

Rights-Centric Education:
Pulling Education into alignment with
the Evolution of Human Rights

Ahamed Sifaan Zavahir, 2024

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated to the Children.

To the Children of *Today*;
who are awaiting the fulfilment of the promise made 35 years ago,
to be treated with dignity and respect,
as human beings, not just human *becomings*;
as the subjects of their own rights,
with the authority to assert and defend their own rights,
not just receive them as objects of charity, chattel, or innocent cherubs to be protected;

And to the Children of *Yesterday*;
now walking around inside adult bodies,
who do not know how to keep that promise...
because they don't know what it feels like
to be a child treated with the dignity and respect
that is every human beings' birth right.

Rights-Centric Education Pulling Education into alignment with the Evolution of Human Rights

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Postgraduate Diploma in Education Policy & Analysis

Bandaranaike Academy for Leadership and Public Policy

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DECLARATION

This extended essay is my original work and has not been submitted previously for a program of study at this or any other university / institute. To the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material published or written by another person, except as acknowledged in the text.

Author's name: Ahamed Sifaan Zavahir Date: Oct 30, 2024

Signature:

This is to certify that this extended essay is based on the work carried out by Ahamed Sifaan Zavahir under my supervision. The extended essay has been prepared according to the format stipulated and is of acceptable standard.

Certified by:

Supervisor Name: Dharshini Seneviratne Date: Oct 30, 2024

Signature:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I consider it an honor and a privilege to be a Founding Member of a movement that is pulling education into alignment with the evolution of human rights, a movement we call “Rights-Centric Education” (RCE). While I have been a part of the movement even before I enrolled in this present program of study, I decided to present my efforts in it as my capstone project – at least the portion of work falling within the capstone timelines.

As a result of my efforts, I have become a “face” of RCE – and that is a crown that does not belong to me, or to anyone. To paraphrase Newton, *“if I can see further, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants”*.

Even though I will highlight in this essay some of my contributions in order to fulfill the requirements of the capstone, this is most assuredly not “my project”. This is a movement whose time has come, and there are too many Giants who have walked before me to practically acknowledge here. Nevertheless, in terms of my Capstone, I express my gratitude to

- The wind beneath my wings, Dileepa Manawadu. I’m sorry – we exacerbated the patriarchal, inequitable division of domestic labour for one more year, so I could enjoy the male privilege of being able to prioritize my program of study and my work for Rights-Centric Education,
- Our son, Sahil Manan, and the other citizens of Kinder Republic, for confidently and regularly asserting their Rights and holding us accountable as a Duty Bearer,
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- Dharshini Seneviratne, my capstone supervisor. Her depth of experience in Human Rights in general and Child Rights in particular have been invaluable,
- My classmates, for the year full of earfuls as we engaged in debates that helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of Rights,
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this extended essay:

BALPP	Bandaranaike Academy for Leadership and Public Policy
EUDEC	European Democratic Education Conference ¹
IDEC	International Democratic Education Conference
RCE	Rights-Centric Education
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

¹ Also, European Democratic Education Community, but in this essay I only use it to mean Conference

PREAMBLE

One of the most famous, and inspiring, quotes in Education is by Nelson Mandela²: “*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*”

However, for me, it is a scary quote – because Mandela *didn't qualify* what *kind* of education he meant. And the *wrong* kind of education is a weapon that destroys the world...

The history of human civilization is the ebb and flow of two powerful and contradictory narratives:

1. *Liberation*: that every human³ being is worthy of living a life of dignity, free from Oppression, and
2. *Oppression*: that it is acceptable, even necessary, to violate the dignity and freedom of some humans for the benefit of others.

In contemporary society, the narrative of Liberation finds expression in the Human Rights' discourse... it is actually the very foundation of the discourse, described thus in the opening statements of the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴ (UDHR):

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

*Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the **advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,***

The same preamble concludes with a prophetic statement:

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Has this “*common understanding of these rights and freedoms*” been achieved? Emphatically, NO! That is why Democracy, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are in crisis today.

But... Why was this prophecy not heeded?

