

## **Children's Rights Education as a Key to Human Rights Education**

**K. Peter Fritzsche (Published in: Peace matters – Utrecht, SIM special 29, p 49-73, 2007)**

Since the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force (1989) children's rights education has become an integrated part of human rights education. While the process of standard setting and institution building in the field of human rights and children's rights has made enormous progress, as well as the process of developing attainments targets, educational concepts, and curricula in the field of children's rights education the research in this field is still in the developmental stage. This article gives an overview on standards, concepts and research findings in the field of children's rights education.

### **1. Human Rights Education from the start**

Human rights are the indispensable instruments for the realization and the protection of human dignity and of fundamental human needs. Human rights are no magic guarantee that can overcome any violation of dignity. However, they are the strongest instruments we have developed so far to pave the way for a life of self-determination and non-discrimination. Human rights include as *human* rights, the same rights of others, the equal dignity of each individual! In order to raise an awareness of these human rights and an understanding of their powerful potential we need special educational effort (Fritzsche 2004).

What good does it do to have human rights if we don't know them, and what good does it do in turn to know them if we don't understand them!? And finally, what good is it to understand human rights if no one is prepared to respect them and step up to support them? Human Rights Education (HRE) is not a pedagogic addendum, but a genuine component of human rights. It therefore logically follows - and meanwhile has been recognized - that there is an human right to HRE.

The need for HRE is also confirmed by surveys conducted in the US and in Germany showing an enormous gap between the importance of HRE and a lack of human rights awareness. *In 1997 Peter Hart Research Associates, conducted a national survey on the knowledge level and attitudes of people in the USA on human rights. The results showed that only 8% of adults and 4% of young people are aware of and can name the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over 90% of the population remains ignorant of the most basic human rights document (Hart 1997).*

In 2003 a similar national survey of adults in Germany conducted by the Research Institute Usuma showed also a widespread lack of human rights awareness (Stellmacher/Sommer/Brähler 2005).

*As far as you know, is there an official document that sets forth human rights for everyone worldwide?*

- 20 %: *There is no such document;*
- 30 %: *Don't know;*
- 50 %: *There is such a document.*

*The respondents could name only the content of less than three human rights. These are*

- 2,05 *political and civic human rights;*
- 0,73 *economic human rights;*

Surprisingly even students of Unesco schools were not more aware of human rights. In 2000 the first study on human rights knowledge of students (2680) and teachers (144) of UNESCO schools (36) in Germany showed that only less than 3 of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be named. Even the teachers could formulate only the content of 5.6 articles (Müller 2002).

Meanwhile there is increasing evidence that HRE is emerging in the work of non-governmental organizations as well as in national systems of education (Ramirez et al, 2005). Over the last years, the term "human rights education" has slipped into the language of ministries of education, educational nonprofits, human rights organizations and teachers - not to mention intergovernmental agencies such as the United Nations and regional agencies (Tibbitts 2002). In the UN-Decade of HRE (1995-2004) a large number of countries have incorporated HRE into pre-school, primary and secondary school level curricula, either as a cross-curricular theme, or as targets in the overall curriculum. In 2005, with the conclusion of the UN Decade for HRE, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights launched an on-going and more focused World Programme with a Plan of Action for Human Rights Education, which promises to elicit improved cooperation from governments, as well as cross-cutting support from UN bodies (Tibbitts 2006).

HRE targets all professional groups that perform activities relevant to human rights, such as the police, penal system officials, lawyers, armed forces, internationally-active diplomats and civil servants, development workers, members of peace keeping forces, members of NGOs, media employees, government officials and members of parliament. However, children are the most important target group of HRE, because children are both the first bearers of human rights as well as the first audience for HRE. In order to make HRE a reality, Unesco propose to "mainstream" human rights into teaching and education and to start as early as possible. Children's rights education is recognized as the first step of human rights education. Children have to be educated about and in children rights, ie. those rights which had been internationally agreed upon in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## **2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child as a bridge for HRE**

A remarkable international progress to protect the rights of the child has been reached by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Goldrick 1991). All the rights enumerated in the

Convention – the civil and political rights as well as the economic, social and cultural rights – are indivisible and interrelated, with a focus on the child as a whole. This indivisibility of rights is a key to interpreting the Convention.<sup>1</sup> The Convention is increasingly becoming a point of reference and a key document for early HRE.

