

HRE for young people

“Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential”

From the 1990 Jomtien Declaration

It is increasingly accepted that attention should be devoted to human rights education for young people, not only because it is important for society, but also because young people themselves appreciate and benefit from the type of activities that this work involves.

Contemporary societies and, in particular, the youth population are increasingly confronted by processes of social exclusion, of religious, ethnic and national differences, and by the disadvantages – and advantages – of increasing globalisation. Human rights education addresses these important issues and can help to make sense of the different perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and values of a modern multi-cultural society. It helps individuals to find ways of using such differences in positive ways. Perhaps more importantly, young people care about human rights, and in that sense, they provide the main resource for human rights education. Young people today are often criticised for being apathetic and uninterested in politics; but a number of studies appear to suggest that the opposite is actually the case.

Research carried out for the European Commission in 2001, for example, reminded us that young people do participate in society - not least, through associations and youth clubs. On average, within the countries of the European Union, more than 50% of young people either participate in, or belong to, an association of some type¹ (although there are significant differences from one country to another). As far as interest in political issues goes, a study of young people's attitudes to the European Union revealed that human rights issues rank among their top priorities. Beaten only by the issues of unemployment and crime, young people would most like their governments to address the protection of human rights, protection of the environment, the fight against racism, and inequality between the sexes

Experience from around the globe has shown the energy and commitment that young people will devote to such issues if they can themselves take joint responsibility for what they do and how they learn, and if the issues are presented in relevant and interesting ways.

As educators, we need to harness that energy. That they will take up these ideas and run with them is evident from the numerous existing programmes for young people - from the small scale activities carried out on a relatively ad hoc basis in individual youth clubs or schools, to the major international programmes conducted by the Council of Europe and other organisations.

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

Confucius