² http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/2003/030716_mindset.htm [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]. At the launch of Mindset Network, Johannesburg, on 16 July 2003. The quote is also often attributed to a previous speech at Madison Park High School in Boston in 1990, but according to <https://archive.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/za-com-mr-s-1569> (retrieved Oct 30, 2024) it was a slightly different quote that day.

³ This is an unashamedly anthropocentric narrative, where it is considered self-evident that the rights of human beings are superior to the rights of other living beings. While I shall not, at this moment, go beyond naming this issue, I wish to acknowledge the work of those who strive to resolve this injustice, and am grateful that several of them have joined the Rights-Centric Education Network.

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]

The architects of the UDHR, possibly giddy with excitement by the magnitude of their undertaking, unfortunately dropped the ball in one mission-critical area. They thought it was sufficient to express, in Art 26.2, the Liberation ideology thus:

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”

But it was patently not sufficient. That is why, 53 years later, it was recognized⁵ that

*The effective promotion of article 29 (1) [this is the article in the UNCRC that expresses the aims of education] requires the **fundamental reworking of curricula** to include the various aims of education and the systematic revision of textbooks and other teaching materials and technologies, as well as **school policies**. Approaches **which do no more than seek to superimpose the aims and values of the article on the existing system without encouraging any deeper changes are clearly inadequate.***

At the same time, the *value* of lived experience in Human Rights Education was acknowledged⁶:

children should also learn about human rights by seeing human rights standards implemented in practice.

Did this “fundamental reworking”, these “deeper changes”, take place? It would seem not, because 8 years later (i.e. in 2009) the *primacy* of that lived experience was recognized⁷:

Human rights education can shape the motivations and behaviours of children only when human rights are practised in the institutions in which the child learns, plays and lives together with other children and adults

Even another 15 years on, 76 years since the UDHR, we are still failing – because we have been pursuing the *wrong* kind of education: *The most powerful ~~weapon~~ tool which you can use to change the world is Education centered on Human Rights.*

⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 1 (2001), Article 29 (1), The aims of education, CRC/GC/2001/1, 17 April 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2001/en/39221> [retrieved Oct 29, 2024]

⁶ *ibid*, Article 15

⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 12 (2009): The right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12, 20 July 2009, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2009/en/70207> [retrieved Oct 29, 2024]

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Problem: Ignoring the call to center Human Rights in Education

Unlike the Mandela quote referenced in the preamble, this statement on the aims of education is much less recognized, even by those familiar with the work of its author:

We are in the midst of a cataclysm that has engulfed the whole world. We see the extent to which power and greed dominate the world and knowledge and science are being prostituted to bring about the destruction and devastation that is now going on all around us. Some people are asking 'Have the youth of today who are fighting each other in all parts of the globe been brought up on a wrong sense of values?' The answer is that social, political and educational aims have been deficient.

This statement is no less relevant today than when it was first published in Kannangara (1943) § 64. Indeed, it is echoed in the Introduction of UNESCO⁸'s 2021 "Reimagining our Futures Together: A new Social Contract for Education" thus:

We face an existential choice: continue on an unsustainable path or radically change course. To continue on the current path is to accept unconscionable inequalities and exploitation, the spiralling of multiple forms of violence, the erosion of social cohesion and human freedoms, continued environmental destruction, and dangerous and perhaps catastrophic biodiversity loss. To continue on the current path is to fail to anticipate and address the risks that accompany the technological and digital transformations of our societies.

The "current path" here is the narrative of Oppression. The "radical course change" it advocates for is the narrative of Liberation – the same narrative that has, for at least the last 76 years, called for Human Rights to be centered in Education. While these calls have become more strident, more precise, and more detailed⁹ over the years, they have, by and large, been ignored.

⁸ UNESCO (2021) Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education. Paris: UNESCO. ISBN 978-92-3-100478-0.

⁹ Refer Appendix I for a selection of excerpts

The Stakes

Why have the calls been ignored? That is the million-dollar question. But, even if it were to cost a million dollars to answer it, it would not be unaffordable – it’s insignificant considering that the ballpark estimate for the total (i.e. public and private) global investment in education is about 5 trillion dollars, ~5% of the world economy of ~100 trillion dollars.

However, the true cost of this problem cannot simply be accounted for in this way: There is a human price, and that price is paid – as is the norm in any instance of rights’ violations – by the most vulnerable...