The Convention reflects a new vision of the child. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they objects of charity or recipients of benefits. They are the subject of their own rights, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. The child has become the holder of legally binding rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that children's rights are human rights. Children's rights are not special rights, but human rights for the most vulnerable group. Children's rights are not a question of favour or kindness to children or as an expression of charity. They generate obligations and responsibilities that we all must honour and respect.<sup>2</sup>

The Convention is guided by four principles that help to protect and promote the rights. In a child friendly version you can read:

- Non-discrimination (2): you should neither benefit nor suffer because of your race, colour, gender, language, religion, national, social or ethnic origin, or because of any political or other opinion; because of your caste, property or birth status; or because you are disabled.
- The best interests of the child (article 3): laws and actions affecting children should put your best interests first and benefit you in the best possible way. Survival, development and protection (article 6): the authorities in your country must protect you and help ensure your full development — physical, spiritual, moral and social.
- Participation (article 12): you have a right to have your say in decisions that affect you, and to have your opinions taken into account.<sup>3</sup>

The UN human rights regime consists of a broad system of internationally agreed declarations and conventions. But due to the fact that the concept of state sovereignty remains still strong, the implementation of the international human rights standards is often uneven and ineffective (Freemann 2004, 42 - 54). How strong or weak is the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child? Even though a gap between the promise of children's rights and the reality of their continuing denial calls for changes to existing laws and policies, research findings indicate also a remarkable impact of the Convention on the children's rights orientated policies of many countries. The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre has started to undertake research on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first study has been conducted in 2003 and 2004 (a second study is ongoing) and focussed on 62 countries with a special emphasis on those countries which had already addressed to national reports to the Committee (including Germany and the Netherlands). The findings underline a strong impact of the Convention on national policies at three levels.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cridoc.net/glossary\\_h.php](http://www.cridoc.net/glossary_h.php)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_30229.html](http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore\\_155.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_155.html)

1. Many states have developed national coordinating mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights.
2. According to the findings of the study more than 60 children's rights institutions have been established in the reviewed countries.
3. There has been substantial progress in the area of national law reform referring directly to the rights of the children's, especially in the field of health and education.

#### **4. The right to Human Rights Education as part of the Convention**

None of the civil, political, economic and social rights can be exercised by individuals unless they have received a certain minimum education. As UNESCO states: *The Right to Education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in Human Rights and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and for development. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.*<sup>4</sup>

The right to education is of special interest for Human Rights Education. Article 29 of the Convention offers a kind of summary of the right to education and the right to Human Rights Education:

*States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:*

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;*
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;*
- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;*
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;*
- (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.*<sup>5</sup>

Article 42 obliges States Parties to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike. This article as well is of high importance for children's human rights education.

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=9019&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=9019&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

Children are the first target group, the first rights holder and the first learners of HRE. Children's rights education can pave the way to human rights education. The goals of HRE are as follows:

- Learn to know and defend your human rights!
- Learn to respect the equal rights of others!
- Learn to be as committed as possible to defending the human rights of others!

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention by its State parties and criticises children's rights violations.<sup>6</sup> The Committee also publishes its interpretation of the content of human rights provisions, known as "General Comments" on thematic issues and organizes days of general discussions. According to the position of the Committee an education for children's rights has to start as early as possible. In 2004, the Committee devoted its Day of General Discussion on "Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood". In the opening remarks it was stated that even the youngest children have rights from the start and the right to be sensitized to human rights education and to grow up in an appropriate environment. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a new General Comment (7) during its session in September 2005. Through the General Comment, the Committee underlines that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a starting period for realization of these rights.<sup>7</sup>

## 5. Empowerment through children's rights education

General Comment no. 1 of the Committee of the Rights of the Child on the aims of education explains that the goal is to "empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence" and that this must be achieved in ways that are child-centered, child-friendly and reflect the rights and inherent dignity of the child.<sup>8</sup>

Empowerment has become a magic word within the international discourse of human rights. It means a shift of perspective: From the deficits and weakness of the learners to their potentialities centred on the development of a balanced self-confidence. Taking into account the broad discussion about empowerment within the field of HRE and of citizenship education (Lohrenscheit 2004) it can be said that empowerment has also a political meaning. The dimensions of empowerment can be summarized as follows: Empowerment means:

