

Human Rights in Preschool Education

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This section aims at pointing out the prime importance of early childhood education that serves as a point of departure for education on human rights. One of the essential targets of education at large is education on human rights, the principles of democratic conscience and citizenship (Lenhart, 2006). The accomplishment of education on these principles may be possible through the promotion of students' greater autonomy, reflection upon the course of interaction with others, and the development of social activities.

Education on human rights consists in having knowledge of the human rights, insight into and an understanding of the transgressions of human rights, and the development of common awareness for the defense of human rights. Just as human rights were recognized, established and acquired through struggles on a national level, it is equally necessary for every citizen to go through an individual learning process as regards human rights issues, in order to acquire knowledge with regard to the rights enjoyed by other people. In this framework, the pivotal role of education is a lifelong process. The inception of the understanding of principles and the procedures of human rights should lie in early childhood.

The school should encourage the child's participation in its social becoming, in a way compatible with the core principles of respect towards human values and personality. It should not manipulate the child or face it as an adornment; on the contrary, it should promote the child's cyclic or spiral pragmatic and essential involvement in the formation of its environment (Reynaert, Bouverne-de-Bie, & Vandeveldel, 2009).

1. Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education must conform to people's needs. It should help one perceive and reflect on issues that entail the protection of human rights through a holistic viewpoint, allowing no discriminations. When everyone has gained

knowledge about and developed the ability to comprehend one's own as well as other people's rights, then, education on human rights is accomplished (Pantazis & Pantazi, 2015).

Therefore, this constitutes an international duty and a global right protected by international law. In 1946, the United Nations Charter set up *"the promotion and encouragement of respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all"* (Chapter 1, Article 1). In 1948, the U.N. Charter General Assembly promulgated *"this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms"* (Preamble). Additionally, it declared: *"Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."* (Article 26, paragraph 2). In 1966, the two international treaties of human rights adopted by the United Nations, in order to empower and consolidate the rights of the Universal Declaration, postulate the right to education. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressly provides that *"education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"* (Article 13, paragraph 1). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also promotes education on human rights as a process that aims at the acquisition of information and at the dissemination of ideas, while nurturing the freedom of thought, opinion and expression. More specifically, it reaffirms *"the obligation of States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and freedoms"* (Preamble) and that *"everyone shall hold the right to hold opinions without interference"*. It also states that *"everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice"* (Article 19, paragraphs 1 & 2).

Finally, children's right to education on human rights is enshrined explicitly by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was endorsed by the United Nations in 1989. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that *"the child's education shall be directed to [...] the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations"* (Article 29, paragraph 1b). The United Nations declared the decade 1995 -

2005 to be a “Decade for Education on Human Rights” and drew up a plan of action involving all its State-Parties (UN GA Resolution 49/184-23/12/1994).

The child’s rights cover all aspects of children and adolescents’ lives. These are:

Rights to survival: the right to life and the satisfaction of basic needs (for example, adequate standard of living, accommodation, food, medical care)

Rights to development: rights that allow children to use their abilities to their fullest potential (for example, education, play and recreation, cultural activities, access to information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion)

Rights to participation: rights that allow children and adolescents to have an active participation in their communities (for example, freedom to express their opinion, to have a say in issues concerning their lives, to become members of a club or association)

Rights to protection: rights that are essential for children and adolescents’ security and protection against any form of abuse, abandonment and exploitation (for example, special care for refugee children and protection against participation in armed conflicts, child labor, sexual abuse, torture and use of drugs)

Education is regarded as both a human right as well as an indispensable means for the achievement of the totality of human rights. An educational system that encompasses an approach based on human rights will better fulfil its primary mission to ensure high-quality education for all. Moreover, education shall aim at the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial and religious groups and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (Tibbitts, 2002, 2005).

