

## Conceptual Framework for Teaching Human Rights

*Name of organization:*  
**Centre for Civic Education,  
Russian Academy for Upgrading Professional Standards and the Retraining of Educators**

### **ON TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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One of the main considerations in modernizing education is renewal of its contents. Educational content should extend the selection of key competences in intellectual, civil and legal, communication, information and similar spheres. Education experts in many countries consider that it is no longer sufficient to expect only mastery of a body of knowledge. Education should develop the ability to live and work responsibly and harmoniously in society. A component of modernizing educational content is to deepen understanding of human rights and basic freedoms.

Teaching about human rights is a component of civil education. It is necessary to raise the level of teaching about human rights and about the rights of children by implementing the following: to help people see the value and social role of human rights; to prepare young people to live in a democratic state, respect the rights of others and resolve arguments and disputes by legal means. This facilitates the development of citizenship, patriotism and respect for the national and religious traditions of others as well as the moral, aesthetic and legal cultures of those being taught.

Today many social processes and events are connected with human rights. They are studied from the widest and most varied positions such as the fundamental meaning of government, the principles of rebuilding the legal system, the conduct of economic and cultural politics, the battle against ecological threats and criminal activity. The resolution of internal, international and global tasks rests on human rights. Human rights reveal their presence in every sphere of human life-- political, legal, ethical, moral, spiritual, psychological, social, ecological and educational.

It is a subject that goes far beyond the scope of courses on rights studied in teaching institutions. Human rights embody the ideals of respect for individuality and practical humanism.

The basic aim in teaching human rights is to recognize and develop the freedom that is innate to the individual: individual freedom that recognizes its own worth and the worth of others, is characterized by stable moral qualities and the ability to live a fruitful life and by agreement in a multicultural and multinational world. This aim is realized in the process of continuous education of children in accordance with their developing characteristics. At various stages in education the teaching material differs in content (depth, degree of concreteness, level of generalization, etc), but, at the same time, it retains its overarching challenge to develop the following:

- The ability for co-operation and agreement between individual and group values, using the ability to resolve disputes without force;
- An understanding of the value of freedom as a condition for human self-realization and its link with responsibility and self-regulated behavior;
- The feeling of individual worth based on a high morality and respect for the rights and worth of people of other nationalities, races and religious beliefs;
- An understanding of the variety, richness and uniqueness of the cultures of peoples of the world;
- An understanding of personal and civil responsibility in conserving the environment in one's own country and on a global scale.

The formal teaching of human rights fulfills important and educational functions:

- Philosophical/cultural, directed at forming a consciousness of the planet, widening perspectives, overcoming narrow national thinking and prejudices and stereotypes with regard to other peoples and cultures;
- Educational/legal, the idea of which is elevation of the legal culture of the participants by broadening the knowledge of national and international standards, of the elements of human rights and legal institutions, and the ability to use this knowledge creatively for solving problems. Recognition of basic human rights and elementary legal standards as the basis for developing awareness of rights in schoolchildren;
- Developmental/formative, oriented on a deep acceptance and understanding of human rights, perceptions and evaluations; demands individual relationships and transformation of them into sound convictions and solid skills in the acceptance of human behavior;
- Psychological, which in the process of adoption of human rights arouses and refines the interest in oneself, one's inner world, a recognition of self, and the system of needs, interests and orientations which form the psychological basis of self-development and self-improvement;
- Corrective, which is directed towards deviant behavior (aggressiveness, force, intolerance, cruelty) and its remediation by sociological and educational means.

Human rights is a new teaching area at the juncture of all school disciplines: history, social studies, citizenship, social psychology, literature, the arts and natural sciences. An interdisciplinary approach to curriculum planning allows inclusion of human rights issues in traditional disciplines and systemic courses.

The programs of history and social science, for instance, allow students to study the philosophy of human rights. In studying the social history of one's motherland and world social history students acquire an understanding of human development and the development of society, about the status of the individual within the scope of civilization, about the problems of freedom and responsibility, citizenship, reasons for wars and conflicts, and means of averting them.

A literature course gives additional opportunities for consolidating the important concepts of "morality", "right", "legality", "responsibility", "dignity", "honor". Attention is drawn to universal questions of ethics and philosophy: good and evil, life and death, different generations, man and God, man and nature, man and nation, honor and debt, conscience, moral choice.

In studying a foreign language, students obtain general information about the country of the language they are studying and about the nation's culture and its effect on world culture. This leads to a deeper understanding of other peoples, facilitates mutual understanding between societies, develops tolerance and overcomes xenophobia. In the same way students gain insight into the principles of intercultural education.

The subjects in natural science (biology, geography, health studies, ecology) emphasize the natural and economic aspect of human rights and the study of the laws of nature, ignorance of which can bring disastrous consequences. Students develop a feeling of responsibility for the world and conservation of the environment both locally and on a global scale. Natural science subjects become a nexus which helps students to recognize the interdependence of man, nature and society as a whole.

Schools can accommodate the specific content of human rights in the following formats:

- Objective, where students elect "Human Rights" courses in junior and secondary school: one hour in grades 9,10,11 within the framework of a regional and individual school's teaching plan;
- Quasi objective, where the basic content of human rights is included in a range of academic disciplines – humanities (history, social science, literature, foreign languages) and natural sciences (physical and economic geography, biology, zoology, etc.)

Teaching human rights in 2007-8 in general education institutions is recommended in conditions of profile teaching within the framework of humanitarian or social economic profiles. For this the following ways of teaching are possible: in the framework of a regional (national-regional) component of a state educational standard of general education; in the framework of a component of an educational institution; as an optional course within the framework of profile teaching. Apart from that the study of human rights can be reflected in different forms of extracurricular, cognitive and developmental activities, within the framework of individual teaching plans of the participants.