1. an educational approach that encourages personal development, a sense of competence and self-confidence
2. a process that leads people to perceive themselves entitled and able to make decisions
3. a means to enable people to become aware of their rights and responsibilities

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.GC.7.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.GC.7.En?OpenDocument)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/CRC.GC.2001.1.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/CRC.GC.2001.1.En?OpenDocument)

4. a process by which powerless or excluded people become aware of the power influencing their lives
5. a social and human development strategy that enables women, men, and children to become agents of social change.<sup>9</sup>

Applying the approach of empowerment to children's rights education means:

Children's rights education intends empowering to children, providing them with opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities in ways adapted to their interests, concerns and evolving capacities. Empowerment can be also a consequence of the developing awareness of being entitled. The rights-based approach underlines that children are not the objects of charity or recipients of benefits, but they are the subject of their rights.

### **5.1 Participation as empowerment**

Participation rights are of high concern and they belong to the ensemble of indivisible rights of the Convention. Within the field of children's rights education there are not only the highly emotional violations of the survival and protection rights on the agenda, but also that participation rights and their implementation as well.

*The reality of implementation of these rights across Switzerland was examined in a large survey conducted in 2001 and 2002 of 12,800 children and young people aged 9 to 16. One important finding was that children want to be heard and to be involved to a much greater extent than the school and community apparently allow. About half of Swiss children feel that they have a say in the family, some of them say that their opinions matter at school and just very few feel that their views count at the community level. This was the main finding of a national survey in 2002 on children's participation.<sup>10</sup>*

Even though some studies (Peens, Louw 2000) showed that generally adults feel more comfortable affording children protection rights rather than participation rights, the fear that educating children about their rights will lead to the lost of the adults' authority is not at all justified. Data from a project in Great Britain (Morrow 1999, 153) show very clearly that „children recognize not only the limits of their autonomy, but also the need for guidance from adults; all they are asking is some inclusion in decision-making processes, which involves according them some respect and dignity“. Even though participation is a value in itself it is expected that participation has a sustainable learning effect. It is up to future research to analyse the sustainable impact of participatory activities of children. What do children gain from having a say in important areas of their lives? Does early participation really help to become familiar with democracy?

The UN Special Session on Children 2002 „A World Fit for Children“ provided an international opportunity for discussions with children about human rights. Based on the action plan of the first World Summit for children that contained a clear program of 10 points

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pdhre.org/about.html>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.nfp52.ch/e\\_dieprojekte.cfm?Projects.Command=details&get=31](http://www.nfp52.ch/e_dieprojekte.cfm?Projects.Command=details&get=31)

referring to health, food and education, it was possible to discuss questions like: What went well in the last decade? What did not go well in the last decade? Why did it not go well? In the web you can find even a child-friendly report on progress and failures in this regard.<sup>11</sup>

The first-ever participation of children at the World Summit is a good example for making real participation an issue. However, what kind of competencies has to be learnt in order to be able to participate in the process of decision making? The German child-orientated NGO “Kindernothilfe” has started a discussion on criteria for such competencies so that the participation of children at conferences do not only turn into an symbolic event.

While studies in Canada, South Africa and Norway (Limber at al 1999, 368) showed that “the concepts of rights emerge in the early elementary school“(and develop in stages later on), some researchers start to focus on the pre-school age. It is only very recently that research in the field of children’s rights education addresses questions of participation in the kindergarten. A study of Ruppert (2006) underlines how difficult it is to conceptualize and identify forms of participations which take into account the evolving capacities of the children in the kindergarten. An empirical evaluation of the German project “Demokratie leben im Kindergarten und der Grundschule” shows how sensitive and challenging it is to anchor participation rights in everyday issues with which young children can identify in early education programmes. The main obstacle seems to be that the educators are not yet trained in participatory approaches for young children (Priebe 2006).

## **5. 2 Respect and responsibilities**

Children have the right to express themselves and the right to meet with others and to form associations. But in exercising these rights, the child must respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others. The issue of respect for the rights of others is contained in several articles of the Convention.

Education as empowerment aims at making the individual aware of his or her rights as well as developing a willingness to respect the same rights of others. It seems to be easier when it comes to your own rights, but harder to be supportive of the acceptance of the rights of the others. The idea or concept of equal dignity and equal rights is not at all self-evident, but it is the result of civilisation and education. The recognition of equal values cannot be prescribed with a moral appeal, but rather it requires a learning culture to strengthen willingness to accept equal rights and equal values.