As education on human rights is termed every initiative of teaching, briefing and passing information on human rights that aspires to create a universal culture of human rights through the dissemination of knowledge and skills and through the shaping of behaviors that aim at:

- (a) Strengthening the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms
- (b) The full development of the human personality and dignity
- (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, racial equality and friendship among the nations, peoples and the racial, ethnic, national, religious and linguistic groups



- (d) The effective participation of all the people in a free society, and
- (e) The promotion of the United Nations activities for the maintenance of peace (Gillett-Swan, & Coppock, 2016)

1.1. Education Models for Human Rights

Projects on human rights are globally implemented and, according to Gollob, Krapf & Wiskemann (2009) they follow the typology of three instructive models:

- *Values and Awareness Model*

In this model, emphasis is placed on the theoretical knowledge of human rights rather than the practical ability to realize them. This is about an education within the framework of a relatively ensured observance of human rights. One prerequisite is the social majority's acknowledgement of the rules that stem from the documents on human rights as moral values. In this model, the development of abilities and skills for the realization of human rights is of secondary importance and does not approach the level of professionalism. It essentially focuses on the conveyance of basic knowledge, such as freedom, justice, human dignity and equality, aiming at raising the individual's interest through pedagogical strategy (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007).

- *Responsibility Model*

This model targets at training and educating the people who are professionally involved in the protection of human rights, with an emphasis on the administration of justice and the protection of human rights. It is based on social justice and social change on a community level, as well as on a regional and national level.

- *Transformational Model*

This model links human rights education to the question of restoration and maintenance of peace as well as to issues related to other tactics of reinforcement, such as women's equal participation and involvement, the promotion of the majorities' rights, the development of the global community. In the epicenter lies reinforcement, boosting the ability for further social development. The baseline is that learners have their own experiences of human rights transgressions or that they can imagine themselves assuming the role of potential transgressors. Usually, this model applies to vulnerable social groups (refugees, Roma, et al). In schools, it can apply in the form of an in-depth case study.



All the above models are presented as a “Learning Pyramid” (Tibbitts, 2002), on the base of which is placed the values-and-awareness model, in the middle, the responsibility model and at the top, the transformational model.

2. The Meaning of ‘Active Citizen’

Citizenship is the status of being a citizen. According to Maitles & Gilchrist (2006), Active Citizenship includes the following dimensions:

- Information about public affairs
- Knowledge of the rights and duties the individual has as a citizen
- Expression of opinion
- Demand for transparency and justice
- Active participation in social activities

According to Edelstein & Krettenauer (2014), by ‘Active Citizen’ one usually means that a person is entitled to be in the public space and to participate actively in socio-political structures of opinion formation and decision-making. Such structures are the local authorities, political parties, trade unions, societies, unions, associations, as well as informal collegialities (of a social/political/cultural character), scientific unions, et al.

Citizenship represents the totality of rights and obligations defined by the community members, while, at the same time, it consists of two complimentary aspects: the citizen’s rights and the citizen’s practice (Garratt, 2000). According to Delanty (2007), citizenship is a learning process, not entirely related to human rights or concerning one person’s status solely as a member of a state. It is more a matter of participating in the political community, and this starts early on in life. It is about acquiring the ability for action and taking on responsibility; but, essentially, it is about one’s knowing one’s own self and the relationship between self and others. In this regard, citizenship concerns identity and action, a fact, which entails the presence of a personal and a cognitive dimension that go beyond the personal on a broader cultural layer of society (Thornberg, 2008).

Within the educational framework, students are required to prepare for their actual participation in society on a theoretical and practical level, to deal with matters of real life, which influence them and their communities, while learning from their experiences at school as well as from the curriculum (Johansson & Emilson, 2016; Hampshire County Council, 2009).



The need for a student-centered teaching is a great challenge to the educator. According to Thornberg (2008), it means acquisition of new forms of knowledge, development of new teaching methods, finding new ways of employment and creating new forms of professional relationships – both with colleagues as well as with students. It focuses on teaching that is based on current affairs and not on understanding the historical systems, on teaching critical thought and skills as well as the conveyance of knowledge, on the collaborative and collective work rather than the isolated preparation, on professional autonomy rather than dependence on a central administration. It requires a shift in the way we perceive learning – from the teacher-centered learning to learning through experience, participation, research and reciprocation.

