologies and processes. However, there are certain types of essential experience which foster the development of the values, ideas, skills and actions and which should be featured in all educational settings. These include:

- working co-operatively and working independently;
- giving and receiving feedback and participating in decision-making;
- feeling valued and sharing responsibility;
- knowing a sense of achievement.

While learners should regularly experience many of these in formal educational settings, there should also be opportunities built into organisational arrangements that allow the experiences to be made real in other, non-formal contexts. The

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experiences do not change, but the contexts do. It is the responsibility of organisers and leaders to ensure that where circumstances permit, learners have the appropriate opportunity to take part in such things as:

- residential experiences;
- opportunities to join societies and associations;
- opportunities to be involved with school councils;
- opportunities to engage with representatives of other and perhaps 'opposing' traditions and perspectives including those of other cultures – this dimension is especially important in the context of comparative or cross-cultural learning;
- opportunities to practise skills of negotiation and conciliation outside the 'safety' of the formal settings etc.

The four dimensions described above can and should be explored in specific contexts and understandings e.g.:

- the growth of the ideas and the struggles that have shaped and moulded the international human rights movement;
- an understanding of the existing international human rights regime, its institutions, standards, laws, obligations and actors;
- linkages between the international and domestic human rights regimes.

In the context of the membership of EMHRN, they will also be explored and understood within the context of their economic, social, cultural, educational diversity etc.

Part Three: Some Issues and Challenges

This section briefly identifies a number of issues and challenges for members of the Human Rights Education Working Group of the Network. The list of issues is by no means comprehensive but is based upon the current work and experiences of the member organisations. We recognise that the challenges we face are constantly changing and in flux.

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Human Rights Realities - theory and practice

Throughout the world, there are glaring contradictions between what governments profess as regards human rights and what they often do – this is as true in the fields of politics and economics as it is in other areas such as education and the rights of minorities. Promoting a model of human rights education amongst people who constantly refer to these contradictions makes our work all the more difficult if all the more urgent and necessary. Major international issues such as globalisation (with its attendant and growing inequalities), denials of the right to self-determination, refugee issues, extremism and xenophobia, ‘the war on terrorism’ (with its highly selective agendas), fundamental and continuing denials of the right to development etc. pose huge challenges for our work.

HRE advocates need to directly address these issues and root our understanding and our practice in such realities encouraging a positive engagement with them and a spirit of civic responsibility and civic participation. Above all, we need to ensure in our own work that we challenge double standards especially as regards the educational models we use.

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Another dimension of this issue relates to the relative roles and responsibilities of different actors within the human rights agenda. Given the diversity of contexts within which our members work, there are inevitable tensions and contradiction between the roles and responsibilities of state and non-governmental organisations. In many cases, the state has begun to assume its responsibilities in this regard and the role of NGOs is therefore different from that in countries where the state is either hostile towards or unconcerned about human rights and human rights education.

As voluntary organisations, we need to recognise the legitimate right and responsibility of the state to support HRE whilst also ensuring the active engagement of civil society. In those countries in which state action is either negative or passive, we need to continue to advocate HRE and the importance of civic participation in its realisation. Because of our roots in the voluntary sector, there is reluctance (or a wariness) to recognise the legitimate right and responsibility of the state to become involved. Against this, there are the constant, and legitimate, calls for governments and statutory bodies to discharge their responsibilities.

In the broader context of increased ownership of and engagement with human rights and development issues, there needs to be greater clarity and negotiation around roles, responsibilities and competencies. The role of NGOs, local and regional organisations as well as that of the statutory sector needs to be debated further. What competencies and perspectives does the voluntary sector have which add value to education work? What is the role of small, issue-focused organisations within the broader picture? How should we relate to the state and its statutory responsibilities? What compromises and agendas need to be negotiated? How do we maintain independence in the context of growing partnerships? How do we ensure a strong justice and rights focus?

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How do we ensure that the needs, interests and perspectives of learners are fully included in the design and delivery of programmes and projects? Ultimately, how do we ensure that the ownership of this agenda rests firmly in civil society as well as in the state?

The Human Rights Agenda and Education

The origins of human rights information and awareness are in legal, academic and activist concerns with international instruments and conventions (such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights and its attendant Covenants etc.). Education for human rights should, in this view, be about knowing of such Declarations and Covenants and how they are or are not upheld. Such a perspective is a necessary component of human rights education but it is not a sufficient description of it in any context.

Clearly human rights education is about issues much larger and more fundamental than those described above – it includes basic consideration of core human values and visions, understandings of how society is (unevenly) structured, issues of power and powerlessness etc. This needs to be clearly stated, time and time again. Such a recognition does not imply that the issues described above are irrelevant, just that they are but part of the overall agenda. The broader agenda and context of human rights education has been described above and does not require additional elaboration here. Suffice to note that the moral, educational, historical, cultural, philosophical as well as the values base of human rights are crucial to the emergence of critical understanding of, and engagement with, human rights issues and challenges.

