

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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Lessons Learned and Perspectives”
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Allow me to join my predecessors in greeting you this morning and thanking the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science and ODIHR for organizing this regional forum. It is very gratifying to see so many familiar faces at this gathering, which speaks to the dedication and long-term engagement so many of us have had with human rights education. I commend all of you for interest and involvement in this field.

This regional forum is taking place at a time when human rights education is increasing in all regions of the world. Without question, it is now an approach that has gained currency within the schooling sector over the last 15 years. At the same time there are ongoing challenges and questions in relation to its implementation and its impact in terms of contributing to a human rights culture in schools and human rights advocacy and accountability efforts in society in general.

I was asked to prepare some remarks that highlight accomplishments within the human rights education field for this region, as well as remaining challenges. I will tell you now that, almost without exception, the contour of these accomplishments and challenges mirror those for democracies in other parts of the world. I am here thinking specifically of Latin America, many countries in Africa and Asia, as well as North America and other parts of Europe. I think this has something to do with the strengthening of the human rights movement in these regions, trends related to “system” and “curricular” sharing across national educational systems, and the important role that international governmental agencies and transnational civil society have played in promoting human rights education. So this morning when I share with you the accomplishments and business left undone for human rights education in this region, to a large degree I am speaking about these in relation to human rights education practice in general.

In preparing this summary, I reviewed the executive summaries that were prepared for those countries represented today, as well as the results of a Regional European Meeting on the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which took place in Strasbourg in November 2007. In addition, I draw on some initial findings I have of an impact evaluation I carried out for Amnesty International in relation to their human rights education programming in 10 countries, including Russia, Moldova, Poland and Slovenia. My comments are focused primarily on the schooling system but of course human rights education is also required for professional groups. I am sure that such developments are taking place in most of your countries, but they have not been highlighted in your reports and I will not address this aspect of human rights education in my presentation this

morning. I also ask for your general understanding for observations I make that may not reflect your own experiences or with which you may disagree. I assure you that each of us will have the opportunity to share our views in these days.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Inclusion of human rights education as a goal in national education laws, plans and regulations.

In all of the countries represented here national education laws and regulations incorporate references to human rights, even if these references are quite minimal. In addition, some countries have had national plans that explicitly incorporated a human rights education element, for example, the national plan of action for human rights (Moldova), the national plan of action for human rights education (Belarus) and the national plan of action for the child (Poland).

In some cases, educational reform movements, such as those with an emphasis on competencies, active learning or decentralization of educational management have also provided fertile ground for the promotion of human rights in schools. In Poland, additional educational regulations related to decentralization have encouraged school-wide initiatives related to democratization and the practice of human rights.

It is probably worth mentioning that the evolution of national education policies that are hospitable to human rights education has not always been a steady and straight one. Like any national policy, educational policies related to human rights have reflected the political environment of its time. In Belarus, for example, the environment for carrying out human rights education was apparently much more favorable five years ago than at the present time.

Certain European and region-specific developments have been predictably hospitable for human rights education: the ratification of international and regional human rights standards in the early 1990s (in order to gain entry into the United Nations and the Council of Europe); preparation for accession to the European Union; and an interest in showing responsiveness to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, which has now been superceded by the permanent World Programme for Human Rights Education.

2. Within elementary and secondary school curricula, there is increasing incorporation of topics, principles and values related to human rights and democracy.

In nearly all countries there is some curricular avenue for teaching human rights or children's rights. In some cases this is as a specialized course (for example, Poland, Moldova and Ukraine); or it has been integrated as a sub-theme in another course (for example, civics or other general education subjects in Lithuania and Ukraine); or as a cross-curricular theme (as with Latvia).

3. There are a large number of supports for carrying out human rights education, including teaching and learning aids, methodological materials and reference books, many now available in local languages.

Access to materials remains a critical support for human rights education work in this region. An evaluation carried out for Amnesty International and its human rights education programming in 10 countries, including Russia, Moldova, Poland and Slovenia, show that access to learning materials was rated by teachers as the most significant support to human rights education programming (even more than “training of trainers” programming). Some of the country reports remarked on the development of such resources for your countries but that such resources are not necessarily readily available for educators.

