

**HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION
AND
SERVICE LEARNING

AT
GERMANTOWN ACADEMY**

It is so easy to become cynical about our ability to change systems, about working for peace and justice, about rights flouted in so many places throughout the world. Yet our young people need not become tainted with that cynicism. They have the energy, the idealism, the courage to take the risks which working for human rights so often demands.
Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Secretary General, The Commonwealth from the Stoke Rochford Declaration, 1996

Annabel Smith, November 2006

I. The Case for Human Rights Education and Service Learning

Why?

The basic idea of **Human Rights** lies in a recognition of the need to protect and affirm the dignity of all people equally. It has thus become the language for expressing both legal entitlement and shared values.

The international community has been pressing for **Human Rights Education** in all schools since **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights** first called for a global commitment to human rights education in 1948.

Despite the passage of nearly 60 years, there is still much work to be done before ‘the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (article 26 of the UDHR) become explicit goals of national education systems anywhere in the world. Ironically, however, most progress has been made in emerging democracies and post-conflict situations, leaving highly developed nations in the North lagging far behind.

General Comment no 1 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child states that,

The education to which each child has a right is one designed to provide the child with life skills, to strengthen the child’s capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to promote a culture which is infused by appropriate human rights values (para. 2)..such education is for every child an indispensable tool for her or his efforts to achieve in the course of his or her life a balanced, human rights-friendly response to the challenges that accompany a period of fundamental change driven by globalisation, new technologies and related phenomena. (para 3.)

To that end, human rights education ‘encompasses i) **knowledge and skills** ii) **values, attitudes and behaviours** and iii) **action**.’¹ Because action is integral to this vision, **service learning** presents an ideal model for introducing it into schools. This balances the more familiar model of community service with classroom time to learn about the issues raised.

Human rights education and service learning provide a route to the essential issues that lie at the heart of all schools. By combining academic and experiential learning, they embrace individuals of all backgrounds and capabilities, and provide shared work for the whole community. In this way they are able to address diversity, prejudice, discrimination, injustice and a full range of the moral, ethical and values-related issues that all students will encounter, and do so in the tradition of practical, participatory

¹ See for example the definition provided by the World Programme for Human Rights Education, Plan of Action for the First Phase (2005 – 2007) Note by the Secretary General.

learning. They carry the integrity of dealing with reality, focussing on action and solutions to counter the overwhelming feelings of helplessness many young people feel when confronted with the realities they see daily in their lives, on the internet and on television. Human rights education and service learning send the clear message that informed active citizens are vital to a fully functioning democracy. They allow and encourage young people to be their best selves.

Human rights education and service learning provide opportunities for students to distinguish themselves in the **college admissions process**. The best universities will look beyond good grades for indicators of maturity and thoughtfulness. The opportunity to develop interests beyond the commonplace and spend time on individual research projects should prove to be a particularly valuable element in this process.

Why now?

The internet and easier global communications have made the potential of human rights education infinitely richer and easier to achieve. At the same time, they have exposed students to stark worlds of images and information with few tools to make sense of them. The recent Make Poverty History and One Campaigns are perfect examples of how it is being left to rock stars and celebrities to inform young people about issues of global economics, politics and social justice.

- i) The framework of international law and educational standards developed since 1948 provides the structure for programmes of human rights education that have almost unlimited scope. There is a **wealth of available resources** to support learning about human rights, with contributions from individuals and groups representing the highest levels of global scholarship and expertise. However this high quality material needs to be separated from the misleading, incomplete and incorrect information which is regrettably also prevalent in students' lives.
- ii) Schools present the ideal opportunity for learning about human rights. The academic principles on which human rights education is built are the same as those that underpin mainstream educational theory. There is the same hierarchy of learning that suggests that while traditional classroom teaching is a necessary medium for the transmission of factual information and skills, it is

with greater participation and engagement that the truly **transformative power of education** can be seen. Above all, it comes when young people are trusted to go out into and beyond their communities to learn from those whose experience has made them experts. In these circumstances it is vital that students work in a safe and structured environment, and that teachers are available to provide ongoing support and information.