3. Human Rights Training in Preschool Education

According to the study of Gollob & Krapf (2008), school is particularly important to human rights education and training and to the formation of a democratic consciousness, since children are the first carriers of human rights and the first educational recipients of human rights. It is school's obligation to develop children's abilities to become aware of the value of human rights, so that they know their freedoms and their rights when they are adults. As highlighted in the study by Quennerstedt (2016), children should get in touch with human rights as early as possible, and according to age, while early childhood age is the appropriate age for children's introduction into human rights issues.

Coupled with the incentives and the training children will get during their preschool age, this time of their life plays a significant role in the formation of a democratic personality (Engdahl & Losso, 2019). While children embrace democratic and other broad stances and values, the impact on them by their intimate environment is especially great. The 'others who are immediate family' and the 'significant others' serve as an example, since children are mimicking the behavior of parents and educators; while supported and rewarded, they embrace and assume the behavior that is acceptable and that concurs with the predominant values (Theobald & Danby, 2011). Moreover, the acquisition of the meaning of equality and respect among human beings has its foundation in the development of self-respect that relies on the procurement of the individual's positive self-image and the establishment of self-esteem. Valuing the "self" and the "other" is a basic prerequisite for the recognition of man as value and as a carrier of values; in these values are anchored the fundamental human rights. As Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt (2014) point out, only when the child appreciates man – initially discovering 'man' only in himself and later



in the face of others – only then can he perceive that every human being has rights, of which no one is entitled to deprive him/her. From this point onwards, the child can get in touch with human rights that ensure man's life and dignity above all.

Human rights can be more accessible through a democratic education, since they are particularly valued in democratic societies. If we consider that the democratic, active citizen is attuned to respecting and implementing human rights, we understand that his education on democracy and his education on human rights are interconnected (Frank & Huddleston, 2009). Children's democratic education and their acquisition of awareness of human rights issues is integrated in the fundamental goals, general principles and pursuits of the Hellenic education (Androusou & Kourti, 2020).

Pre-primary school or Kindergarten is part of the Greek educational system and follows the fundamental principles of education, one of which is to mold democratic and responsible citizens. Kindergarten can contribute towards this through educating children on basic values of democracy. Children at this age develop their knowledge and feelings about homeland, politicians, international conflicts, the laws and become recipients of their parents' political ideologies. Within the framework of an organized education system, preschool-age children appear capable of developing an understanding of their country's political system (Birbili, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda, Wang, Koutsouvanou & Albright, 2002).

In Kindergarten, the democratic education of children aged 4-6 years old is mainly encouraged through the way school life is organized, the style of class management, the teaching methods and forms applied, but also the development of the democratic, pedagogical climate. In this democratic climate, children start experiencing democracy, learning about democracy, getting to know their rights and asking for their application, becoming aware of the others' rights and involved in democratic procedures. After all, it would be a discrepancy on the part of a democratic society not to educate its future citizens on democratic processes, such as having debates, showing respect for varied viewpoints, participating in decision-making and developing a system of social responsibility (Birbili & Myrovali, 2019).

Educating the democratic citizen starts with the social influences in the school classroom, where children learn to value their participation in the Democratic classroom society. If the child's capability of taking on responsibility for him-/herself and his/her endeavor to do what is the common good for a team is a positive thing for every community, then, to the democratic society, this is a requirement for the citizen's education. That is the reason why participation in common endeavors and

collaboration for the common good has to start early on in a child's life. For preschoolers, this process begins with taking on responsibility for their personal needs, e.g. development of self-care (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007). Only when the child has taken on responsibility for him-/herself can he/she exhibit responsibility for other individuals or groups: by participating in small groups, in interesting conversations and common activities (games of collaboration and drama, listening to fairy tales, learning songs, dolls animation). The contribution of all participants is required for the achievement of the greatest possible success (Vitsou & Kamaretsou, 2020). Observations in nurseries and kindergartens showed that children aged 3 to 4 years old, with the aid of adults, can take part in common activities, such as the preparation of a meal, cleaning up after themselves, taking care of plants and of their space within the framework of the team. What has also come to attention is that at age four, children assist their peers with special needs, in order for the latter to function as full members of their team. At age 5-6, children participate in group-activities, planning together and sharing in responsibilities and tasks among them. By announcing and talking about their ideas, they become capable of solving problems and planning their learning, by taking on responsibilities themselves within the group framework (Birbili & Myrovali, 2019).