Firstly, when we offer to – and in most cases impose on – children a system of education that does not respect their rights, that actively¹⁰ violates their rights, that does not even acknowledge them as the subjects of their own rights; there is a human cost of those rights violations. And in the absence of any avenue for redress, that cost is borne by the victims.

Furthermore, we cannot, in good conscience, expect young people to go out into the world concerned about democratic values and the rights and dignity of others, if the schools in which they spend most of their childhood do not respect their rights¹¹.

We cannot realize the pledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the “advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want”, the world which has been “proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people”, without “a common understanding of these rights and freedoms”. We condemn ourselves – or at least the vulnerable selves, the marginalized selves – to be victims of “barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind”, because that is the price of “disregard and contempt for human rights”. Whether this is in terms of climate justice, poverty¹², hunger¹³, health (including mental well-being), armed conflict, discrimination against minorities, interpersonal conflict¹⁴, loss (or subjugation) of indigenous ways of life, there is always a civil, political, economic, social or cultural right that is being violated.

¹⁰ For example, according to <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/schools/> [retrieved Oct 30, 2024], corporal punishment is currently lawful in 63 countries. Why are we even allowing this to masquerade as “discipline”? If adults were “disciplined” the way children are, it would be considered abuse – at the very least, harassment – and they would have legal recourse to redress for it. Children in schools with corporal punishment have less protection from physical abuse from authorities than incarcerated convicts do.

¹¹ My paraphrasing of Article 108 of General Comment 12 of the UN CRC, which was the last quote in the preamble of this essay.

¹² distributive justice really, the world already has more than enough economic activity to ensure every person a basic standard of living, except we insist that they earn their dignity through their own labour.

¹³ again, distributive justice, the world produces more than enough food for everyone.

¹⁴ homicide, domestic/intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment, etc.

The Hypothesis

My hypothesis to explain this sad state of affairs is that many people, many well-intentioned people, including even the authors and signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many Human Rights' defenders since then, have been deceived.

I believe they were not aware¹⁵ of the dark history of public funded education, and that this dark history was actively concealed from them. So they assumed, and continue to assume, that the mainstreamed¹⁶ system of compulsory schooling, that many also assume to be the only vehicle for the provision of education, could simply be *“directed to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”*. It could not – because it was a system rooted in the narrative of Oppression. It was explicitly designed for the purpose of violating human rights and denying fundamental freedoms. So the structure, practices, processes, norms, values and goals of this system of education were, and still are, oppressive.

And that is why the Human Rights discourse belatedly recognized in 2001 that merely “superimposing the aims of education” without “deeper changes” was “clearly inadequate”.

Please note that while I have named a hypothesis here, my capstone is not about academically proving or disproving it. My intention is to pull education into alignment with the evolution of human rights. If my hypothesis proves useful – and so far it has been – in achieving that intention, it will be used; if not, it will be discarded.

The Dark History of Public Funded Education

While public funded education is now considered to be an essential¹⁷ attribute of a democratic state, we must remember that when it emerged in Prussia in the 18th century, it did not emerge out of concern for the Human Rights of children. How could it, when it was a time that even adults did not enjoy – even on paper – Human Rights? After all, this was some 200 years before the advent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As expressed by Paglayan (2022) p. 1242, *“public primary education systems are a central feature of modern states. What is puzzling about these systems is that, contrary to popular belief, their emergence and most of their expansion usually took place under nondemocratic*

¹⁵ Or perhaps some were aware, but considered it politically expedient to conceal it. It's hard to tell for sure.

¹⁶ I find it particularly offensive that in the western discourse, at least in English, this is referred to as “traditional” education, essentially completely denying even the existence of many indigenous systems of education that were far less coercive – such as gurukulam in India – to add insult to the injury of them being ruthlessly eliminated during the colonization of the Majority world. Nevertheless, I am hopeful for the future because I know of at least one Founding Member of the RCE Network (Jerry Mintz) who has experience with upholding the rights of indigenous peoples.

¹⁷ it certainly is an essential attribute *now* – otherwise already marginalized groups would be further marginalized by being deprived of access to education

regimes. In Europe, most states began to assume control of primary schooling during the early nineteenth century, before the spread of democracy, with absolutist Prussia taking the lead.”