4. We now have a pool of people from diverse institutional bases familiar with and committed to human rights education and able to deliver programming. Each of the countries represented here have examples of partnerships between the government and civil society sectors, inter-governmental agencies and other international actors. Partnerships at the national level between inter-governmental agencies, ministries of education, human rights institutions, universities, teacher associations and non-governmental organizations will remain important for the ongoing offering of human rights education.

Many of your reports pointed out that civil society continues to be a key proponent of human rights education. There are “strong” non-governmental organizations in each of your countries who have carried out human rights education for many years. So we have seen some organizational continuity in the delivery of human rights education and the cultivation of expertise such as training skills, the writing of teaching and learning materials, and the development of creative programming (including in the non-formal education sector). At the same time, there has been a tendency for more individuals and groups to become engaged in this field.

5. There is recognition that for youth, both formal and non-formal approaches are important for offering human rights education programming. Non-formal activities related to human rights education are taking place in all countries represented here, sometimes within the umbrella of existing educational frameworks. The quality of interaction can be high in non-formal education and a key motivating factor for learners. Human rights education practice and individual learners benefit tremendously from the ongoing relationship between the formal and non-formal sectors.

6. Research and evaluation is becoming increasingly available. Human rights education scholarship is now emerging although in its current phase it is still insufficient for allowing us to assess progress and to plan programming based on evaluation results. This is partly because scholarship carried out in academic institutions or through program evaluations do not substitute for monitoring and evaluation carried out by educational systems supporting human rights education. Without the incorporation of accountability

within national policies for human rights education, the work will remain varied and uneven in implementation.

The Amnesty International evaluation with which I have been involved shows clear impacts on teachers and students, as well as other beneficiaries. I would like to share some of these results with you, as an indication of the kinds of results that we might expect to find in successful human rights education programming. Amnesty International's programming positively influenced "concern for others", with the results highest for the Polish program across all 10 countries. (4.62 on a scale of 1-5, with 3=somewhat and 5=a great deal). The average across all 10 countries was 4.0

Here are some quotes from Polish students and teachers who participated:

"I try to show it to my friends, how a lack of tolerance can influence others' lives."

"I am trying to educate people about their rights and convince them that they should exercise them in order not to be harmed."

"I think that I am more open-minded and approachable. I am also more willing to listen to other people's opinions."

Another interesting area of impact was "commitment to taking action". The average across all 10 countries was 3.80. For Russia, the average was 4.0 but the average was significantly lower for Moldova at 3.47.

Some quotes from Russian teachers:

"I'm trying to stand up for my rights: at work, at home, in public offices."

"We successfully established an initiative group, which is directly engaged in human rights activities... We provide assistance to the population in protecting their rights: making complaints, claims and actions. We actively cooperate with the district prosecutor's office."

REMAINING CHALLENGES

1. In many countries there remains a difference between policies that "allow" for human rights education activities versus those that actively promote and support their implementation.

Ministries are providing frameworks, which are very necessary for enabling human rights education in schools. However a lack of political will or concern about pressures on education systems to teach many different subjects means that human rights education often takes place only through the intervention of non-governmental organizations and with activist teachers. An important question for our countries, therefore, is how to interest ministries and educational managers in human rights education and how to

continue to foster productive and well resourced collaborations amongst a range of actors.

2. Study programs often address human rights and democracy is nominal rather than substantial ways. Here are some of the potential shortcomings of educational programming that ostensibly incorporates human rights education:

- Although there are formal definitions of human rights education, in practice there is a lack of clear concepts in relation to human rights, democracy and rule of law. As a consequence we lack clarity in the related competencies we want to address in human rights education in schools and universities. Across the countries represented here, for example, we see civics- and law-related approaches (Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia), legal-philosophical (Belarus) and rights-oriented (Poland).

Some of these choices that have been made regarding approaches to human rights education no doubt relates to the varying educational, cultural and political contexts of our countries. However, I think that it is also the case that educational actors may not always understand what is “unique” and what is “shared” between human rights education and citizenship education and cannot therefore understand what choices there might be. For example, I would say that human rights education is uniquely focused on justice, analysis of power and authority, and the importance of empathy and taking action, in addition to international human rights standards and principles. I might even be bold enough to say that without incorporating all of these elements, a particular human rights education program is incomplete. But perhaps my standards are not the same as yours.

