



Promoting Values and Citizenship through Human Rights Education

A Small-Scale Research Initiative between Ireland and Scotland

This information has been taken from the report provided by the project leads:

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- ✚ Elaine Watts, Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure Scotland (BEMIS), then University of Strathclyde, Scotland

The project leads attended the 2011 Five Nations Conference in Dublin. Both Amnesty Ireland and BEMIS found that teachers are working in a context of economic austerity and education cutbacks brought particular challenges. It significantly limits the amount of time that teachers have to engage in CPD, yet there remains a huge need for, and appetite from teachers to learn about integrating human rights education (HRE) into their work. The organisations found that although HRE has clear links to values education and active citizenship, with its focus on participatory methodologies and values, many teachers are still not making the links between the two.

Aims

- ✚ Strengthen respect for human rights and values across the school community
- ✚ Promote a deeper understanding of active citizenship
- ✚ Develop ideas that will improve how teachers are supported to promote values and citizenship through human rights education in the classroom
- ✚ Develop effective partnerships between schools and third sector partners
- ✚ Measure attitudinal changes to HRE (children, staff, wider community)

Actions

[Project timeline: April 2012 to September 2013]

The partner organisations chose a small rural and large urban school in each jurisdiction to reflect the geographical and cultural diversity in both countries, and to allow project participants to see the differences in implementing human rights education in different environments and scales. Both urban schools are densely populated and ethnically and culturally diverse whilst both rural schools have small school rolls with little or no ethnic diversity. It was thought that these partnerships within and across the jurisdictions would have the added benefit of developing and strengthening respect for ethnic and cultural diversity across all four schools.

St Ultans National School, Dublin, Ireland	Urban school
Glensamole National School, Dublin, Ireland	Rural Catholic school
Lourdes Primary School, Glasgow, Scotland	Urban school
Luing Primary School, Luing Island, Scotland	Non-denominational school that serves the Isle of Luing

Each school developed a workplan, which ensured that the project worked with existing school activities and was manageable for the school staff. Two study visits took place. Participants first travelled to the schools in Ireland, then to the schools in Scotland.

*'It was very helpful to meet everyone at the start of the project as **communication and cooperation** is facilitated by connecting names and faces. There were **many good ideas generated** at the meeting in Ireland – use of amnesty resources, persona dolls, **human rights temperature**, sharing resources on yammer.'*

1. Study Visit to Ireland, 14 -15 November 2012

Scottish delegation:

Stephen Glen Lee, Luing Primary School
Jamie Maxwell, Lourdes Primary Glasgow
Elaine Watts, BEMIS

Irish schools and participants:

St Ultans Primary School, with Ene Morley, Anne Marie Reilly, Miriam Conway
Glensmole National Primary School, with Mary McColgan
Anne Molloy, Amnesty International Ireland



The group visited three classes at St. Ultans Primary School, where teachers demonstrated class lessons on human rights. This allowed the group to observe how children at different stages engaged with human rights issues. The school already had a Human Rights Week established and was keen to develop this throughout the school curriculum.

The group then visited Glensmole National School, a small rural school involved in a Comenius project looking at cultural diversity. The principal was keen to incorporate human rights into this, and also into the school's SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) programme.

The group discussed their plans for the project. They wanted to improve their own knowledge of human rights education and staff at Amnesty Ireland set up a Yammer account for everyone to be able to communicate and share ideas and documents. Everyone agreed that it would be important to measure changes during this project and it was decided that they would use the Human Rights Temperature Guide to begin this process.

"As the Irish teachers had already started looking at human rights, they had devised introductory lessons which were active and interesting for the pupils. I took note of those ideas. The enthusiasm for HRE within the school setting shown by Amnesty staff and teaching staff was inspiring."

Jamie Maxwell, Lourdes Primary Glasgow

2. Study Visit to Scotland, 29 - 30 April and 1 May 2013

The group visited Lourdes Primary School in Cardonald in Glasgow, which has a highly ethnically diverse population. They observed Jamie teaching a lesson on human rights with his primary 6 class. The children were engaged and focused on the lesson and project participants were struck by how well they were using the 'language of rights' and incorporating this language into everyday classroom (and playground) situations. This use of language was highlighted as being an important tool for improving children's interactions and behaviours. Staff from St Ultans reported that HRE and the subsequent literacy that results from it was influential in developing restorative practices.