She continues (p. 1246) *“The Prussian education model emphasizing discipline, acceptance of one’s lot, and respect for authority, is significant because it heavily influenced the design of primary education systems worldwide. Dozens of government officials from Europe and the Americas traveled to Prussia to observe its primary schools; back home, they shared what they learned about designing a public primary education system.”*

While education is now considered essential for social mobility, this was not at all what it was intended for: Frederick II of Prussia himself contended that primary education must not promote social mobility (p. 1245).

And this is not just 18th century history – Paglayan also cites (p. 1254) the example of Indonesia in the 1970s under Suharto as *“a case of large-scale postconflict primary education expansion to inculcate “adherence to unquestioned authority” and restore political stability in a hybrid military-party-personalist dictatorship.”*

The central features of mainstreamed education systems, viz compulsory schooling (enforced by the state), national curricula (standardized by the state), professional teachers (licensed by the state) and public funding (by the state) were originally conceived for disempowerment. To quote Paglayan (p. 1247) one last time, *“to prevent education from empowering the masses, central governments introduced comprehensive education laws and regulations that, for example, imposed a national curriculum to control educational content, specified what textbooks to use, gave the state extensive powers to train teachers, established procedures to assess aspiring teachers’ moral qualifications to act as agents of the state, and created a centralized school inspection system.”* And the public funding was required not, as it is seen today, for ensuring universal access, but to ensure universal oppression – this was not the education that the common man wanted, it was imposed on them (often violently through compulsory schooling laws), and of course they were not going to pay out of their pocket for an education that they did not wish to receive.

[The drafting of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#)

It is unfortunate that the drafters of the UDHR did not have access to Paglayan’s work – if they had, it might have been possible to begin anew, shedding the oppressive baggage that was already encumbering educational practice. At the time of the drafting, the Prussian model of compulsory schooling was well established in many countries – leading to the awkward formulation that *“elementary education shall be compulsory”* (UDHR § 26). In what way is only the Right to Education compulsory? Of course, many Rights, such as Freedom of

Expression, Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Association, only require that duty-bearers do not interfere to limit them – these are Negative Rights. However, there are other Positive Rights which place an obligation on the duty-bearer to act to fulfill them, such as the right to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal (investing in the justice system), right to take part in the government of the country (investing in electoral systems), and the right to social security. Why were they also not compulsory? It was already understood that upholding these rights were an obligation that states accepted, so there was no value in adding ‘compulsory’ to ‘obligatory’.

Stanfield (2021), referring to the minutes of the drafting of the UDHR, shows that there was considerable debate on the inclusion of the word “compulsory” in what would become Article 26. Delegates from India, Lebanon and the UK raised concerns that the concept of compulsion was in contradiction with the statement of a right. After much discussion, a proposal to delete the word “compulsory” was put to a vote and was narrowly defeated 8-7. If not for the assurance by Professor Cassin (France), the main drafter of the article, that *“the world ‘compulsory’ should be interpreted to mean that no one (neither the State, nor the family) could prevent the child from receiving elementary education and that the idea of coercion was in no way implied”*, and the mistaken belief that the 40 countries that had already established free and compulsory education in their constitution had done so to advance the universal human right to education, the result would almost certainly have been different.

Unfortunately, not only was the world ‘compulsory’ retained as ‘compulsory education’, at least in the case of Germany, and possibly other countries, the term “elementary *education* shall be compulsory” is translated as “elementary *schooling* shall be compulsory”, which essentially allows a Weapon of Oppression to be marketed, and foisted on people, as a Tool of Liberation. Belatedly, in 1999, in a case of bolting the stable door after the ~~horse~~ wolf in sheep’s clothing had ~~bolted~~ bred all over the world, it was clarified that *“the element of compulsion serves to highlight the fact that neither parents, nor guardians, nor the State are entitled to treat as optional the decision as to whether the child should have access to primary education.”*¹⁸ – a case of too little, too late. Notwithstanding the clarification, most people – and most states – still understand “compulsory education” to mean *“it is compulsory for the child to attend school”*, not *“it is compulsory on the state to provide access to (at least) primary education to every child without discrimination.”*

¹⁸ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999) Substantive Issues Arising in the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. General Comment 11, Plans of action for primary education. <https://undocs.org/en/E/C.12/1999/4> [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]

The Way Forward: Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

Under International Human Rights law, it is nation states that commit to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, when they sign declarations and ratify treaties. So we have a curious case of entrusting the realization of rights to, in, and through education to an entity that benefits from maintaining a system of education that violates and suppresses those rights – exactly as it was designed to do.

