

Teaching the teachers

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Across the world, schools may be exemplary institutions capable of inspiring young people to achieve their highest potential and struggle, as citizens, for justice and peace in the world in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. Equally, they may be institutions in which prejudice is taught, humiliation and violence are routine and head teachers or administrators are involved in corruption.²

Teachers may be socialised into either of these paradigms. When they have little training, or that training is largely school-based, they may accept corrupt practices and forms of violence as simply inherent to school organisation. On the other hand, when teachers are trained and that training includes consideration of their professional and ethical responsibilities, they may be encouraged to take a lead in opposing corruption. Central to this is the need to include a strong ethical dimension based on human rights and the rights of the child within teacher education programmes. There is already evidence from both university-based and NGO courses of the efficacy of this approach.

Vision

The effects of economic globalisation and the opening up of public sector organisations to for-profit private capital has forced schools across the world to address standardised targets for attainment.³ Teachers and heads are obliged to prioritise standard agendas, and this may lead them to overlook the role of education in challenging injustices and corrupt practices in society.⁴ Research on young people's understandings of citizenship reveals a strong awareness of social discrimination⁵ and of corruption.⁶ If schools fail to engage young people in dialogue on these issues, they may positively encourage apathy or frustration.

Teacher education can offer support and guidance on handling political and controversial issues.⁷ Teacher education can introduce trainee and experienced professionals to normative standards, including the notion that teachers have a moral obligation to promote justice and challenge discrimination and corruption. The aim of such teacher education is to develop and remain conscious of a personal vision for education that can provide stability and certainty in making judgements about changing social, political and educational contexts and policies.⁸

An understanding of human rights and children's rights is powerful knowledge for teachers, since it provides a normative framework that is based on international law. All governments within the United Nations are committed in principle to uphold and promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These instruments provide a benchmark of minimum standards expected of governments and a moral framework for relationships between teachers, learners and parents in the context of schools.⁹ Human rights are utopian in the sociological sense of providing a vision of a different world. This provides a sense of agency and a driving force for action, such as, for instance, to challenge corruption and inequality.¹⁰

Early attempts at teacher training in human rights education from the 1960s involved NGOs such as Amnesty International providing classroom materials and locally based training in how to use them. Human rights education (HRE) programmes involving governments, and therefore capable of a vastly greater impact, developed from the 1980s. The Council of Europe developed guidelines for HRE that emphasised the importance of teacher training.¹¹ The Geneva-based International Training Centre on Human Rights and Peace Teaching developed a method for training an international group of teachers. A European project in the 1990s involved the teacher education departments of

27 universities developing a human rights curriculum planned cooperatively but delivered locally.¹² By the late 1990s the UN was promoting a Decade for Human Rights Education (1995 to 2004) followed by a World Programme of Human Rights Education (2005 to present). The principles underpinning these initiatives are set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011).

Knowledge and understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) are particularly important for teachers and young people alike. By knowing their rights, young people can challenge injustice, prejudice and corruption. By understanding children's entitlements to rights, teachers become aware that their relationship with children should be based on respect and reciprocity, not just on the imposition of an authoritarian regime. Two recent projects among many serve to illustrate how the principles can be put into practice.

Teacher training in practice

The 'Rights respecting teacher education' programme at London Metropolitan University (LMU) and the University of Winchester systematically introduces all their trainee teachers and tutors to the UNCRC, proposed as crucial professional knowledge that also influences pedagogy and provides a values framework for the children's workforce.¹³

The programme is informed by research that concludes that, whereas many schools focus on the responsibilities of students rather than their rights, 'a focus on responsibilities does not promote responsibility in children. A focus on rights does.'¹⁴ When the emphasis is on responsibilities, children may misunderstand both responsibilities (seen as mere compliance) and rights. An emphasis on rights provides opportunities to discuss the reciprocal nature of rights. Teachers in training may never before have had a serious opportunity to learn about human rights. The inclusion of this element in their programme enables them, like the children they will teach, to make for themselves the conceptual links between rights for all and responsibilities to uphold the rights of others. In another study, teachers' initial fears of teaching rights were overcome by the experience of students recognising that their teachers and fellow students had rights too and acting in solidarity and a spirit of reciprocity.¹⁵

At LMU, lectures, workshops and discussions examine patterns of inequality in education, including consideration of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, special needs and refugee status. A children's rights dimension challenges the direct and indirect discrimination prevalent in schools and the education system. The programme offers discussion of the pedagogical principles derived from the UNCRC. These include dignity and security, freedom from fear, participation, identity and inclusivity.¹⁶ Trainee teachers report improved relationships with their students and improved behaviour by the students, on the basis of mutual respect, their listening to students and teachers recognising their responsibility to uphold students' rights. They have also begun to appreciate the political nature of education, and see themselves as moral agents within the system and thus in a position to challenge corruption.¹⁷

