



## ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

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English only

### Human Rights Education – Samarkand Forum Contribution of Nika Bakhsoliani

It's my pleasure to be present here, my pleasure, because out of all, ranting about human rights education is one of my favourites. And I rant a lot. I'm honoured to represent Council of Europe here, this is one of the organisations that stands out in developing human rights education as a concept and as a praxis, alongside the UN. I come from Human Rights Education Youth Network – an international organisation bringing together professionals working on human rights education. But to better illustrate my passion with this subject, I'll maybe tell you my story. I actually was an A-student in a medical school, on my way to become a doctor, but because one event I was derailed from my plans in medicine. And I think, to explain the process of this “derailing” is a good chance to set the background for my speech – it really tells us why people are passionate about this subject. This was in 2013, May 17 when queer activists got violently beat up by a mob organised by the orthodox church, and the authorities did nothing to protect the activists, or to prosecute the culprits. Shocked, disappointed, anxious - this is when I decided, I have to do something, and that's when I started the activist and volunteer page of my life story, and I figured out, education is the way to deal with this injustice. And later on, I found out that human rights education is the best way.

Human rights education itself has many names, it's a many-faced god - global education, intercultural, anti-racist, development, environmental, values-based, democratic citizenship, personal education, civic education, peace education – got very popular several decades ago, political education or formation – popular in France and Germany, critical pedagogy – by *Paolo Freire*, Council of Europe has published an interesting model on competencies of democratic culture, Yael O'HANA recently explained what Critical Youth Citizenship Education is and what's youth work has to deal with it.

I think these all are largely based on the same idea, and this idea is learning about a social contract. In between the changes of the society, within this dialectics, a change brings a new order, which is enshrined within a social contract, it tells us how people live together, shown within the laws and the rights on the paper, and unwritten morale, which works through culture or values, like the values that underpin human rights – human dignity, equality, justice, fairness, universalism etc.

Learning this social contact is the task for human rights and human rights education – and we often get this tension, that learning about human rights is not enough, learning about the documents, about laws and the values, is only the first step, human rights create a framework to work, while another important step is to understand how this social contract works or doesn't work, and what's more – what to do if it doesn't work.

Before we start to discuss what actually is human rights education about, I'd like to recall a rightful dichotomy in human rights-based approach. There are rights-holders, those should enjoy human rights, which are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and there are those who bear duty – those who have a responsibility and the obligation that the rights-holders enjoy human rights. Normally, we imagine governments and authorities as duty bearers, but I'd like to go further and generalize it as power-holders. I say, primarily it's the governments, but where necessary also other systems and organisations as well, including businesses and corporations. These entities have the responsibility that human rights are fulfilled. In conclusion, I would say human rights education is very

much about you, society, powerholders and about ever-changing relationships between them. It already sounds like a sweet-sweet, very important and much-needed concept that should be integrated into the educational curricula.

But the problem is, that it's frequent when people think of human rights education as an immediate response to crisis, a remedy that can heal a social trauma, which is caused when social contract doesn't work. Whereas, human rights education is a good tool to identify faults, injustices and pathologies, and act against these **on time**, without having to face the crises – like the murder of George Floyd. But mainstreaming human rights education, making it accessible for everyone, it's simply, or not simply, not happening! Unfortunately, human rights education is not high on the agenda of politicians, governments, or even the institutions who are responsible for education. In fact, in many countries, in reality, the praxis of education is quite an opposite – a praxis, which can be best described as pouring water into a vessel – what Paolo Freire calls a “Banking system”. The very system that encourages assimilation of young people into an existing order and structure – in other words, it's a tool for complicity.

Now human rights education is an instrument of change, through what we learn what are human rights, human rights documents, instruments, the values that underpin them. In addition, human rights education should enable us to critically reflect and view the existing structures, and identify the barriers and challenges for fulfilments of the rights of ours and others. What's more human rights education should tell us how to act, how to act against injustice, oppression, and violence. And create new structures, with more equal opportunity with more just system, more democratic etc.

Learning is never neutral, it either reinforces the status quo, or it challenges it. Human Rights Education is the one that challenges the status quo. So now you tell, me why human rights education is not on the agenda of power-holders.

Learning is a political act.

Instead of trying to bully young people to remain in classrooms isolated from the community and structured to prepare them to become cogs in the existing economic system, we need to recognize that the reason why so many young people drop out from inner-city schools is because they are voting with their feet against an educational system that sorts, tracks, tests and rejects or certifies them like products of a factory because it was created for the age of industrialisation. They are crying out for another kind of education that gives them opportunities to exercise their creative energies because it values them as whole human beings.

Grace Lee Boggs - The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the 21st Century (2012, p. 49)

*The opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.*