- This leads to my next point. We might benefit from the development of clear competencies/learner objectives, standards and benchmarks within existing international and regional frameworks. One potential solution for Europe is the framework policy document on EDC/HRE that is currently being worked on at the Council of Europe. It will help to clarify concepts and provide a common reference and understanding of the issues at stake. Other framework documents include the United Nations’ World Programme for Human Rights Education and UNESCO/ UNICEF’s “A Human Rights-Based Approach to ‘Education for All’”.
- Still on the topic of shortcomings in relation to educational programs incorporating human rights, additional weaknesses can be identified, such as a lack of historical background information and analysis; rare mention of individuals who stood up for human rights and democracy, in history and today; and a failure to address cases of massive human rights violations in the recent history of the world, Europe and the country (if it applies).
- There remains an emphasis on content knowledge, rather than a balance in learner objectives relating to seeing the relevance and value of the human rights framework to daily life and skills for promoting such values. Another critical weakness in many study programs is the failure to incorporate critical analysis, including that of the human rights value system itself.

3. Human rights education in schools continues to remain concentrated at the level of classroom contents and activities. With rare exception, study programs incorporating human rights do not envision human rights as a value system to guide regular daily human interactions, including that of school life. Thus there can be major contradictions between what is taught within human rights education lessons and what students experience in the school, their families and other places in their community. Human rights education cannot be reduced to a curriculum or an associated teaching methodology, although these are important. Human rights in schools means:

- an overall human rights culture in the school (leading us back to such themes as the hidden curriculum, an examination of relationships in the school, policy and decision-making systems including ones related to discipline);

- a rights-based approach in general to schooling (which calls for schooling systems to be inclusive/non-discriminatory; participatory in process; transparent; and accountable).

We have some very good examples from Poland. I understand that there are also democratically theme-based schools operating in Russia and school development programs in Ukraine that use a human rights-based approach

4. Teacher training, in particular initial teacher training, continues to be the weakest link in the educational chain.

We all know that human rights education in the initial training of teachers is nearly absent and that much of the in-service training that is taking place is due to the efforts of the non-governmental sector. Thus, inevitably, what is offered to teachers is not systematic. Not only is there a lack of attention to human rights and democratic themes in teacher training institutions, but the associated pedagogies emphasizing dialogue, multiple perspectives, critical thinking and active learning are rarely addressed.

Neither legal or curricular provisions, or textbooks or learning materials, can substitute for the formative influence of knowledgeable, skilled and sensitive teachers. The need to cultivate teacher know-how in human rights education is accompanied by a need to better motivate educators about the relevance of human rights education, about its non-partisan nature, and its worth in taking up precious classroom time.

5. There remains a lack of evaluation tools and data to in relation to learner outcomes as well as other indicators of effectiveness for human rights education programming. Does human rights education have any impacts on learners, on their teachers, on schools, on families and communities, and societies at large? Are they designed to do so? If so, how can we investigate this?

There are different aspects to this problem. One is the availability of evaluation “technology” to carry out evaluations, for example, clearly defined competencies, related indicators, and instruments for collecting information. Another aspect has to do with

resources and political will to carry out such assessments or research. In Latvia the theme of human rights is included in a required test on civic competencies in schools. Would we want more such assessments incorporated into the requirements set out by educational institutions?

I conclude with a broader question about the kind of impacts we can realistically hope for schools to have on learners in terms of long-term commitment to and involvement with the promotion of human rights. The country reports from Lithuania and Moldova showed quite discouraging results in terms of knowledge and skills to promote human rights and civic participation.

We cannot know to what degree these results are the result of flawed human rights educational programs or the failure to implement them comprehensively. However we are wise to bear in mind that social attitudes concerning human rights are influenced by many environmental factors. We need to be mindful of these factors – not discouraged by them. And we must remain vigilant as we move forward and look for leverage points in our broader political environments that will create more hospitable circumstances for individuals to forge personal commitments to promote and protect their human rights and those of others.