Can empowerment through children’s rights education become a condition for sharing rights and responsibilities with others? Does empowerment work as prevention against the feelings of fear, stress, insecurity, powerlessness and inferiority which are the fruitful ground for

---

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/docs\\_new/documents/child\\_friendly\\_sgreport\\_summary.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/docs_new/documents/child_friendly_sgreport_summary.pdf)

excluding and discriminating others? Are those who have experienced recognition themselves more capable of accepting others as equal and tolerating their differences? Human rights educators believe in the impact of human rights education on the basis of their experiences, but few studies exist in any part of the world to offer concrete, objective evidence. Even though there is still very little empirical examination, there is a „take off“ of research focussing on children’s rights education.

A 1997 study conducted by the Search Institute and Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights showed some results, even though only a single program had been assessed. Cognitive and behavioral outcomes were measured at a Minneapolis public elementary school where some students received no human rights education, some had three lessons a week, and others participated in a program in which human rights were fully integrated into both the curriculum and the culture of the classroom.<sup>12</sup>

*Students' self-report of knowledge on human rights related issues showed increase.*

- *Students self-reported "feelings of concern when others were disparaged because they looked or behaved differently" showed an even greater increase.*
- *Most significant were the behavioral outcomes, which indicated a reduction in inappropriate physical, verbal and social behaviors among students receiving human rights education, with a clear distinction between students receiving disparate lessons and those participating in an integrated human rights education program.*

Taking into account the empirical studies of Decoene and De cock of 1996 which indicated already some impact of children’s rights education the research findings of Covell, Howe and Brian (2001), underlines that children’s rights education matters. The study on „rights, respect and responsibility“ shows that when children are taught in school about their rights and responsibilities under the Convention, „in an egalitarian and student-centered manner“ they are indeed more respecting of the rights of others. Children (age 13-15) who have learned about their rights under the Convention, compared with those who have not show:

- a better understanding of what it means to have rights and responsibilities
- greater acceptance of minority children
- more positive interactions with their classmates and teachers
- higher self-esteem.

In another study Covell et al (2002, 304) conclude: „When children learn that they are worthy individuals who possess rights, they become more supportive for the rights of others.“ However, we may doubt how far this kind of solidarity will sustain under difficult circumstances. While it seems relatively easy to establish such pedagogical settings which support behavioural change in the classroom it seems much more challenging to promote changes which sustain also beyond the classroom.

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hrhandbook/part1D.html>

Based on experienced recognition, it could be possible to strengthen the idea of freedom and equality of human rights and to use it as an antidote against the racist and extremist ideologies inequality. Right-wing extremism and xenophobia among children and adolescents in Germany is increasingly considered a serious societal problem. The social services or social sciences offer no simple answers or solutions to the problem of right-wing extremism among the young, but indicate a variety of options and conclusions:

- *pedagogical programs geared toward young people help to prevent violence and reduce prejudice*
- *specially designed programs foster political and social participation of young people and show them ways to social integration*
- *by doing so, social and educational programs for the young make an important contribution to the formation of a "civil society"<sup>13</sup>*

It has been the concept of human rights and children's rights as a kind of antidote against right-wing extremism that led the Amadeu-Antonio Foundation to the pilot project „Menschenrechtserziehung für demokratische Kultur (HRE for a democratic culture)“. This project (2004-2006) shall help to develop an awareness of rights and responsibilities among school children that makes them immune against the „temptations“ of a widespread right wing youth culture, especially in parts of East Germany.<sup>14</sup>

## **6. Human rights orientation of the school and of the teachers**

Contrary to the opinion of many teachers quite a number of issues in children's lives at school are related to the rights of children as stipulated by the Convention (Krappmann 2006).

- Respect for the views of the child (Article 12): Are children allowed to express their views and do they get the opportunity to participate in decisions concerning the rules of the school life?
- School discipline (Article 28 (2): Is school discipline administered without any violence or violation of the dignity of the children?
- Violence among children (Article 19): Is it possible to eliminate violent fighting, bullying or mobbing within the classrooms?
- Right to privacy (Article 16): has the school a culture of respect to every child's right to privacy developed?
- Non-discrimination (Article 2): Do the teachers and the pupils behave in a non-discriminating way to children from vulnerable groups, to children with an migration background. Is there a climate that fosters integration?