The group also made a short visit to the West of Scotland Development Education Centre (WOSDEC) in Glasgow and sat in on an evaluation session with a group of teachers who had been developing Global Citizenship in their classrooms.



They travelled by train to Oban so that they could visit Luing Primary the next day. The group used this time to discuss the project and share ideas and plans.

At Luing Primary, Stephen discussed the Curriculum for Excellence and the importance of the Outdoor Classroom in relation to children's rights and values. The group saw the HRE work that the whole school had been involved in and were treated to a community lunch, prepared by parents and members of the island community. This was an excellent opportunity to meet the local community and discuss HRE with them. As Luing is an island school, the whole island community had indicated that they wanted to be involved in the project.

International HR instruments such as the UN World Programme for HRE and the UDHR and UNCRC have been considered during class lessons. Jamie has also referred to the Glasgow City Council Children's Charter which is based on the UNCRC. Both schools in Ireland were planning to include themed days/months to look at particular human rights issues and to build human rights into other projects such as Comenius or Confirmation.

Learning point

Following the visit to Luing Primary, the group met to discuss some major issues, related to child protection and domestic violence, which had arisen from all schools involved in the HRE project. They discussed how HRE needs to be handled sensitively, as children may choose to disclose if they feel certain rights may be being abused. Although schools can provide a safe platform for children and possibly parents to disclose such issues, the group discussed the need to ensure teachers were able to deal with this effectively. There were concerns raised about the need for HRE training for other professionals such as the Police/Garda and social workers.

Visit with Scottish Parliament

The group met with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Michael Russell, who, having heard about the project invited the group to meet with him in the Scottish Parliament to discuss HRE. The Minister was very interested in promoting HRE within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. He was also interested in arranging a meeting with the Irish Minister for Education to discuss this further. This was a really useful meeting and Mr Russell asked to be sent a copy of the final report and to be kept up to date with the development of the project.

Outcomes

Whole School Approach – the big picture

A whole school approach to HRE allows children to learn in an environment that values the contribution of each child and encourages active participation. It means that children are not just taught about respect but experience respect in the classroom and equally, are not just taught about responsibility but experience age appropriate responsibility in their everyday lives in school. HRE can often be understood as a one off activity or lesson – e.g. a human rights week, curriculum linked lesson plans. This results in it being compartmentalized into a subject or activity and its full potential not being realized. This is further likely in a context of education cutbacks and a crowded curriculum.

This study demonstrated the contribution a whole school approach to human rights can make to developing citizenship skills in the school. The study visits were a very effective way of school leadership seeing the 'big picture' of a whole school approach to human rights education and to allow discussions on how different approaches can work. Once the teachers and school leaders understood the big picture, they could then see how it could be integrated in their school. One example of this is with a school who integrated human rights education into their school code of behaviour:

“Human rights education, without doubt, helps with behaviour management in schools. We're teaching the children their human rights, and with rights come responsibility. ...Even at Junior level children are learning, we all have a right to play, we all have a right to a name – but with that comes responsibilities. So at break time we all have the right to play nicely to ensure that nobody else gets hurt. The same applies in the classroom, when we're talking about we all have the right to an education – when we are told to – put up our hands, or get on with our work, not distract others from their work, and what I find is that I might be teaching and if there is a disagreement or misbehaviour, the children themselves will come up and “yeah we all have the right to education and ‘you're not being responsible’ so they start to bring it up themselves.”

Impact on the children

The school that linked the language of human rights to their code of behaviour found this a very effective way of getting the children to realize the impact of the behaviour on others.

*“Children and teachers are more **mindful** of their **rights and responsibilities** which can be of great help in all aspects of school life and of particular help in the playground. We also find **children** are taking **leadership roles** in **conflict resolution**.”*

*“In terms of school policies it has informed and has been **integrated** into our school code of behaviour and children are more aware that **with their rights come responsibilities** and when they misbehave they are given an **opportunity to reflect** on how their behaviour has affected the rights of others.”*

The schools who participated also noticed positive changes in behaviour and how the children spoke about, and observed their place in, the world:

“My teacher observation shows the children have developed a wider vocabulary to discuss human rights and other issues.”

“It has increased the children’s respect for each other and their awareness of differences and similarities between cultures. It has decreased racial bullying and increased their sense of responsibility in terms of their school, their community and the wider world. It has also developed their sense of fairness and has opened their eyes to issues beyond their own community. It has instilled in them a sense of responsibility and motivated them to be proactive.”

