



This paper is taken from

*Human Rights and Citizenship Education  
Proceedings of the eleventh Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2009

edited by Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9562789-6-8

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
  - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
  - a official of the European Commission
  - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

*Messina, C., Jacott, L. & Navarro-Sada, A. (2009) Trainee teachers' knowledge and beliefs about human rights and citizenship education, in Ross, A. (ed) Human Rights and Citizenship Education. London: CiCe, pp 156 - 161*

© CiCe 2009

CiCe  
Institute for Policy Studies in Education  
London Metropolitan University  
166 – 220 Holloway Road  
London N7 8DB  
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

#### Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

# **Trainee Teachers' Knowledge And Beliefs About Human Rights And Citizenship Education**

*Messina, Claudia, Jacott, Liliana, and Alejandra Navarro-Sada*  
*Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain)*

## **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to explore the knowledge and beliefs of trainee Spanish teachers about Human Rights and Citizenship Education within the frame that this is a subject recently introduced in the Spanish Statutory Curriculum for Primary and Secondary School.*

*The final purpose of this exploratory study is to start studying trainee teachers' knowledge about this topic in order to develop an adequate educational training for the future teachers, so that this helps to contribute the new subject proposed by the Spanish Educational Ministry, fits with the needs and expectations of the educational community.*

*For that purpose a specific questionnaire has been made and has been applied to a sample of students of the mentioned level of education.*

**Keywords:** teacher training – beliefs – citizenship education – human rights

## **Introduction**

Human Rights studies has become an area of growing interest to many researchers in recent years (Hathaway, 2007). Respect of Human Rights is closely related to the development and maintenance of democratic societies. It is generally accepted that an intention of teaching Human Rights is to improve knowledge, understanding and appropriate participation in assuming and defending those rights, so as to contribute to the reinforcement of democratic society.

As long as it is proposed to train children and adolescents in Human Rights during their formal years of education, it is assumed that we will have teachers with high and deep subject knowledge, with specific training to educate them.

Effective Human Rights education requires committed and skilled teachers. "But although human rights provide the moral and legal basis for a genuinely universal ethical standard" (Osler & Starkey, 1994), this is not yet a familiar concept to Spanish teachers. Unfortunately, according to an Amnesty International (2008) report, Spain stands in last positions in Human Rights Education at compulsory university training in Europe.

The Spanish Act of Education (LOE) sets among its prior objectives for primary and secondary compulsive education, the need to prepare students for active practice of citizenship and respect of Human Rights. According to this, in the official curriculum of these stages, a new subject called "Education for Citizenship & Human Rights" has been included. This has been an important step to bridge the gap but it is not enough.

The recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of Education states: Concepts associated with human rights can, and should, be acquired at an early stage. For example, the non-violent resolution of conflict and respect for other people can already be experienced within the life of a pre-school or primary class (Council of Europe, 1985). This also stresses the idea that we need to have very well trained teachers that will be able to teach children on Human Rights.

Lister (1984) provides the framework for the development of a human rights curriculum. He identifies three broad dimensions of human rights education, namely: skills, knowledge and feelings.

Our study is based on the assumption of cognitive psychology that states that, in order to change some educational practices – in this case - it is very important to know in advance the beliefs and thoughts that people who will be in charge of those changes, have. So then, according to their beliefs and thoughts the reconstruction process of the practice starts with a reflection process on their own thoughts, so then they will be able to make the necessary changes and adjustments to then put into practice new ways of educational methodologies and goals.

This paper attempts to explore the knowledge and beliefs of trainee Spanish teachers about Human Rights and Citizenship Education within the frame that this is a subject recently introduced in the Spanish Statutory Curriculum for Primary and Secondary School.

The final purpose of this exploratory study is to start studying trainee teachers' knowledge about this topic in order to develop an adequate educational training for the future teachers, so that this helps to contribute the new subject proposed by the Spanish Educational Ministry, fits with the needs and expectations of the educational community.

### **Method:**

#### Participants:

The subjects of this exploratory study were 52 trainee teachers at the 1st year of their career of Childhood Education. The sample is formed by 1 male and 51 female students with ages from 18 to 23 years old.

#### Procedure:

This questionnaire has been specifically designed for this exploratory study in order to know students' thoughts on and knowledge about this topic. It has two well defined parts. The first part consists of 8 questions that explore the knowledge students have on Human Rights (for example, the definition, their knowledge about the three generations of rights, information sources, etc.), and their attitudes towards the new subject, Citizenship Education and Human Rights and their training they have on this topic at University.