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dji.de/cgi-bin/projekte/output.php?alleszeigen=1&projekt=199>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/eng/content.cfm>

It is therefore important that the teaching methods used in schools reflect the spirit and educational philosophy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Schools should foster a human rights profile and allow children to develop according to their evolving capacities.

But how do we make out that our schools are appropriate to overcome discrimination and to foster self-esteem? Are we sure that schools are the solution and not the problem? An interesting approach is the testing of schools on the basis of an human rights orientated questionnaire called „Taking the human rights temperature of your school“. <sup>15</sup> This approach has been developed by D. Shiman & K. Rudelius-Palmer, of the Human Rights Resource Center at the University of Minnesota. The questions are adapted from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All of the questions are related to the fundamental human right to education found in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration. Meanwhile the English version has been also translated in other languages like Dutch or German<sup>16</sup>.

Another initiative that should strengthen children's rights education in schools has been developed recently by UNICEF in the United Kingdom: „The Rights Respecting School Award“. <sup>17</sup> This is currently being piloted in over 30 schools across the United Kingdom. It will be launched in autumn 2006. This new nationwide award scheme promotes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for enhancing teaching, learning, ethos, attitudes and behaviour. A Rights Respecting School not only teaches about children's and human rights but also models rights and respect in all its relationships: teacher/adults-pupils; pupils- teacher/adults; pupils-pupils.

The Award is open for all schools: nursery, first, primary, middle, secondary and special. For a school to receive the RRS Award, they must show evidence that they have reached the required Standard in each of four Aspects:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) amongst the school community and its relevance to the school ethos and curriculum.
2. Teaching and learning styles and methods are commensurate with knowledge and understanding of children's rights.
3. Pupils actively participate in decision making throughout the school.
4. Provision of professional development to support rights as part of the school ethos, curriculum and culture.

Schools that meet the Rights Respecting School criteria will receive our Rights Respecting School Award certificate and digital logo.

However, who will educate the children applying the lens of children's rights? What is needed are teachers who are themselves convinced of the potential of HRE. We do need educators

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hrusa.org/hrmaterials/temperature/temperature.shtm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hrusa.org/hrmaterials/temperature/default.shtm?PHPSESSID=2872a75500702a21d77be15d23007f0a>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/teacher\\_support/rrs\\_award.asp](http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/teacher_support/rrs_award.asp)

who are able to create environments to „respect, promote and protect children’s evolving capacities“ (Innocenti Insight 2005).<sup>18</sup>

Existing research in Canada indicates that the successful implementation of new children’s rights curricula depends on variables like its impact on workload and teachers’ agreement with the goals of a new program. The support of the new curricula is so important as some teachers perceive children’s rights as hot topics that should not be taught at school and they fear that educating children about their rights will lead to the loss of the teachers’ authority in the classroom. Moreover children’s rights are misunderstood as a green card for children to do always to do what they want. Additional findings were that the more teachers used the curriculum, the higher they rated it later and the more they expressed attitudes supportive of children’s rights (Covell/O’Leary/Howe 2002). Successful HRE depends obviously upon the training and professionalism of its teachers. Universities therefore need to develop and offer appropriate educational programs.

## **7. Materials and the internet**

Children rights education needs also appropriate educational materials. Hundreds of human rights-related teaching materials have been developed worldwide in the last decade and many of these are widely available free of charge on the Internet, for example through the On-Line Resource Centre of Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) and other on-line resource centres. Moreover, bibliographies and descriptive databases of human rights education materials are available through key human rights organizations as well as United Nations-related agencies (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, HREA, Council of Europe). HREA recorded 1.4 million downloads of human rights education-related learning materials from its website alone during the year of 2005 (Tibbitts 2006).

More and more the internet is becoming an indispensable resource for children’s rights education. As a medium that is especially appealing to children, the Internet has the ability to provide an effective means by which children are able to receive information and educational material and to communicate with other children, with NGOs and with human rights defenders worldwide and to express their views. The free access to the Net –as well as the opportunity to learn the necessary skills for this - has now become part of the right to education.

In 1996 the Committee on the Rights of the Child held a consultation on children and the media. A working group then began to explore the issues involved in developing a positive relationship between children and the media. In 1998, the Norwegian Government and UNICEF initiated a process that would identify examples of good practice, forge cooperative

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/evolving-eng.pdf>

links among the many sectors involved, and produce resources to encourage further developments in the field.