Of course, this in and of itself is not a problem – there are many examples where citizens have had to hold their governments accountable to their rights, and this is just one more. But what makes this problem particularly wicked is that most states don't believe they are maintaining a system of oppression – they believe, or at least project that they believe, that “compulsory education” is a virtue, without disambiguating that compulsory on-the-state-to-ensure-universal-provision-of education¹⁹ is a virtue, provided it is fulfilled in a manner that centers human rights, while compulsory on-the-child-to-receive education is not. Likewise, most citizens don't believe that it is oppressive either – they are grateful²⁰ to accept public funded education, believing that it will provide them with social mobility even though the system was expressly designed to deny social mobility, and further believe that children will never, of their own free will, act to realize their right to education and that therefore it is acceptable to coerce them... the very thing that Prof. Cassin promised that was not the intention of Article 26 of the UDHR.

Nevertheless, some human rights' defenders have been advocating for education that truly respects the rights of the child – including Janusz Korczak, whose work was the reason why the Polish delegation²¹ to the United Nations requested for a legally enforceable treaty protecting child rights – that eventually resulted in the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. How can these voices come together to realize the call – dating back to at least 1948 – to center human rights in education?

That is the dream of the movement that is Rights-Centric Education: to pull education into alignment with the evolution of human rights.

It is a movement whose time has come.

¹⁹ I wish to take this opportunity to condemn, in the strongest terms possible, the absolute abomination of an education policy

²⁰ Why 'gratitude'? The state is not granting them a favour like it was some genie in a bottle. The state is fulfilling its obligations. Actually, in most cases states are not fulfilling their obligations towards education as a right, so we should be holding them to account rather than kowtowing to them.

²¹ <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/poland-and-convention-rights-child-celebrating-vision-janusz-korzac-put-child-dignity-first> [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]

PROGRESS REPORT - TO OCT 31, 2024

While the name is new, the movement that we now call Rights-Centric Education has been in motion for a long time²². For the purposes of my capstone, I will be documenting my involvement in Rights-Centric Education, which began in earnest in 2023.

2023 – The IDEC Resolution

Despite a long, albeit niche, history of education that can now be described as Rights-Centric, I am aware of only a few instances (Hartkamp (2016), Hannam (2011) and Je’anna Clements²³ (2017)) where specific Human Rights instruments and articles have been cited to criticize the presently mainstreamed system of education that was rooted in oppression and/or justify a different system of education that is consistent with human rights values and principles.

Why this was so I do not know. Perhaps it is because the formal and precise nature of human rights instruments make them inaccessible? Perhaps it is because their meaning has been intentionally obscured?

Due to some previous limited exposure in my eclectic life to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, my wife and I had found it sufficiently aligned with our ambitions for an “alternative” vision of education to make it a central element of Kinder Republic²⁴, the Democratic School we founded in 2021. Our view, that the basis of democracy is human rights, and therefore a democratic school should focus on upholding human rights, was inspired by Kannangara (1943) § 12:

“The society we have in mind is a democratic society in which all men are looked on as equal. Obviously, however, all men are not equal in all respects. They are not equal in regard to their capacities; physical, intellectual and moral. But they are equal in regard to what men have in common as being men, persons, moral beings. This equality matters so much that, compared with it, great and obvious differences between men are of relatively little importance. It is only in a democratic society that such equality is respected. In a democracy the state exists in order to enable the individuals comprising it to have as full a development as is consistent with the welfare of the others, whereas in a totalitarian state it is not the individual but the state that counts. The individual is of value only in so far as he contributes to the development of the state. In a democratic society

²² For example, A. S. Neill established Summerhill School in the UK in 1921, and Leo Tolstoy established schools for peasants at his estate Yasnaya Polyana in the 1860’s.