If development and human rights education are to develop deep and sustainable roots in society at large, then the educational dimension – in all its dimensions - needs to be further emphasised and supported.

Networking, partnership and comparative learning

One of the key strengths of human rights education has been the multiplicity of projects at local, regional, national and international levels. This has ensured the local relevance and effectiveness of much of the work. However, our experiences also highlight the need for increased networking and co-ordination in order to ensure mutual learning around effective strategies and methodologies as well as maximising impact. This is particularly true of the need for greater international cross-fertilisation as well as that between different areas related to human rights education.

Such networking has a price, the reduction of profile for individual organisations and projects, the negotiation of agendas with the inevitable compromises required and the pooling of resources. As human rights education becomes more *mainstreamed*, the need for co-ordination will increase as government departments or ministries need to negotiate and consult with representative networks and structures rather than with a plethora of individual organisations or projects. Such co-ordination need not mean *centralisation*, but rather co-operation for a common objective.

A constant issue identified by the membership of the Network relates to issues of training and professionalism. There is an ongoing demand within the Network for opportunities for both national and international training at a variety of levels including all of the four dimensions of HRE described above. The need for such opportunities as well as the value of international learning and exchange forms one of the priorities of the Working Group for the coming years.

Members of the Network have highlighted the need for, as well as the value of, partnership approaches to the design and delivery of HRE - this is a crucial

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and central issue for human rights education. How do different groups understand partnership and how is it negotiated and sustained? A central issue is that of recognising that there are two dimensions to our work. One, the development or human rights dimension – the issues, causes, violations, events, responsibilities etc. The second involves the educational dimension – not just what people learn but also, and crucially, how people learn.

Our work highlights the degree to which different organisations and projects emphasise the two dimensions. To what degree are projects designed with the objectives and interests of human rights organisations and agendas only in mind? To what extent do projects integrate the views and needs and perspectives of those for whom they are designed? The latter question is fundamental to the degree there is genuine public ownership of human rights issues.

There are also the related questions of how to achieve effective partnership between the voluntary sector and, where possible, the statutory sector around education and contemporary social issues. Finally, there are also important questions concerning the degree to which there is equality of engagement between 'partners' in the South and those in Northern Europe.

There is also a pressing need to greatly increase the engagement of European Union instruments and procedures with HRE issues and challenges especially in the context of the 'expanded' Europe.

Above, we have highlighted the value and importance of comparative learning between sectors as well as between programmes and organisations nationally and internationally. Yet, experience indicates that the degree to which such learning is actually realised remains considerably limited and under-explored. Despite its obvious benefits and its potential impact, opportunities to systematically learn from each other remain few.

There is an obvious need for comparative learning between sectors – between environmental, development and human rights education, between schools work and youth work, between issues-based education and general education etc. The potential for comparative and mutual learning is immense and yet under-realised.

Research and evaluation

The degree to which research and evaluation is conducted within the various countries within the Network varies greatly - such research is crucial to evaluation and to strategic planning. It could be argued that too many assumptions which are core to our work remain untested and unchallenged. There appears to be a lack of reflection at an academic level, leaving ongoing weaknesses in the theoretical base of our work.

This is an issue that the Working Group intends to tackle and attached priority to in its current Action Plan.

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Conclusion

Today, over 90% of violent conflicts occur within the boundaries of individual states and civilians make up the vast majority of the victims of such conflicts. In addition to such conflicts, human security and human well-being are endangered by a variety of other threats including issues such as small arms, land mines, domestic violence, different types of exploitation of children, drugs, environmental abuse, public and private corruption etc.

The promotion of human rights and the fostering of democratic and citizenship skills for peaceful resolution of conflicts and threats of all kinds are among the key aims of international cooperation and development today. Local, regional, national and international organisations have called for a re-definition of human security – one that embodies issues as diverse as conflict, culture, environment, development and basic needs. Such issues represent fundamental challenges to all citizens and cannot be dealt with effectively by the state alone – a vibrant and participative civil society is fundamental to an effective and sustainable strategy. The promotion of active citizenship, democracy and good governance based on shared human values and dispositions (such as those described in detail earlier) are fundamental to future human security.

In such a context, human rights education is not only necessary and vital – it is fundamentally relevant to people’s current and future lives as well as those of their children. To paraphrase the former Director of Amnesty International in the US, William Schultz, it is in our own best interest to not only defend but also to promote human rights – they benefit each and everyone of us directly. Human rights NGOs within the Euro-Mediterranean region have a leading role to play in ensuring the promotion of human rights practices, perspectives and values. In such a context, human rights education must assume a higher priority than heretofore.



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