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Learning about 'Education: The Human Rights dimension'

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an experience of a training course about Global Education: The Human Rights Dimension, offered by the North South Centre and The Network University in 2010-2011. The course was targeted at practitioners in the field of education and development, teachers, social and youth workers, as well as policy-makers, civil servants and local and regional authorities. It consisted of 4 modules including Global Education and Human Rights Education concepts, strategies for action and Human Rights Education activities. Participants were expected to work on the same module at the same time (collaborative learning). The course included tutoring, assignments, reading materials, discussion topics. The overall evaluation of the course was very positive, with a high rating of satisfaction among the participants' evaluation questionnaires, considering participants' diverse professional and geographical backgrounds.

Keywords: *Human Rights Education; Global Education; training course*

The World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE)

On 10 December 2004, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE). The aim was to improve the implementation of human rights education programmes at all levels, and to broaden and deepen human rights learning, according to the principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependency, impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity, constructive dialogue and cooperation.

The World Programme fosters the following human rights education principles (see Plan of Action, par. 8): (a) Promote the interdependence, indivisibility and universality of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development; (b) Foster respect for and appreciation of differences, and opposition to discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, physical or mental condition, and on other bases; (c) Encourage analysis of chronic and emerging human rights problems (including poverty, violent conflicts and discrimination), which would lead to solutions consistent with human rights standards; (d) Empower communities and individuals to identify their human rights needs and to ensure that they are met; (e) Build on the human rights principles embedded within the different cultural contexts and take into account historical and social developments in each country; (f) Foster knowledge of and skills to use local, national, regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms for the protection of human rights; (g) Make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis and skills for action furthering human rights; (h) Foster

teaching and learning environments free from want and fear that encourage participation, enjoyment of human rights and the full development of the human personality; (i) Be relevant to the daily life of the learners, engaging them in a dialogue about ways and means of transforming human rights from the expression of abstract norms to the reality of their social, economic, cultural and political conditions. This Plan of Action highlights that human rights education in the school system involves not only the integration of human rights in all educational processes and tools (curricula, textbooks, materials, methods and training) but also the practice of human rights within the education system.

The World Programme consists of different phases, of which the first one covered the period of 2005-2009, with a focus on primary and secondary education. The consultation on the focus of the second phase of the WPHRE highlighted the need to focus attention on human rights training for teachers and educators, without which human rights education cannot be effectively integrated into the school system. It was thereby decided that the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2010-2014) would focus on human rights education for higher education and on human rights training programmes for teachers and educators. A Plan of Action for the Second Phase of the World Programme (2010-2014) (document A/HRC/15/28) was prepared and adopted by the Human Rights Council by its resolution 15/11 (30 September 2010). This Plan of Action states that Higher Education institutions, through their core functions (research, teaching and service to the community), ‘not only have the social responsibility to educate ethical citizens committed to the construction of peace, the defense of human rights and the values of democracy, but also to generate global knowledge to meet current human rights challenges, such as eradication of poverty and discrimination, post-conflict rebuilding, sustainable development and multicultural understanding’ (par.21).

As education concerns ‘not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place’, human rights education in higher education should be understood as a process that includes not only the learning of human rights, but also the practice of rights, within the higher education system (par.22). This approach includes action in five areas: (a) Policies and related implementation measures; (b) Teaching and learning processes and tools (c) Research (d) The learning environment (e) Education and professional development of higher education teaching personnel (par.24-33).

Education for Global Citizenship and Human Rights in Portugal

As it also happens in other countries, in Portugal, the study of human rights is not a priority theme in the majority of primary and secondary schools, not even at University. Students should know their rights and responsibilities as an important element of democratic society, but there isn’t an interdisciplinary human rights education programme.

Since its setting up in 1990, the Council of Europe’s North-South Centre, in Lisbon, has been engaged in Global Education, which encompasses the global dimensions of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education as well as global youth work. Global education is ‘a holistic education that opens people’s eyes to the realities of

the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity, and human rights for all' (Maastricht Global Education Declaration, 2002). Global Education encompasses development education, human rights education, education for sustainability, education for peace and conflict prevention and intercultural education, all of which represent the global dimensions of education for democratic citizenship (Sasi, 2009).