²³ <https://www.self-directed.org/tp/childs-right-to-education/> [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]

²⁴ Essentially “Republic of Children” because “kinder” is German/Dutch for children. We also enjoyed the word-play of “kinder” being understood as an English word. It was quite serendipitous to subsequently discover that the rights-centric orphanage run by Janusz Korczak had also been called “Children’s Republic”.

the aim of education is accordingly help to every boy and girl to achieve the highest degree or physical, mental and moral development which he or she as individual capable as well as to help them to be able and willing to work for the common good.”

However, at this time we had not studied the Convention in great depth. But the dark cloud of COVID19 pandemic turned out to have a little silver lining – many previously in-person conferences were suddenly offered virtually, which made it affordable²⁵ for us to participate in them, and meet many people who were working on similar initiatives around the world. Some of them, in early 2023, invited me to join a Discord server to make it easier to collaborate on matters of mutual interest. On the Discord, I was trying to bring Human Rights into some conversation when I was interrupted by another participant, Henning Graner from Germany, saying “*but do you know Human Rights are against us?*”. I asked “*why do you say that?*”. And his answer was “*because Human Rights says schooling is compulsory*”.

From this came the realization that while Human Rights instruments in English referred to compulsory education, in German it was always “*compulsory schooling*” – something that really could not be explained away as ‘lost in translation’.

This was the beginning of an intense research collaboration between several human rights’ defenders (myself included) where we first discovered Stanfield’s 2021 paper, then read²⁶ the detailed minutes of the drafting of Article 26 of the UDHR, and eventually found that there had been a largely unheard-of General Comment²⁷ in 1999 that clarified what was meant by “compulsory” in education: “*The element of compulsion serves to highlight the fact that neither parents, nor guardians, nor the State are entitled to treat as optional the decision as to whether the child should have access to primary education*”.

Excited by our discovery, we drafted a resolution to call on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to clarify what was meant by “compulsory education” and two of us (Henning Graner and myself) took the resolution to the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) in Katmandu, Nepal in October 2023. After much dialogue, the resolution was adopted by the participants and it was sent to the Committee on 20th November, the 34th anniversary of the UNCRC. Unfortunately, we did not receive so much as an acknowledgement.

²⁵ As a side note, gatekeeping conferences and their proceedings behind pay-walls for profit further exacerbates inequalities in access to education. I am grateful that the RCE Network includes rights defenders who address this by advocating for an “educational commons”.

²⁶ Henning Graner subsequently made a presentation of this at the IDEC 2023 conference. A recording is unfortunately not available but the slides are archived at the RCE Wiki at https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Compulsory_Education_in_the_Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights

²⁷ UN ECOSOC, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: General Comment 11, Plans of action for primary education, 10 May 1999, No. 6; E/C.12/1999/4, <https://undocs.org/en/E/C.12/1999/4>

2023/24 – Centering Human Rights in Education

Despite the setback of being ignored by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the idea that Human Rights instruments could be used to critique mainstreamed systems of education – for example, that grouping children by age was an unjustified violation of the child’s right to freedom of association, or that behaviorist practices of discipline violated a child’s right to freedom from all forms of violence, or that denying children opportunities to participate in decisions on their education violated their right to be heard, was taking root.

And together with this was the realization that having educational practice that centered child rights being seen as “alternative” education was inherently self-defeating – because it ceded authority to the conventional, the mainstream. “Alternative” minnows battling mainstream behemoths was a David and Goliath that was never going to end well for David.

We had to justify rights-centric education by means of something that was globally accepted, well-articulated, under active development, and is already advocated for by a variety of stakeholders – and what better means than international human rights law? Especially when the UNCRC has been ratified by every UN member state bar one.