Impact on the teachers



The project participants found it influenced their teaching practice and school environment. The study visits gave time for reflection on the relevance of human rights in the classroom and for pupils to see their role in society.

“I am more conscious of the importance of considering the work of the school in the light of human rights. The resource ‘Becoming a Human Rights Friendly School’ helped me to think in terms of “Us” rather than “Them”. Previously when I have explored human rights, I have focused on the troubles of citizens of other countries. This time, in teaching the topic, I reflected on the extent to which I as a teacher and school Principal uphold the human rights of others in my own environment.”

One advantage to integrating human rights education in primary schools is that teachers can see how it can link right across the subjects of the curriculum.

“I’ve seen so many benefits as a result of teaching human rights and global development education in the class. The best reward for me as a teacher is that the children will start to talk about human rights themselves outside of a lesson where we have learned about human rights. -- It might be science, it might be maths, it might be art, drama, history. They will start to make the connections. It incorporates into every single subject.”

Impact beyond the classroom

The feedback from project participants indicated that the increased awareness of human rights education was beginning to have a wider impact in the community.

“Since we began focusing on human rights education, the children have become very aware, as have their families. They are a lot more skilful, and a lot more knowledgeable of the whole area. So, it has become more than just a programme that we teach the children, and that’s always what we would aim for with anything we introduce, we would like it to become part of the culture of St Ultans, part of who we are. This is just the way we do things here in St Ultans now, and the children will be very quick to explain that to any visitors who come to visit -that when you come through the front door, you get a feeling of respect and that children are valued, and that everybody has a right. That in itself is a prime example of how human rights at the core of our vision and our mission.”

As a direct result of the project, two children made disclosures that had to be flagged with key agencies. The participants discussed the importance of making the links between HRE and other initiatives and obligations such as Child Protection and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scotland) and Children First Guidelines (Ireland).

They also discussed the need for human rights education training for all school staff, parents and key agency staff. One member of the group stated that some teachers may be afraid to approach HRE in case such a situation arose and they then discussed how best to prepare teachers for this. They also discussed the legal obligations that they have in terms of children’s rights to HRE and to child protection. Teachers found it very useful to share experiences in these issues and one school spoke about their use of restorative justice as a way of dealing with conflict in the school.

Scottish Learning Festival

The Scottish teachers involved were invited to present a seminar on the project at the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow in September 2013. This festival is organised by Education Scotland, the lead agency for promoting education in Scotland. Fifty people attended this seminar and the feedback was extremely positive. The head-teacher from Luing Primary School was asked to speak about his experiences of the project at a head-teachers meeting at Glasgow City Council and 25 people indicated that they were interested in getting information on continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities on human rights education at the University of Strathclyde.

Post-project outcomes, legacy and sustainability

All schools are still working on integrating human rights education across their schools in line with their school development plans.

In Ireland, four of the teachers in the participating schools are now peer educator teachers who provide CPD sessions on human rights education to schools in their local area.

The meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Michael Russell was an important opportunity to raise the profile of HRE in general. The minister indicated that he is very interested in learning about the impact of human rights education and mentioned the possibility of setting up a meeting with his counterpart in Ireland.

Conclusions and lessons learned

1. Engaging the school leadership/principals is crucial. Once they see the 'big picture' of what human rights education is about, school leaders can find ways of developing a whole school approach.
2. The overall aims of the project didn't change. However, it became clear that schools would need to be able to develop the project to suit the needs of their own setting. This is consistent with HRE and the need to contextualise human rights to local needs and situations.
3. Promoting the voice of the child in schools promotes citizenship skills

About the Partner organizations

Amnesty International Ireland

Amnesty International Ireland was established in Ireland in 1962. Our regular activities are to take action, mobilising people to put pressure on governments and others with influence to halt human rights abuses. We also educate people about their human rights. We support young people to set up Amnesty groups in schools and colleges where they can learn about and take action on human rights issues they care about. We also support youth participation and leadership skills through our Youth Action Team, a representative body of youth members who advise the organisation on youth participation. <http://amnesty.ie>

Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure Scotland (BEMIS)

BEMIS is the national umbrella body supporting the development of the Ethnic Minority third sector and the communities that this sector represents. BEMIS is committed to promoting inclusion, democratic active citizenship, recognition of diversity, human rights education, and wider representation. BEMIS also has an empowering and proactive role in maintaining and enhancing pathways to influence government policy at local, Scottish, and UK level. <http://bemis.org.uk/>