- iii) The scope and range of materials available about human rights are such that even the most able student can be stretched and challenged. Resources include first hand accounts, individual stories and video and audio evidence, all of which require the development of skills such as empathy and informed imagination. In addition, students will also be working with statistical data, scientific papers, international agency and NGO reports, journalism, witness testimonies and legal cases. These will require and develop **high-level critical thinking and analytical skills**, and an appreciation of the need for **evaluation, corroboration, argument, negotiation and problem-solving**. They form the ideal substance for **discussion, debate and individual research**.
- iv) The issues involved in human rights education are both **global and local**. They require students to engage with situations and individuals far beyond their own experience. This results in a far deeper and broader appreciation of life both inside and outside their home town or country. It also offers great opportunities for study of materials in a target language, for study of maps and atlases, and for exposure to wildly different cultures through music, art and literature.
- v) Service learning represents the ideal fusion of academic and experiential learning. It combines the development of high-level skills with the practical, participatory engagement long advocated by great educationalists such as John Dewey and Kurt Hahn. It allows students to engage and to act, to

develop team-building and leadership skills, to focus on solutions, policy and action. In addition, it allows them to share in the life of their own and more distant communities, and provides a much **richer context for their own life decisions.**

- vi) Human rights education and service learning carry the potential to **draw school communities together through a shared sense of purpose.** By addressing issues together, an environment is created in which school issues of diversity, racism, bullying or discrimination can be more constructively addressed. Because of the emphasis on **action, solutions and leadership,** there is likely to be a positive impact on discipline and integration.

- vii) Research suggests that students are already aware of and interested in issues such as poverty, human rights and HIV-AIDS, yet they have very little understanding of them.ⁱ As teachers know, young people have a strong sense of **compassion and injustice,** and many are already engaged in volunteering and social activism. It is clear that those who have access to opportunities to learn and engage with human rights issues frequently become passionate **advocates for change.**ⁱⁱ

Leading human rights educator Felisa Tibbits argues that:

“Educating young people about the conditions for democracy and the importance of protecting human rights is one of the most valuable investments that a society can make in its future. Schooling is a natural mechanism for forwarding the values and knowledge necessary for participating in and forwarding democracy and civil society. Human rights education specifically raises consciousness about the meaning of human rights. Human rights education promotes a culture of respect, acceptance, care and justice in classrooms themselves. People also learn to participate in the political processes that affect their lives, and the ways in which laws can be made more just and effective.”²

² TIBBITTS, F, 1995, *Planning for the Future: Human Rights in Schools* in SWENNENHUIS, R. (ed.) *Handbook for Helsinki Committees: A Guide in Monitoring and Promoting Human Rights, and NGO Management.* Vienna: International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.

II. Human Rights Education and Service Learning at Germantown Academy

The GA Mission Statement:

Germantown Academy, a coeducational college preparatory school, offers strong academic and extracurricular programs that enable students to acquire the knowledge, confidence and judgment needed to become good citizens and productive leaders in a global society. The school seeks students and teachers from all economic, ethnic, religious and national backgrounds who will challenge themselves and contribute to the life of the school. Germantown Academy is an academic community committed to the following:

- Trust, responsibility and kindness;
- High standards for effort, behaviour and achievement;
- Close working relationships among students, teachers and parents;
- A curriculum that promotes curiosity, reasoning and questioning, imagination and aesthetics, understanding of others and oneself, clear communications, broad applications of knowledge, and satisfaction in learning;
- Talented teachers who enjoy young people and model for them what it means to be a continuing learner and mature individual;
- Encouragement for students' emerging identities, learning styles, talents and interests;
- Student leadership and service to others;
- Respect for the environment;
- Good sportsmanship, fitness and health;
- Regular evaluation and adjustment of programs to fulfil the school's mission.