I had the opportunity to make this claim as

1. A Keynote speaker at the IDEC 2023 conference on “The Role of Adults in Democratic Education” – essentially that they should see themselves as human rights defenders, especially of child rights in education (not just the right to education, but all rights)
2. A Panelist at the Screening²⁸ of documentary on Suvemäe democratic school-within-a-school on Dec 10, 2023 (commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) with Je’anna Clements (another author of the IDEC 2023 Resolution) and others who would later be Founding Members of the RCE Network.
3. A Speaker²⁹ (with Je’anna Clements) on “The Biggest Barrier to Rights Affirming Education and How to Dismantle it” at the Learning Planet Festival 2024, commemorating the International Day of Education on Jan 24, 2024.
4. A Speaker³⁰ on “RIGHTing a Wrong: Conventional Education vs. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” at the Liberation of Education Conference, Feb 26-29, 2024.
5. A Keynote Speaker and Panelist³¹ on “Child Rights in Education” at EUDEC 2024 in the Netherlands, Jul 29 - Aug 4, 2024

²⁸ Recording available at https://youtu.be/YoqFI1r9p_Q

²⁹ Recording available at <https://youtu.be/10Bjvqj-WTg>

³⁰ Recording available at <https://youtu.be/reKayle60tg>

³¹ Recordings available at https://youtu.be/M_kPQl6i-oc (partial) and <https://youtu.be/WV-AsIRmuK4>

2024 – Establishing the “Rights-Centric Education Network”

There was momentum building around the concept – but to reach more people, we needed a name. After some deliberation, we settled on the name “Rights-Centric³² Education”. The reasoning was that there is already a known discourse on shifting education from being Teacher-Centric / Exam-Centric to Child-Centric / Learner-Centric. While this discourse seems to be little more than empty rhetoric (Schweisfurth, 2019) (because it rarely recognized the entirety of child rights, only the right to education), the “-Centric” suffix has currency and we believed that we could neatly hijack that discourse by claiming that education should actually be Rights-Centric, and center human rights – something that, as we have seen, has been a persistent theme in the contemporary human rights discourse.

But what was the nature of this Network? Was it going to be yet another organization competing for already scarce human ingenuity, funding and attention spans? Fortunately, a more inclusive vision emerged – a non-hierarchical, non-incorporated, community of practice of Rights Defenders working to advance human rights for, in, and through education.

And how would we establish such a Network? We did not want to have a situation where there were some “Founders” who were recruiting “Followers”, because that itself would be a hierarchy. So we conceived a Memorandum of Association³³ where anyone (individuals and organizations, regardless of whether they were registered or not) who felt moved by the movement could consent to join as a Founding Member – and all Founding Members would have equal rights and opportunities. There was no membership criteria to join (because that too would create a hierarchy where some members had the authority to decide on the membership of others), no membership fees (that too would create an entry barrier) and no obligations on commitment (to make it possible for anyone to join and then contribute in whatever ways their circumstances allowed them to).

Was this effort³⁴ successful? I believe it was – there are 160 individuals and organizations who have consented to being Founding Members³⁵. This includes many people who I consider to be leading voices in centering rights in education, in theory and/or practice.

³² We preferred “Rights-Centred”, but ambiguities around British and American spelling conventions convinced us to go for the more consistently spelled “-Centric”.

³³ While canvassing for Founding Members, the Memorandum was hosted on the website <https://rights-centric.education>, but it has now been archived to the Wiki at https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Memorandum_of_Association

³⁴ I would like to acknowledge here the stellar efforts of Richard Fransham (also one of the authors of the IDEC declaration) who tirelessly networked to onboard many of the Founding Members.

³⁵ The list is available at <http://rights-centric.education/founding-members>

Of course, there is still work to be done in terms of making the membership be more inclusive and representative – at present there are no children who are members (although there were several cases of rights-centric schools that placed the decision to join in the hands of their children³⁶), which I believe is at least partly due to the responsibilities involved in being a Founding Member. The child-friendly version of the Declaration will, I hope, reduce entry barriers. Also, the Majority World is still under-represented – as is, sadly, the norm in international cooperations. There are many vulnerable groups that are not represented – such as child victims of armed conflict, trafficking, and abuse; refugees and internally displaced children; children in contact with the law; children in poverty; children in indigenous and/or nomadic communities; children with disabilities; and children with neuroidentities typically stigmatized as being “neurodivergent” by the medical model³⁷ of disability.

I do not wish for any vulnerable group to join for tokenistic representation – but I believe we have a responsibility to be accessible and inclusive so that they feel truly welcome if they choose to join, and not feel like their *raison d’être* is to be a tick in a box in a Diversity checklist.