The second part includes 10 problematic situations (like "dilemmas") in which one Human Right is clearly violated, so they have to choose among three possible answers, which is the one who has been violated in the situation showed. 100% of the students present the day in which the questionnaire was given, were willing to complete it.

### **Results:**

In this paper we present results of the first part of the questionnaire only.

#### *What are Human Rights?*

The answers given by the students can be gathered in 6 different categories as shown in Graphic 1. It is important to remark that one student may have referred to more than one category in his answer.

So we see then, that related to the concept of Human Rights, 48% of the students said that these rights are "inherent to human beings" and, as so, nobody can be deprived from them; these rights would guarantee then a good quality of life. They express this, for example, with the following statements:

They are:

*Fundamental rights that every human has*

*Rights that everybody should have just for being a person*

*Rights of each person and nobody may forbid them of having them*

*Rights that everybody has for being humans and belongs to a society; nobody may deprived humans being for them*

15% of the students say the same but making more emphasis on the aspect that these rights guarantee that certain needs are covered, and this way, the quality of life is also guaranteed.

*(They are) all those benefits and needs that everybody should have fulfilled*

*Needs that should be fulfilled, to everybody all around the world*

Human Rights are also defined as principles or rights collected in legal documents or they also refer to the Constitution, they say they cannot be violated and that they have been recognised by many countries all around the world.

These kinds of answers referring to law aspects were also remarked by 15% of the students of this sample. And they said that Human Rights are:

*Rights established by the Constitution*

*Legal factors that everybody can make use of them and cannot be violated; they are compiled by legal documents and have been approved by countries all around the world*

*Serious of laws that protect and assure the human beings' integrity.*

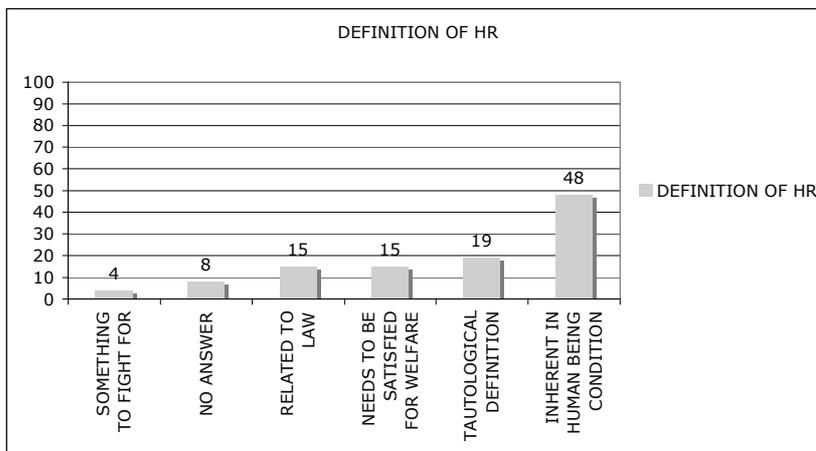
It is important to remark that 19% of the students couldn't give an appropriate definition, not even, in some cases, give any kind of adjective that qualify these kinds of rights that Human Rights make reference to. This means that these students gave tautological definitions, like the followings:

*(They are) rights of all human beings*

*Rights that every human being has to have*

Finally, 8% didn't answer this question and 4% said that they were rights for which people fought in the past or we always have to fight for them.

Graphic 1



*Where do you obtain information on HR?*

The students were also asked to answer where they have obtained the information they have about Human Rights. 73% points out 3 main sources of information (see graphic 2): home, school, and television.

