

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (85) 7

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN SCHOOLS

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 14 May 1985
at the 385th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage ;

Reaffirming the human rights undertakings embodied in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter ;

Having regard to the commitments to human rights education made by member states at international and European conferences in the last decade ;

Recalling :

- its own Resolution (78) 41 on "The teaching of human rights",
- its Declaration on "Intolerance: a threat to democracy" of 14 May 1981,
- its Recommendation No. R (83) 13 on "The role of the secondary school in preparing young people for life" ;

Noting Recommendation 963 (1983) of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on "Cultural and educational means of reducing violence" ;

Conscious of the need to reaffirm democratic values in the face of :

- intolerance, acts of violence and terrorism ;
- the re-emergence of the public expression of racist and xenophobic attitudes ;
- the disillusionment of many young people in Europe, who are affected by the economic recession and aware of the continuing poverty and inequality in the world ;

Believing, therefore, that, throughout their school career, all young people should learn about human rights as part of their preparation for life in a pluralistic democracy ;

Convinced that schools are communities which can, and should, be an example of respect for the dignity of the individual and for difference, for tolerance, and for equality of opportunity,

I. Recommends that the governments of member states, having regard to their national education systems and to the legislative basis for them :

a. encourage teaching and learning about human rights in schools in line with the suggestions contained in the appendix hereto ;

b. draw the attention of persons and bodies concerned with school education to the text of this recommendation ;

II. Instructs the Secretary General to transmit this recommendation to the governments of those states party to the European Cultural Convention which are not members of the Council of Europe.

Appendix to Recommendation No. R (85) 7

Suggestions for teaching and learning about human rights in schools

1. Human rights in the school curriculum

1.1. The understanding and experience of human rights is an important element of the preparation of all young people for life in a democratic and pluralistic society. It is part of social and political education, and it involves intercultural and international understanding.

1.2. Concepts associated with human rights can, and should, be acquired from an early stage. For example, the non-violent resolution of conflict and respect for other people can already be experienced within the life of a pre-school or primary class.

1.3. Opportunities to introduce young people to more abstract notions of human rights, such as those involving an understanding of philosophical, political and legal concepts, will occur in the secondary school, in particular in such subjects as history, geography, social studies, moral and religious education, language and literature, current affairs and economics.

1.4. Human rights inevitably involve the domain of politics. Teaching about human rights should, therefore, always have international agreements and covenants as a point of reference, and teachers should take care to avoid imposing their personal convictions on their pupils and involving them in ideological struggles.

2. Skills

The skills associated with understanding and supporting human rights include :

i. intellectual skills, in particular :

— skills associated with written and oral expression, including the ability to listen and discuss, and to defend one's opinions ;

— skills involving judgment, such as :

- the collection and examination of material from various sources, including the mass media, and the ability to analyse it and to arrive at fair and balanced conclusions ;

- the identification of bias, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination ;

ii. social skills, in particular :

— recognising and accepting differences ;

— establishing positive and non-oppressive personal relationships ;

— resolving conflict in a non-violent way ;

— taking responsibility ;

— participating in decisions ;

— understanding the use of the mechanisms for the protection of human rights at local, regional, European and world levels.

3. *Knowledge to be acquired in the study of human rights*

3.1. The study of human rights in schools will be approached in different ways according to the age and circumstances of the pupil and the particular situations of schools and education systems. Topics to be covered in learning about human rights could include :

- i. the main categories of human rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities ;
- ii. the various forms of injustice, inequality and discrimination, including sexism and racism ;
- iii. people, movements and key events, both successes and failures, in the historical and continuing struggle for human rights ;
- iv. the main international declarations and conventions on human rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

3.2. The emphasis in teaching and learning about human rights should be positive. Pupils may be led to feelings of powerlessness and discouragement when confronted with many examples of violation and negations of human rights. Instances of progress and success should be used.

3.3. The study of human rights in schools should lead to an understanding of, and sympathy for, the concepts of justice, equality, freedom, peace, dignity, rights and democracy. Such understanding should be both cognitive and based on experience and feelings. Schools should, thus, provide opportunities for pupils to experience affective involvement in human rights and to express their feelings through drama, art, music, creative writing and audiovisual media.

4. *The climate of the school*

4.1. Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice. An appropriate climate is, therefore, an essential complement to effective learning about human rights.

4.2. Schools should encourage participation in their activities by parents and other members of the community. It may well be appropriate for schools to work with non-governmental organisations which can provide information, case-studies and first-hand experience of successful campaigns for human rights and dignity.

4.3. Schools and teachers should attempt to be positive towards all their pupils, and recognise that all of their achievements are important—whether they be academic, artistic, musical, sporting or practical.

5. *Teacher training*

5.1. The initial training of teachers should prepare them for their future contribution to teaching about human rights in their schools. For example, future teachers should :

- i. be encouraged to take an interest in national and world affairs ;
- ii. have the chance of studying or working in a foreign country or a different environment ;
- iii. be taught to identify and combat all forms of discrimination in schools and society and be encouraged to confront and overcome their own prejudices.

5.2. Future and practising teachers should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with :

- i. the main international declarations and conventions on human rights ;
- ii. the working and achievements of the international organisations which deal with the protection and promotion of human rights, for example through visits and study tours.

5.3. All teachers need, and should be given the opportunity, to update their knowledge and to learn new methods through in-service training. This could include the study of good practice in teaching about human rights, as well as the development of appropriate methods and materials.

6. *International Human Rights Day*

Schools and teacher training establishments should be encouraged to observe International Human Rights Day (10 December).