In November 1999, young people involved in media projects, media professionals and child rights experts gathered in the Norwegian capital Oslo to discuss the role the media can play in the development of children's rights throughout the world, under five headings:

- Children's right of access to the media, including new media
- Children's right to media education and literacy
- Children's right to participate in the media
- Children's right to protection from harm in the media and violence on the screen
- The media's role in protecting and promoting children's rights.<sup>20</sup>

A follow-up product is the development of the meeting The MAGIC Network was set up for professionals and organizations working in the field of children and the media to share information and ideas as well as the child friendly MAGIC Website with „Know your rights“, the „Make your way in the media“ and the „Have your say“ sections.<sup>21</sup> This website is only one example of a growing amount of child friendly websites in the field of children rights. At the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights Education in Germany there is an ongoing student project „Unsere Kinderrechte“ to develop a site that integrates child friendly texts with texts for adults.<sup>22</sup>

## **8. Children's rights education for all**

Children's rights education aims also at building bridges to those children whose rights are violated by violence, exploitation or discrimination. At the same time those violations stress how different and unequal the living conditions of children are worldwide. Children are the most vulnerable group, however there are very different grades of being exposed to such vulnerability depending on where the children live.

Disadvantaged or poor children are a challenge not only in developing countries, but also in affluent societies like Germany or the Netherlands. A current study of children growing up poor in an affluent Netherlands is an initial effort and adds to the focus on the children's perspectives and their coping mechanisms. This way, it enables us to see children's agency in their own environment (Innocenti Working Paper 2005).

Empowerment as a process of learning that encourages a sense of competence and self-esteem support children living everywhere. They are even more important for those children who are especially vulnerable like children living in situations of conflict or emergency, second generation children, economically and socially disadvantaged children and migrant children.

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/about.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.unicef.org/magic/users/children.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.unsereKinderrechte.de/wiki/>

According to a new OECD study „Where immigrant students succeed“ (PISA 2006) many developed countries are failing to help children of immigrant families integrate into society through education. Immigrant children in some OECD countries lag more than two years behind their native counterparts in school performance. The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tested 15-year-old students in 41 countries in mathematics, reading comprehension, science and problem-solving skills. It focused on 17 territories with large immigrant populations. The report shows that in countries, such as Canada and Australia, immigrant children perform as well as their native counterparts. But in other countries, notably those with highly tracked education systems, they do substantially worse. While the achievements of migrant children are improving in almost all countries with passage of time, the performances of migrant kids in German schools worsen drastically.

All attempts to foster education in and for children’s rights have to take into account the living and learning conditions worldwide. If children’s rights education is more than a privileged and exclusive opportunity for well developed countries or for special groups, only then children’s rights education has to be implemented as „Education for all“.

## **Conclusion**

After the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Decade of HRE new standards, curricula and educational materials for and in children’s rights education have developed rapidly. The new children’s rights standards have been followed by high expectations concerning the possible impact of the new educational approach. However, research in this field is developing only slowly. The knowledge about the effectiveness of children’s rights education is often based on reports of good practice instead of research findings. Clearly, more research needs to be done. Especially the evolving capacities of the children, the children’s rights awareness of the parents and the teachers and the sustainability of educational projects are challenging questions for research. *Educators need research information not only to identify effective methodologies and refine their practice, but also to convince decision-makers, such as educational authorities, boards of nongovernmental organizations, and funders, of the efficacy of human rights education.*<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, there are already research findings that give hope: children’s rights educations matters! But we are only at the beginning.

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hrhandbook/part1D.html>

## References:

Campbell, K. M.; Covell, K. (2001): Children's rights education at the university level: An effective means of promoting rights knowledge and rights-based attitudes. In: The International Journal of Children's Rights. Vol. 9. 2001. p. 123-135.

Covell, K.; Howe, R. B. (1999): The impact of children's rights education: A Canadian study. In: The International Journal of Children's Rights. Vol. 7. 1999. p. 171-183.

Covell, K.; Howe, R. B. (2001): Moral Education through the 3 Rs: rights, respect and responsibility. In: Journal of Moral Education. Vol. 30, No. 1. 2001. p. 29-41.

Covell, K.; Howe, R. B.: Schools and the Participation Rights of the Child. In: Education & Law Journal. Vol. 9. p. 107-123.