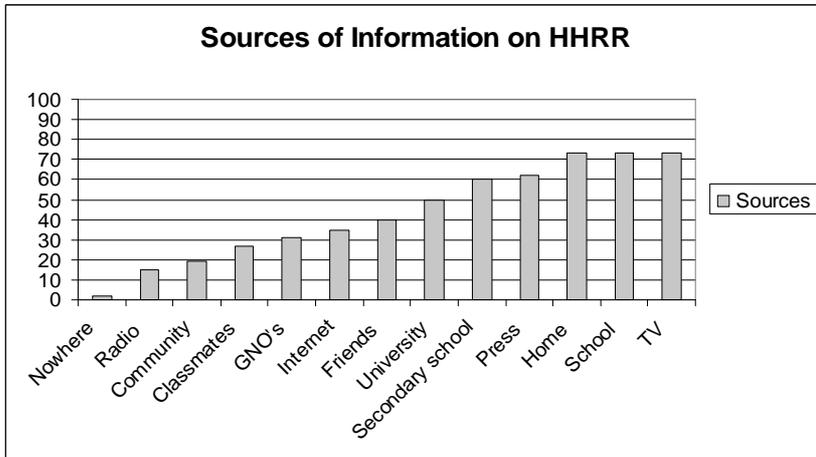
They are closely followed by written press (62%) and secondary school (60%) respectively. We have to take into account that these students are at the first year of their career, so the information they have received at the secondary level could be easily available for them.

University and friends are also a source of information, with a 50% and 40% respectively, followed very close by the Internet with 35%.

Under 30% we find the classroom, the neighbourhood/community, and the radio as sources of information on this topic.

It is remarkable that 2% (1 student) points out that he/she has obtained information nowhere and, in fact, he/she not even answered the question about the definition nor mentions any human right, what it is very significant in the sense that the majority of the students have some information about the theme.

Graphic 2



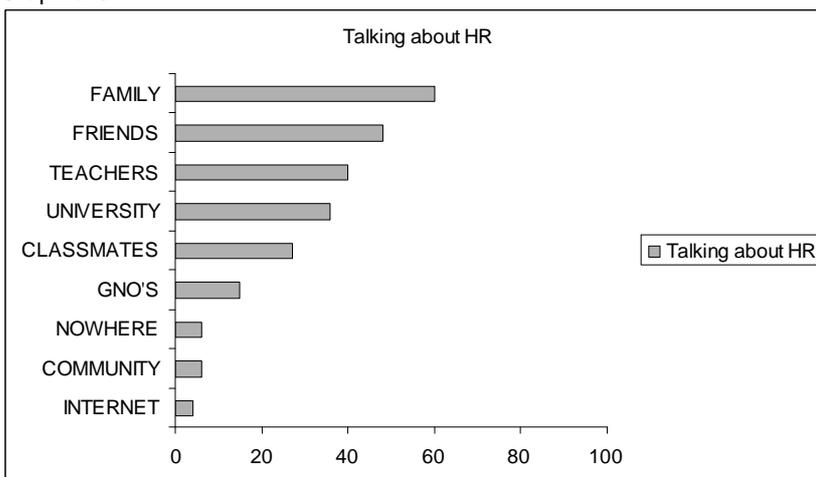
*Whom/Where do you talk about Human Rights?*

Besides asking them about where they got information from, we asked them where and with whom they usually talk about human rights.

As it can be seen in Graphic 3, the students consulted where they talk the most about this topic is at home, with their families (60%) followed by their friends (48%). 40% says that teachers are also people whom they talk about this and 36% say that the University is one of the places where they talk about HR.

The Internet is highlighted as “the place” or “the space” where they “talk” the least on Human Rights, taking into account that they remarked that the Internet is one of their main sources of information about it. This could be interpreted as a space where they obtain information (see Graphic 1) but not as an interactive space in which they can share this topic with the friends/people whom they chat or exchange emails.

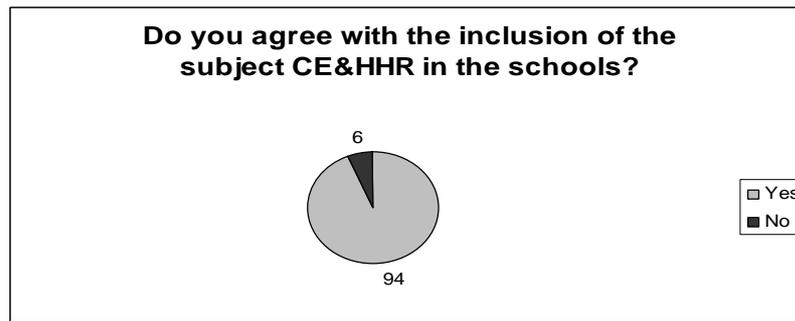
Graphic 3



*What do you think about the inclusion of the compulsory subject 'Citizenship Education and Human Rights'?*

94% of the students consulted consider that it is a good measure to include this subject in the compulsory Spanish curriculums of primary and secondary education, as can be seen at Graphic 4.