Germantown Academy (GA) is a wonderfully busy and successful school. The curriculum is already broad and challenging, and is matched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The community service organisation thrives, and plays an essential role in connecting students to those outside GA.

GA buzzes with activity. Students, faculty and staff all have highly directed lives that mean their days are tightly scheduled. The aim of this proposal is not to suggest simply packing one more thing in. It aims instead to suggest a route by which the whole community could move towards creating an active culture of human rights and service learning. Such a move would be entirely consistent with the spirit and letter of the school's mission statement, and would provide a clear and distinct sense of direction for taking the school forward.

The Current Situation

GA already gives students considerable exposure to human rights issues through the regular curriculum and a wide range of elective courses, although the label ‘human rights’ is seldom used. There are opportunities for students to hear speakers through the assembly programme, and for further learning and discussion in societies such as Ethics and Model United Nations. Students are also encouraged to write articles for the wide range of journals and newspapers. In addition, interested individuals have opportunities to pursue subjects further through the Academy Scholars Programme and Senior Projects. Community Service is currently optional.

The three key components of any integrated human rights programme are i) **curriculum and policy** ii) **text development** and iii) **teacher training**. GA is particularly well placed in each of these respects, with a long standing curriculum committee, highly skilled and motivated faculty and a wealth of experience in curriculum and text development. The building blocks are already in place:

Regular curriculum

Electives programme

Assemblies and speakers

Community Service Organisation

Clubs and societies

Journals and publications

Academy scholars

Senior projects

Overseas trips

The Partnership School

Faculty / student / parent / alumni / staff experience.

The school also has a strong resource-base in the **library and CALCs**. In addition, the new organisational framework of the **house system** lends itself perfectly to a community more actively focussed on service.

III. The Proposal

To introduce human rights education and service learning to the Germantown Academy community over a 2-year period.

Year 1:

- To appoint an existing faculty member as **Director of Service Learning (DSL)**. S/he would chair both the ‘academic’ and ‘service’ committees and be responsible for overseeing the development and delivery of the curriculum. S/he would also be responsible for liaising with community leaders and building sustainable relationships between the school and the service sites. In addition, the DSL would be responsible for creating and running a series of linked **extra-curricular events and opportunities**. This program should have a strong emphasis on leadership, solutions, policy making and action.
- To create a **core academic program for all students**. This would be based on elements of departments’ existing course offerings. Departments will need to audit their existing offerings. It is expected that most, if not all, will already be addressing human rights issues in some way, although perhaps not explicitly. All departments would be required to contribute at least one unit of study. This would be co-ordinated by Department Chairs and the DSL.
- To create a small ‘**academic**’ **committee**, chaired by the DSL, to oversee the further development of this program beyond the core curriculum (through the development of electives and through a new specific human rights education / service learning strand to be developed in year 2), and to work with the ‘service’ committee. They would consider the most appropriate way to introduce the program in each section of the school, and ensure a progressive coherence. They

would also consider the potential of existing programs such as Academy Scholars, Senior Projects and overseas trips for closer links to the human rights / service learning curriculum.

- To provide time and funding for departments and individuals to explore **external curriculum enrichment resources**, such as the NAIS 20/20 program and the organisation Facing History and Ourselves.³
- To convene a **‘service’ committee** representing all constituencies, including faculty, students, staff, board members and, preferably, parents. This would be chaired by the DSL and would oversee discussion and implementation of policy on the selection of community service sites and the service requirement. They would also consider the potential of developing closer links with the Partnership School.
- For the DSL and both committees to propose an approach to **assessment and testing** that ensures that all students gain knowledge and understanding of key international issues and have opportunities to discuss and debate them. This would take place partly through regular departmental testing and examinations. In addition, however, students could be required to write an **annual individual research project**; presentation could be organised through the advisory or house system.