Teaching human rights in a general education school includes three stages. At the first stage (primary education) basic moral values and standards of human behavior are introduced. Children form an understanding of the significance of human dignity and an understanding of their own individuality and the dignity of others. Children learn respect for others, tolerance, the feeling of solidarity, a tendency towards co-operation, and the ability to solve conflicts without force.

The second stage (basic school) formulates a system of values and the principles of human behavior; younger children acquire knowledge and abilities for future independent life in society. At this stage of the teaching of human rights, respect towards the law and the rights of other people is promoted. There is an enrichment of students' knowledge of the history of the motherland and a perception of legal standards.

At the third stage (full middle school), knowledge is broadened about the processes occurring in different spheres of society about the rights of people. A perception forms around the complex interconnection among philosophical, cultural, political, legal and socio-economic bases, and civil positions of the human and socio-political orientations are determined. The task for this stage consists of ensuring that, in the process of social activity, students refine the readiness and ability to defend their rights and the rights of other people, create for themselves standards of activity and behavior, and build individual and collective activity.

The practice of human rights education is most effective when the latest educational technology is widely used. Interactive methods facilitate the formation of abilities and skills. Human rights learning often leads to student projects and work outside of the classroom. The content of extracurricular activity should ensure the moral motivation to acquire the "spirit" of human rights. This content should include activities that extend school self-governance such as participation in school councils and the formation of peer counselors. The following forms of extracurricular activity have great significance for the development of a civic mentality: work in a microregion, organization of clubs, organization of trips to other towns and cities, to other republics of the CIS, to foreign countries, organizing friendship festivals, UN weeks, etc.

One of the indispensable conditions of teaching human rights is rebuilding the whole system of education on a democratic basis, introducing democratic relationships into the very fabric of school life. In other words, creating in school **a democratic way of life**.

The fundamental elements of the democratic way include:

- The idea of the priority of the individual which penetrates the whole school process, atmosphere and organization;
- Democratization of school management, strengthening its educational potential, providing wide participation of members of the school community in school management, and creating the climate for broad participation by all those interested in the educational process;
- Conversion of the school into a community, open to the outside world as well as to participants within the education process;
- Wide participation in the resolution of school, local and social problems;
- Creation in school of the means of mutual respect, constructive discussion, dialogue and consensus, openness to the interests of all participants in school life, including parents and community;
- Creation in school of a legal space (a system of formal and informal standards and traditions), the development of school co-management, modeling in school of democratic principles;
- Creation in school of means of self improvement.

The basis of human rights education lies in the participation of the individual in decisions that impact the social group. It suggests a combination of development of skills of social practice with a thorough mastery of the bases of the sciences. One of the intensive methods of social practice is social project work. The basic aim of social project work is to create conditions that help participants develop their own point of view on problems being discussed. Social project work constitutes an essential sphere of application of civic competences.

In contrast with lessons, here there is no limitation in the time or the place for applying effort. Here living practice is possible that can lead to socially-significant results. Social projects give participants the possibility of connecting the understanding they have acquired in lessons first with real life in which they themselves are included, as well as their friends, family and teacher and secondly, with social and political events taking place in a microregion, town, larger area, or even an entire country. Through projects, participants use their knowledge and communicate and co-operate with one another. Among the most successful social projects are "I am a citizen of Russia" and "Citizen's Forum".

***The system of evaluating educational achievements*** is especially important in human rights education. A competent organization of assessment for the educational process is a complicated task. This task becomes even more complicated when civic competence is evaluated, since the object of assessment is an individual's ability to take part in decisions relating to matters of local society, country and humanity as a whole. Assessment in the field of human rights represents an aggregate of knowledge, abilities and skills in thinking and action and of valuable landmarks. The key component in this triad is ability (skills), inasmuch as the citizen appears as a social player, able to accomplish general tasks. The knowledge and valuable landmarks manifest themselves only in the action. In order to check whether a student has a particular competence, the teacher should see how he or she performs socially significant tasks. In this way, in the teaching of human rights assessment is the most important of the abilities and skills.

The most adequate method of assessment of teaching human rights, aside from traditional oral and written tests, is the method of sociological research: interviewing, self-assessment, observation of the student's behavior in an educational situation and in real life. The approaches to assessment can be to use the "pass-fail" system or verbal encouragement. In assessing the subject "Human Rights" it is recommended to use the technology "portfolio".

To assess the attainments of participants in teaching human rights, the following criteria are proposed: objectivity, adequacy, relevance, integratability, openness, accessibility.

"Objectivity" is achieved by careful development of concrete criteria of the knowledge and abilities and socially-active accomplishments of the participants.

"Adequacy" implies accuracy of the assessment instrument. In order to use this criterion, it is necessary to answer the question: "What exercise or task can adequately show that students have achieved the expected aims and have acquired the necessary knowledge, abilities and values?"

"Relevance" suggests a choice of the most important or the expected results (aims) of the course. In order to use this criterion it is necessary to answer the question: "Which expected results are so important that assessing them is worthwhile? Is this knowledge and are these abilities and values useful and applicable in real life and in the social practice of the citizen?"

"Integratability" means that ongoing assessment, in the form of active feedback, is included in the actual teaching process.

"Openness" requires that the criteria for assessment are known to the participants in advance. The participants should know what will be assessed and how so that they can take part in the development of assessment criteria.

"Accessibility" suggests that the assessment forms are simple and convenient to use.