Graphic 4



Consulted for the reason of this agreement, 38.8% agree very much with the idea that it is at school (both primary and secondary) where this has to be taught to children and teen agers, this is the place to teach them to be good citizens and to make them to know their rights, and 69.4% agree also very much with the idea that both educational institutions complement the education the children and teen agers receive at home.

They also agree very much (61.2%) with considering that both educational institutions are part of the society, so then, it is their function to promote the education of good citizens and to give knowledge about Human Rights.

According to these answers, 34.7% shows disagree with the idea of considering that this function is exclusively a family's function. In the following tables (1, 2, 3 and 4) it is shoed the absolute frequencies and percentages given to each answer for the items of agreement.

Table 1: School and High school: places where to teach this knowledge

Values	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Percentage acumulated
1	3	6,1	6,1	6,1
2	5	10,2	10,2	16,3
3	11	22,4	22,4	38,8
4	19	38,8	38,8	77,6
5	11	22,4	22,4	100,0
Total	49	100,0	100,0	

Table 2: Family is the only one who has the right and the obligation of teaching this knowledge

Values	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Percentage acumulated
1	17	34,7	34,7	34,7
2	11	22,4	22,4	57,1
3	13	26,5	26,5	83,7
4	6	12,2	12,2	95,9
5	2	4,1	4,1	100,0
Total	49	100,0	100,0	

Table 3: School and High school complete the knowledge and education they received at home

Values	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Percentage acumulated
3	3	6,1	6,1	6,1
4	12	24,5	24,5	30,6
5	34	69,4	69,4	100,0
Total	49	100,0	100,0	

Table 4: School and High school are part of the society so they have to promote this education

Values	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Percentage acumulated
3	2	4,1	4,1	4,1
4	17	34,7	34,7	38,8
5	30	61,2	61,2	100,0
Total	49	100,0	100,0	

*What kind of training on Citizenship Education and Human Rights (CE&HR) do you believe you have received at the University?*

Regarding the answer to this question we have founded the following:

- 8,2 % think that they have received enough educational contents on CE&HR
- 59,2% thinks that they have few educational contents on CE&HR

But, when asking them if they feel they are trained enough to teach this subject in the future, their answers seem remarkable:

- 40,9% says they are able and feel confident to teach CE&HR in the future
- 28,6% says they are able and feel confident enough to teach CE&HR in the future

So, despite they say they haven't received apparently enough educational contents on the topic they feel confident as future teachers of the subject. This result coincides with the one founded by Amnesty International in 2003. It is probably the fact that they haven't received enough training on CE&HR so far, because they are at the first year of their university studies.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the exploratory study show that our students (trainee teachers) have information on Human Rights but university is not yet the main place where they get information on the topic.

Although they have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of the new compulsory subject "Citizenship Education and Human Rights" in the primary and secondary Spanish curriculum, they don't feel that they have received enough training on the topic so far.

But, and this is the most interesting result, they feel confident to be future teachers on the subject when they finish their studies, which coincide with the results of the Amnesty International report (2003). This could be due to the fact that the students consulted are at the first year of their studies and they feel confident that, in the near future, they will receive more training on the subject.

For this is an exploratory study, the next step is to increase the sample and the questionnaire to more trainee teachers and of other Spanish public universities too.

We hope to have the opportunity to discuss the second part of the questionnaire once we have increased the number of students consulted.

## **References**

- Amnistía Internacional (2008) *Las Universidades Españolas, a la cola de Europa en formación obligatoria en Derechos Humanos* (available at: <http://www.es.amnesty.org/temas/educacion-en-derechos-humanos/documentos/>)
- Amnistía Internacional (2003) *Educación en Derechos Humanos: asignatura suspensa* (available at: <http://www.es.amnesty.org/temas/educacion-en-derechos-humanos/documentos/>)
- Council of Europe (1985) Recommendation No. R. (85) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights in Schools, in: H. STARKEY (ed.) (1991) *The Challenge of Human Rights Education*, 256-259, London: Cassell.
- Hathaway, O. (2007) Why do countries commit to Human Rights Treaties? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51, (4), 588-621.
- Lister, I. (1984) *Teaching and learning about human rights*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Osler, A. and Starkey, H. (1994) Fundamental issues in teacher education for human rights: A European perspective, *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 23, 349-350