³ See suggestions in Appendix

Year 2:

- To develop a **human rights education / service learning curriculum strand** that connects the core curriculum with the extra curricular program, fills gaps in the core curriculum and makes explicit reference to the specific issues raised in community service sites. This would be available as an optional class in the (Middle and?) Upper School for those students who chose to make a concentration in this area. Ideally this would be taught by the DSL.
- To invite interested faculty to create a series of **specialist elective courses** and options within their departments for those students who wish to study in more depth.
- To focus new and existing programmes of study explicitly around the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and an appreciation of its global relevance. To post copies of the UDHR around the school.
- To expand the school's **library resources**.
- To create a **website** to support this new curriculum area and provide links and resources for **independent research, study and action**.
- To further raise the profile of human rights education and service learning in the school through **publicity and development materials**. To broaden the program by inviting **alumni** to become involved, and exploring links with other schools, both in the US and overseas.
- To schedule regular sessions (perhaps one per quarter) during which local **community leaders** visit classes / houses / sections to give briefings on key local issues and to lead discussions.

IV. Implementation

Issues likely to arise during the process of implementing this proposal include:

1. Time.

GA is already an extremely busy place. By creating a core human rights / service learning curriculum from existing course offerings, the aim is to avoid any sense that something else is just being added. Instead, the intention is to highlight certain issues within the curriculum and provide a coherent framework for their development throughout the school.

For interested students and faculty, the electives and extra-curricular programs provide opportunities to develop these issues further.

The only net increase in time for the whole community would be the addition of community service / service learning requirement.

2. Schedule

There would be no requirement to change the existing schedule.

In planning the calendar for the upcoming year, however, it would be desirable to be able to reserve certain fixed blocks of time for service learning sessions – perhaps one 2 hour session per quarter. These would allow student to work in year, house or advisory groups with guest speakers / community leaders.

Community service would take place outside the regular schedule.

3. Budget

Budget implications are minimal, and can be easily spread over the two-year period.

The largest single item would be the funding of the position of Director of Service Learning.

In addition, there would be costs associated with:

- Further professional development
- Additional library and departmental resources
- An expansion of the guest speaker program / travel expenses etc.

Most of these costs can be absorbed by the existing budgets for sections and departments, professional development, and the extra-curricular programme.

Kast Grants could also be made available for more adventurous approaches to curriculum enrichment and innovative faculty projects.

4. Staffing

In the first instance, the only necessary addition would be the position of Director of Service Learning. This would best be filled from within the existing faculty, as it requires a considerable understanding and appreciation of the whole school.

Since specialist teachers are rare, Germantown Academy would be wise invest in providing opportunities for current staff to develop areas of interest and expertise. Working in partnership with local community leaders and NGOs would provide another source of easily accessible expertise.

V. Evaluation

Germantown Academy already has a well-established system for evaluating classes within departments. It would be a small task to expand this process to include a standard questionnaire for all classes in the core curriculum and all relevant electives.

It would also be useful to develop a feedback form which could be given to a sample of students and faculty after events in the extra-curricular program, and after visits to community service sites.

The DSL would be responsible for collating feedback into brief quarterly reports which could be used to provide direction for the programme during the initial start-up period.

Endnotes:

ⁱ See, for example, BOURNE, R., GUNDARA, J., DEV, A., RATSOME, N., RUKANDA, M., SMITH, A., BIRTHISTLE, U. 1997, *Commonwealth Values in Education: Young People's Understanding of Human Rights. Report of a Four Country Study For The Commonwealth Education Ministers' Meeting, Botswana, 1997.* Or TAYLOR, N., SMITH, A.B., NAIRN, K., 2001, Rights Important to Young people: Secondary Student and Staff Perspectives, *The International Journal of Children's Rights* Vol 9: p 137-56.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, MULGAN, GEOFF and BENTLEY, TOM, 1997, 'Only Connect', *Times Educational Supplement*, 14th February 1997. Or, CHIONDO, JOHN, 2005, 'What Do Students Have to Say About Citizenship? An Analysis of the Concept of Citizenship Among Secondary School Students.' *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Spring 2005.