The annual Lisbon Forum on Human Rights, held by the North-South Centre since 1994, is a platform for dialogue and for sharing experiences, expertise and good practices between Europe and the other continents. It focuses on human rights, democracy, the rule of law and intercultural dialogue. In 2008, it was devoted to the principle of the universality of human rights and its implementation, in relation with the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 2009 Lisbon Forum focused on 'Creating a culture of human rights through education'.

The North-South Prize ceremony is a most important aspect of the Centre's role in advancing human rights. The Prize is awarded annually to two persons, one from the North and one from the South, for their outstanding and exceptional merits in the field of human rights in a North-South context. The Prize ceremony takes place in the Portuguese Parliament (Sasi, 2009).

One of the Portuguese priorities has been on intercultural Education, as, in the last decades, there was an increase in the alien population. An important effort has been made against racial discrimination and to combat racism and intolerance, in terms of legislation and specific actions. The mass media are also involved in promoting tolerance, multiculturalism and combating racial discrimination. Inter-ministerial programmes have been set up to promote the values of co-existence and integration and the production of multicultural teaching materials. Seminars and workshops on human rights education and racism have also been conducted. Material for teachers are distributed free of cost to promote these values.

An experience of 'Global Education: The Human Rights Dimension'

The experience I am going to describe is a training course called *Global Education: The Human Rights Dimension*, offered by the North South Centre and The Network University in 2010, from 15th November to 20th December 2011. The course was targeted at practitioners in the field of education and development, teachers, social and youth workers, as well as policy-makers, civil servants and local and regional authorities. This four-week online learning course involved at least 8 hours of learning per week, including reading course materials, online discussion and participation in interactive exercises. The course included individual assignments, interactive group exercises, a discussion forum, a glossary and a virtual library.

The *Global Education: The Human Rights Dimension* Course consisted of 4 modules: 1. Introduction to Global Education: Human Rights Education Basics; 2. Understanding Human Rights Education in your *glocal* context; 3. Developing strategies for action; 4. Developing Human Rights Education activities. Participants were expected to work on the same module at the same time (collaborative learning).

The online training course included registration, the learning process, tutoring, assignments; reading materials; development of specific discussion topics. The group was diverse but well balanced, especially regarding geographical background. Each start of a module (or week), participants received an email with information on the schedule of that week including activities and proposed assignments. The course developed for a period of around 7 weeks. One additional week of time was allowed to finish the required assignments. After this extra week the final decision on the Certificate award was made. Criteria were that at least 75% of the activities should be completed and there were two activities obligatory (assignments 8 and 9). The successful participants received a package containing a printed and signed certificate; a CD-ROM with the contents of the course and a copy of NSC publication 'Global Education Guidelines', which is available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

Conclusion

This training module helped the participants to reflect upon the theoretical bases and to develop teaching activities and strategies that may be used in different curricular areas. It was successful in developing teamwork skills and the ability to work in interdisciplinary contexts, and enabling us to become critical and participating citizens in our global society.

The overall evaluation of the course was very positive, with a high rating of satisfaction among the participants' evaluation questionnaires, considering participants' diverse professional and geographical backgrounds. Participants comments on lessons learned related to mainly three areas: 1. The challenges of designing and implementing activities in practice and in context; 2. The reflections on the links between Human Rights, globalization and social justice; they mentioned for example the importance of having a 'global' picture and also paying attention to rich and diverse local perspectives. 3. Team work and organizational issues: working in diverse teams and with different stakeholders. They also developed skills in relation to developing a Human Rights Education programme, from general planning skills to implementing an activity step-by-step. Many participants said that they felt more competent in these areas and more aware. As for the methodology and exercises, participants believed that exercises fitted well the course contents and objectives. I really think it was very rich, because it gave us a whole approach, with different methods, different documents and many contacts, all over the world, which made this course really global.

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