Covell, K.; O'Leary, J. L.; Howe, R. B. (2002): Introducing a New Grade 8 Curriculum in Children's Rights. In: The Alberta Journal of Educational Research. Vol. 48, No. 4. 2002. p. 302-313.

Fatke, R., Niklowitz, M., 2003. Children and youth survey on participation in Switzerland. Available: <http://www.research-projects.unizh.ch/phil/unit62100/area764/>

Freemann, M. (2004): Human Rights – an interdisciplinary approach, Cambridge

Fritzsche, K. P. (2004): Menschenrechte. Eine Einführung mit Dokumenten. Paderborn.

Krappmann, L. (2006): The rights of the child as a challenge to human rights education, In: In: Human Rights Education, Online „Journal of Social Science Education“ Available (July 2006): [http:// www.jsse.org](http://www.jsse.org)

Limber, S.P.; Kask, V.; Heidmets, M.; Kaufman, N., and Melton, G. B. (1999): Estonian Children's Perceptions of Rights: Implications for Societies in Transition', International Journal of Children's Rights, 7, pp. 365-83.

Morrow, V. (1999): „We are People Too“: Children's and Young People's Perspectives on Children's Rights and Decision-Making in England', International Journal of Children's Rights, 7, pp. 149-70.

Innocenti Research Centre – Innocenti Insight (2005) The Evolving Capacities of the Child, Innocenti Publications

Innocenti Research Centre (2004): Summary Report of the Study on the Impact of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Innocenti Publications

Innocenti Working Papers (2005): Through Children's Eyes An Initial Study Of Children's Personal Experiences And Coping Strategies Growing Up Poor In An Affluent Netherlands, Innocenti Publications

Lohrenscheit, C. (2004): Das Recht auf Menschenrechtsbildung - Grundlagen und Ansätze einer Pädagogik der Menschenrechte. Mit einer Studie über aktuelle Entwicklungslinien der Human Rights Education in Südafrika, Frankfurt/M

Müller, L. (2002):. Menschenrechtserziehung an Schule und Hochschule, Occasional Paper Nr. 6, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Menschenrechte, Universität Trier.

Available: <http://www.politik.uni-trier.de/forschung/agmr/6.pdf>

Peter Hart Research Associates, Inc. (1997). Hart survey on attitudes and knowledge of human rights – Adult.

Available: <http://www.hrusa.org/features.shtm>

Peter Hart Research Associates, Inc. (1997). Hart survey on attitudes and knowledge of human rights – Youth.

Available: <http://www.hrusa.org/features.shtm>

PISA (2006): Where Immigrant Students Succeed - A Comparative Review of Performance and Engagement in PISA 2003, OECD Publishing

Peens B.J., Louw D.A.(2000): Children's rights: a review of children's and adults' perceptions. Med Law. 2000;19(2):275-86.

Priebe, M. (2006) Evaluation des Projekts „Demokratie leben in Kindergarten und Grundschule“, In: INA und RAA (Hrsg): Empowerment und Partizipation von Kindern, in press

Ramirez, F.O., Suarez, D. and Meyer, J.W. (2005). “The Worldwide Rise of Human Rights Education”. Chapter developed for a forthcoming volume on comparative curricular research, edited by A. Benavot and C. Braslavsky

Ruppert, J. (2006): Partizipation im Kindergarten. Am Beispiel von Interaktionen zwischen Kindern und Erzieherinnen (unveröffentlichte Diplomarbeit). Landau: Universität

Sommer, G.; Stellmacher, J.; Brähler, E. (2005): Menschenrechte in Deutschland: Wissen, Einstellungen und Handlungsbereitschaft, In: Bürger im Staat, Heft 1/2005  
Available: [http://www.lpb.bwue.de/aktuell/bis/1\\_2\\_05/wissen.htm](http://www.lpb.bwue.de/aktuell/bis/1_2_05/wissen.htm)

Tibbitts, F. (2002): “Understanding What We Do: Emerging Models for Human Rights Education”. In International Review of Education, 48 (3-4), pp. 159-171.

Tibbitts, F. (2006) Introduction, In: Human Rights Education, Online „Journal of Social Science Education“  
Available (July 2006): [http:// www.jsse.org](http://www.jsse.org)

**Published in: Peace matters – Utrecht, SIM special 29, p 49-73, 2007**