A second example of teacher training based on human rights that challenges corruption comes from an article reporting on the work of the Institute of Human Rights Education (IHRE).¹⁸ The IHRE grew out of the work of a human rights organisation, People's Watch, in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Its programme aimed to provide innovative teacher training that would incentivise participation and legitimise both the message and the messengers of human rights. The evaluation suggests that HRE teachers and textbooks can prove to be vital community resources for intervening in abuses. As teachers learned about human rights, they both became less corrupt and violent themselves and challenged abuses.

Teachers who followed the training programme found increased motivation, and instead of doing the minimum or not even attending (itself corrupt practice, given that they were receiving a salary) they started to be interested in and involved in their students' lives. Some teachers stopped corporal punishment (both with their students at school and their own children at home). Bajaj also reports on a case from Orissa explicitly featuring corruption: her informants told her that head teachers were found to be encouraging student dropout so that they could claim the funding for the students without having to provide the resources to teach them. A teacher used his knowledge of human rights to challenge the head to take back 13 children and persuaded the parents to insist on the right to education. In another case reported to the researcher, Armed with knowledge of their rights and supported by local NGOs with international links whose phone numbers and names were printed in their textbooks, teachers and students also challenged corrupt police officers, who failed to intervene in an illegal and abusive forced marriage and in cases of illegal domestic violence by abusive fathers and husbands.¹⁹

Challenging corruption always requires courage and motivation. There is increasing evidence that understandings of human rights give teachers the confidence to address issues of power and politics with their students. Politics anywhere in the world includes examples of corruption. Discussion of such issues at school and in universities helps to create a climate of opinion that is less tolerant of corruption.

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Notes

¹ Hugh Starkey is Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

² Clive Harber, *Schooling as Violence : How Schools Harm Pupils and Societies* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

³ Michael Apple, 'Can Schooling Contribute to a More Just Society?', *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, vol. 3 (2008), pp. 239–261, p. 240.

⁴ Sam Mejias and Hugh Starkey, 'Critical Citizens or Neoliberal Consumers? Utopian Visions and Pragmatic Uses of Human Rights Education in a Secondary School in England', in Richard Mitchell and Shannon Moore (eds.), *Politics, Participation and Power Relations: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Critical Citizenship in the Classroom and Community* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2012), pp. 119–136.

⁵ Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey, *Changing Citizenship: Democracy and Inclusion in Education* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005); Audrey Osler, *Students' Perspectives on Schooling* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010).

⁶ Leonel Pérez Expósito, 'Students' Representations of Political Participation. Implications for Citizenship Education in Mexico City's Secondary Schools', unpublished PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

⁷ Diana Hess, *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Michael Fullan, 'Why Teachers Must Become Change Agents', *Educational Leadership*, vol. 50 (1993), pp. 12–17.

⁹ Osler and Starkey (2005); Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey, *Teachers and Human Rights Education* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2010).

¹⁰ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge, 1991 [1936]); Hugh Starkey, 'Human Rights, Cosmopolitanism and Utopias: Implications for Citizenship Education', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 42 (2012), pp. 21–35.

¹¹ Council of Europe, *Recommendation no. R(85)7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights in Schools* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1985).

¹² Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey, *Teacher Education and Human Rights* (London: Fulton Publishing, 1996); Audrey Osler, Hanns-Fred Rathenow and Hugh Starkey, *Teaching for Citizenship in Europe* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1995).

¹³ Lee Jerome, 'Children's Rights and Teachers' Responsibilities', in Mitchell and Moore (2012), pp. 101-117.

¹⁴ Brian Howe and Katherine Covell, 'Miseducating Children about Their Rights', *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, vol. 5 (2010), pp. 91–102.

¹⁵ Anne Hudson, 'Citizenship Education and Students' Identities: A School-Based Action Research Project', in Audrey Osler (ed.), *Teachers, Human Rights and Diversity: Educating Citizens in Multicultural Societies* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2005), pp. 115–132.

¹⁶ Osler and Starkey (2005, 2010).

¹⁷ Jerome (2012)

¹⁸ Monisha Bajaj, 'Teaching to Transform, Transforming to Teach: Exploring the Role of Teachers in Human Rights Education in India', *Educational Research*, vol. 53 (2011), pp. 207–221.

¹⁹ Bajaj (2011).