As mentioned in the Analytical Studies Curriculum for Kindergarten (ICCF-ASC Kindergarten), children need to develop key-skills that will help them acquire a positive stance towards learning, so that they are in a position to learn and evolve for as long as they live. More specifically, modern study curricula are called to provide students with the necessary skills, which are "... necessary to citizens for their personal fulfillment, social integration, their active citizenship and occupation in our society, which is founded on knowledge" (Birbili & Oikonomidis, 2013).

Social skills enable people to participate in social life and to resolve differences and conflicts in a constructive way. Such skills are effective communication and collaboration in different environments and negotiation in a climate of trust, acceptance and respect for otherness. For this development, the role of intercultural education is momentous. It is necessary that intercultural education and preschool education will be set in motion at the same time (Magos, 2019). Skills pertaining to citizenship facilitate people to participate in social life fully and concern specific competencies, such as expression of solidarity, interest in social issues, responsibility for self and others, controlling behavior and observing rules. The necessary skills and behaviors for one to "live together with the others" and to effectively participate in social activities are varied in proportion to age, the cultural framework and the special conditions one faces at different times in his/her life. For preschoolers, their



holistic development and their social skills are interrelated and enriched as they grow and communicate with others more effectively. They are relevant to the child's ability to develop meaningful interactions in certain socio-cultural frameworks, to recognize and respond appropriately to ideas, actions and feelings of others, to respect their needs, to ask for and offer help (Frödén & Tellgren, 2020).

Kindergarten should be in a position to foster social skills, when preschoolers are encouraged to exchange information with their peers as concerns their culture, or when they make joint efforts to achieve a goal – for example, to make a construction or decorate the classroom. Also, in cases, when children are prompted to negotiate: for instance, when they have to resolve a dispute, how to go about it, or when they are to set rules for the effective operation of the class or decide how to conduct a survey of opinions in class. Additionally, when they are encouraged to support their opinion by using argumentation while keeping an open mind to views that are different from theirs. At the same time, when they take up different roles in daily classroom activities (e.g. assistant, facilitator, colleague, participating in groups doing chores), these may help prepare children for their future status as active citizens, so they can function with flexibility, when they find themselves in various social surroundings, in the course of their life (Sammons, Sylva, & Melhuish, 2008).

The above skills apply in all learning fields as they pervade and cover the whole Kindergarten curriculum. In every learning field, there are opportunities, which the educator can make use of according to the educational planning, so that she can promote their development. At the same time, since all of these skills are essential tools towards learning, their employment, as they evolve, during the educational process, supports and facilitates the achievement of goals in every learning field. However, every basic skill may serve in some of the learning fields in a more systematic way than in other learning areas (Gray, 2016).

Basic skills are interconnected, interdependent and complement each other. As children gradually improve their ability to use the means of representation and communication, they thus obtain new tools for thought that help them to develop their creative and critical thought. Simultaneously, this skill can help children to express and project their interest and abilities, to discover what they want to learn and, progressively, to take on responsibility for their learning. As they improve their ability to communicate with others, the development of their social skills becomes easier. Thus, they can collaborate and manage conflicts more efficiently, they can negotiate their points of view and build solid relationships. When children are able to express and communicate their emotions and their thoughts effectively, it is easier



for them to enjoy autonomy and develop a positive 'self-feeling' (self-esteem). This may occur when they pioneer original ideas and manage to deal with and resolve issues, by using resourceful tactics (Brantefors & Thelander, 2017). The development of personal identity and autonomy contributes to the development of social skills. That is, as children start recognizing various personal traits, such as abilities and behaviors, they also become aware of differences and similarities in others' traits; so, they learn to acknowledge and respect others for who they are. The ability to collaborate also enables children to participate in group-tasks, to handle issues as a team and to learn from their peers. Finally, building relationships with other children and active participation in group-projects enhance children's self-confidence, strengthen their determination and helps them take initiatives (Schweinhart, 2010; Johansson & Emilson, 2016; Oikonomidis, 2014).

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