Empathy and Human Rights. A stimulus for innovative teacher education?

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Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

- **Human Dignity:** Recognition of the **inherent dignity** and of the **equal and inalienable rights** of all members of the human family...

  ...how often do we ask if human beings feel themselves included into the human family? Could you think about examples that might not? What can each of us do about it?

  ...is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world

  ...what about our freedom, justice and peace WITH in our own world?
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

- **Fundamental Human Freedoms (F.D. Roosevelt 1941):**

  freedom of speech and expression  
  everywhere in the world. ?

  freedom of every person to worship God in his own way  
  everywhere in the world. ?

  freedom from want - which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants  
  everywhere in the world. ?

  freedom from fear - which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor  
  anywhere in the world. ?
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

First generation human rights are freedoms and protection rights.

The second generation are positive participation rights, like they are e. g. taken over by states as national objectives into their constitutions.

The third generation can be described as standards stipulated in the recent debate, e. g. the right of protection against extreme poverty or the right of development, which, after all, require an even higher degree of redistribution or transfer of resources that can only be imposed by the states community (...)

a) The human rights catalog is being extended from the classic freedoms and protection rights to political, economic, social and cultural participation rights, up to being entitled to claiming (financial) assistance and support.

b) The “holder” of rights remains the individual human being, but more and more rights are stipulated for groups.
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

- Nearly 25 years ago, the world made a promise to children: that we would do everything in our power to protect and promote their rights to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential.

- (...) Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, Considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity...

How strong is this kind of spirit in our classrooms at school?
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

Article 29

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
Short introduction into basic ideas of Human Rights, Children’s rights and Human Rights Education

Everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms and should have access to human rights education and training. (UN-Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011)

**Human rights education and training encompasses:**

- (a) **Education about human rights**, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;

- (b) **Education through human rights**, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;

- (c) **Education for human rights**, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.
The gift of Empathy
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Basic emotions can be perceived and expressed regardless of a person’s cultural background and origin (Paul Ekman 1999).
The gift of Empathy

1. What is empathy I?
2. What is empathy II?
The gift of Empathy

Plüss 2010 summarizes:

- Emotional Response und Connection
- Care
- Perspective- and Role-taking
The gift of Empathy

Theoretical approaches on the development of empathy (Bischof-Köhler 2011)

Empathy as a phenomenon means directly experiencing someone else’s emotions or intentions and thus understanding them.

In spite of this “participation” the other person’s emotions or intentions remain private to this person.
The gift of Empathy

Basic processes of showing empathy are:

- perceiving another person’s expressions
- being aware of another person’s situation

With increasing experience (age), empathy can also be triggered by simply hearing about someone else’s expressions and situation.
The gift of Empathy

What happens if, in a certain situation, I am unable to perceive empathy?
The gift of Empathy

The importance of understanding the situation:

- In order to be able to identify another person’s situation, the observer needs to understand what happens.

- Empathetic perception does not require already having made experience with the given situation.
The gift of Empathy

Difficulties regarding the empathetic identification:

- if a person reacts different from the empathetic observer, thus not adequately showing the other person’s empathetic reaction, e.g. the other’s emotions.
Theoretical reflection on the meaning of Innovation for the educational context

- Usually the different groups of actors in society claim innovations in the school system and the design of learning offers.
- Usually the discussion is driven by the formulation of future needs and requirements as they are seen from the different perspectives and the present situation.
- For children innovation in learning is daily experience and behavior. Their whole development and learning is focused on growth.
- Children are already innovative learners!
- So the discussion on innovation is a discussion about which offers and contributions the community suggests to make to their children in line with their needs and visions.
- The importance is to agree on a fundamental base (standard) between the different groups of actors. It defines what a society decides to offer the young generation as general standard for learning.
- So if we talk about innovation in learning, it is connected with what we as a society want to offer the children. It is about the definition of the general educational standard children can start from..
Theoretical reflection on the meaning of Innovation for the educational context

- This is a fundamental issue and a process of negotiation between the different actors in society, mostly between the rather conservative and the rather progressive groups of visionaries.
- Each innovation and change needs to contain parts of conservative values and traditions as a good and stable base. Such a base offers e.g. Human Values.
- Each innovation process in education needs to reflect on basic values and find a connection to the innovative ideas.
- The interests of the society and the best interest of the individual child must be in balance
- Progress has to serve the process as a whole
Model for pedagogical innovation adapted from Müller-Using 2010, p 37
The design of innovative learning settings and the search for a general idea behind it

- Participation and integration of the learner's point of view
- Learning with all senses to discover and develop one's own potential
- Acceptance of and respect for the individual learning approaches and knowledge access, strengths and weaknesses
- Social group behavior
- Perceptive, self-reflecting, self-confident and empathetic teachers (not only servants to the child and to the innovation process)
- Teachers with knowledge and experience in understanding children's ways of thinking and associative learning.
- Teachers who are experienced in „reading“ children's views.
1. Divergent thinking and acting
2. General knowledge and basis thinking skills
3. Specific knowledge and specific skills
4. Focusing effort and willingness
5. Motive and motivation
6. Openness and ambiguity

A: individual dimension
B: group or close-environmental dimension
C: social or historical or global dimension

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Conclusion

- Innovative learning turns out to happen if children as well as teachers create the learning together.
- The respect and empathy towards individual contributions to the learning process opens up for creativity and innovation. 
  e.g. Sustained shared thinking
- Methods and learning settings follow the idea of learning together.
- Balance between „best interest of the child“ and „interests of the community“
- Balance between innovation, conservation and connection to current standards.
- Human Rights and duties give innovative ideas a common base to be stable and fruitfull!
Discussion

- Is Human Rights Education a standard in the teacher training of your country?

- How can empathy be trained and developed in academic teacher training? Or is it a talent that just has to exist before?
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