

Human Rights and Democracy Education in Schools: From Curriculum to the “Effective Schools” Approach

Name of organization:
Albanian Ministry of Education and Science

First phase “Intercultural and Human Rights Education in Albania” (2001-2003)

Second phase “Promoting Quality Education for All Human Rights and Democracy Education in Albania” (2005-June 2008)

First phase:

1. *UNESCO HR set* of books translated and printed (3000 copies).
2. “*Human Rights*” for teacher trainers (1500 copies).
3. “*Human Rights Glossary*” English Albanian/Albanian English (1000 copies).
4. “*Humans Rights - A World to be Discovered*” for elementary school teachers (3000 copies); cross subjects integrated with HR activities.
5. “*Human Rights - A World to be Discovered*” for primary school teachers; cross subjects integrated with HR activities (3000 copies).
6. “*Human Rights Education – Situation Analysis*” (500 copies).

Second phase:

7. “*Human Rights and Democracy in Action*” for primary school teachers (2800 copies). Distributed and used in approximately 1800 primary schools of the 37 school districts of Albania.
8. “*Human Rights and Democracy in Action*” for elementary school teachers (3000 copies). Being distributed to approximately 1500 elementary schools in the 37 districts.
9. “*Commentary of the UDHR*” for high school teachers (1000 copies). Distributed to approximately 350 schools in the 37 districts.
10. “*The HRE & D Effective Schools’ Findings*”. Scheduled for publication and distribution to all educational institutions in Albania (July 2008).

Research on “Effective Schools” Component

The hypothesis: A better school climate with regard to respect for human rights and democratic practices adds to improved school performance at all levels.

Methodology: A group of specialists developed the evaluation instruments. These instruments were applied in four elementary schools. The findings were analyzed and recommendations were provided for action/intervention in two pilot schools during the 2007–2008 academic year. Upon the completion of these activities, a second analysis was conducted using the same instruments (90%) and the same sampling methodology.

The findings of the two analyses were compared in order to:

1. Study the developments within each of the four schools over the research period.

2. Study the differences between the respective pilot and test schools (the two pairs).
3. Identify specific developments in each case.
4. Make the relevant correlations to gain insight as to the causes of each specific development.
5. Reveal how and to what extent intervention in the area of human rights and democracy has impacted these developments.
6. Formulate recommendations.

The Profile of the schools selected: four schools were identified by the educational directorate for the implementation of the research project: two pilot schools and two test schools.

Location: the schools were located in Tirana for easy management of the research. Demographically, the schools in Tirana are highly heterogeneous and representative at a national scale. In addition, Tirana shelters 1/3 of Albania's entire population. Two schools (one pilot and one test school of generally the same size) are centrally located in Tirana; the other two are located in the outskirts of the capital.

The size of the schools: The project specialists were particular that the schools be representative in terms of the size of the school: the number of the students and teachers. Two central schools are considered as large having around 1000 students and the two remote ones are considered to be among the small ones with around 600 students.

The evaluation instruments: Made up of representatives of the above institutions under the guidance of the experts of the Education Evaluation Agency, the working group designed the instruments to be used: questionnaires to be completed in the schools by teachers, students and parents (qualitative aspect); and tests in physics and Albanian language and literature in the 7th grade (quantitative aspect).

The administration of the evaluation process: Teachers and school principals were instructed as to the goal of the activity and how the questionnaires and tests would be administered to ensure the objectivity and seriousness of the process. They were highly cooperative. This process was conducted in May – June 2007.

Analysis of the findings: The specialists of the Education Evaluation Agency prepared the initial report that was further analyzed by the education experts who made specific recommendations. Their implementation included concrete activities and mini-projects for students and parents and teachers such as:

1. Teacher training in four main areas :
 - a. Interactive/democratic methodologies
 - b. Extracurricular activities
 - c. Democratic climate/ communication among teachers, support staff, administrators, and school executives

- d. Professional rights and obligations (education law and other related legal documents regulating the school life)
2. Parents
 - a. Parenting classes
 - b. Meetings with the psychologist: How to better understand my child?
 - c. Meeting with the doctors to make the school more welcoming and useful to parents
3. Students
 - a. The role, mission and impact of effective student government
 - b. Concrete activities initiated by students under the principles of student government

4. Joint activities

a. Mini-projects:

When the above activities were completed, teachers were asked to design mini-projects that would include as many members of the school community as possible. Seven mini-projects were implemented in each pilot school. The guiding motto being “the promotion of human rights and democratic climate for a better school performance”, the mini-projects targeted neglected students, potential dropouts and gifted students who were not paid due attention because of large class size (averaging 45 per class). These target groups were offered mini-projects like courses in mathematics, physics, foreign language (presented separately to weak and gifted students), reading skills for the primary level, drawing, music, sports, etc.

Other mini-projects addressed the issue of tolerance and co living, bearing in mind the heterogeneity of students and teaching staff. The mini-project “Getting to know my birthplace and my tradition” aimed at developing student pride in their own origin and better understanding of the background and characteristics of others. Folk costumes, songs, dances, delicious sweets etc. were effective strategies, impressing not only students but also their parents and teachers.

Another mini-project addressed the “know how” of human rights.

Competitions within the classes as well as among classes and levels were participatory and informative. Drawing their subject matter from social concerns of everyday life, students dramatized themes related to human rights and democracy.

5. *The process in the school.* What was achieved in the schools is clearly important, but the *process* that guided its success is even more important. In every step/action the emphasis was put on the democratic process itself. Teachers and students held lengthy discussions before making any decision, undertaking any activity or voting for the best painting, song, class senator, team,

etc. The process of continual instruction and consultation guided them to make right judgments and decisions as they established common rules and criteria. This was applied even when it came to buying school equipment. They determined what was missing and what was really needed to raise the quality of the educational process (e.g. they chose lap top computers, overhead projectors, cameras, printers, etc).

The process itself guarantees the sustainability of the project in the future.

The results of the research project: The results of the research project were made public at a National Conference held on July 14th 2008 and will be published for replication throughout the country.