I am hopeful that this will eventually be rectified – and those who join later as Regular Members will enjoy the same benefits and opportunities as Founding Members, because otherwise that too would be a hierarchy that discriminates against those who could not be reached during the window of establishing the network, or were reached but did not have the capacity to respond.

³⁶ It was heartwarming to hear the testimony that “Our students actually couldn't imagine why we wouldn't be members”.

³⁷ In contrast to the Social Model of Disability, for which I recommend <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/> as a primer.

2024 – A model for an inclusive not-organization

A collective obligation on the Founding Members (stated in the Memorandum) was to define Articles of Association to govern the Network. For example, how would Members join the Network after it had been established by the Founding Members? How would the Network make decisions in ways that allowed every Member to have an equal voice, but not place excessive demands on people's time that would distract them from the real work they are doing? How would it balance inclusiveness (allowing every member to participate, and be heard) with efficiency (being able to make decisions quickly)? And provide the structure necessary to avoid feeling lost, without letting the structure become so rigid that it stifles?

We presently have draft Articles of Association³⁸ that we hope will meet these objectives, using sociocracy (consent-based decision making) as the preferred option, with the possibility to use majority voting if required. It's definitely a big experiment³⁹ – and if it fails, we shall try another way. Once the Founding Members consent⁴⁰ to the Articles, we can open the process by which Regular Members can join (without the commitment to establish the Network that was borne by the Founding Members), hopefully in time for the 35th Anniversary of the UNCRC falling on November 20th.

³⁸ Please see <https://www.rights-centric.education/articles>

³⁹ While there are many examples where sociocratic decision making is used, I do not know if it has been used for a large (already over 160, will be more once we start accepting Regular Members), decentralized (impossible for all members to gather for a meeting, even virtually), open (no criteria to meet to obtain membership), non-hierarchical (no council, trustees, board, etc) group.

⁴⁰ i.e. do not, within some reasonable period, raise objections or present counter proposals

2024 – The Declaration of Child-Rights-Centric Education

One of the wicked questions I grappled with was how to ensure that practices of education that respected the human rights of all stakeholders are permitted⁴¹ to flourish while upholding the obligation on the state to ensure every child's rights to, in and through education?

After all, there are legitimate (although perhaps exaggerated) concerns that families who opt out of the “compulsory” (properly speaking, compulsory-on-the-child-to-receive) education provided by the state (or similar schools established by non-state actors) are doing so for problematic reasons – e.g. the child is being physically abused and this would be discovered if the child went to school; or the child was being groomed (for extremist ideologies, for crime, for trafficking, etc) and this is only possible by excluding the child from mainstream education. This is an issue completely different from children who are denied access to education, or are provided access to education that is not acceptable to them – that does require compulsory education, in the sense of compulsory-on-the-state-to-provide education.

A belief that has persisted in me since childhood is that if I am contributing towards something, I should focus my attention towards areas where I can make a unique contribution – because “If not me, then who? If not now, then when?”. And I believe that I have some combination of abilities where I enjoy wading through reams of Human Rights instruments, can spot statements that can be leveraged, and weave them together to construct a narrative, using ‘legalese’ if required. So I feel incredibly honoured to be able to contribute with those abilities to steward a process of drafting a declaration that will answer that wicked question.

I believe we are now very close to finalizing the Declaration – it basically captures the themes already expressed in the Preamble and Problem Statement of this document in the form of a Declaration that people can endorse by signing. As it is derived entirely⁴² from existing statements in various Human Rights instruments, I believe it will not be possible for anyone to deny the declaration even if they choose to not actively support it.

The latest draft of the Declaration is included as Appendix II. As the language of the declaration is quite formal, I also created some commentary⁴³ (text and video) to make the text of the declaration easier to understand.

⁴¹ For example, that they are legally accepted so they do not face prosecution by the state; and so that children, parents and educators who wish to participate are not fearful that they are on the wrong side of the law

⁴² All the statements the declaration “calls for” are derived from existing statements; the rationale for weaving them together in this way, and for highlighting these statements, is based on a reasoning that might be contested, but that does not permit the negation of what the declaration actually calls for.

⁴³ At https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Declaration_of_Child_Rights-Centric_Education

NEXT STEPS

Even though my capstone has a submission deadline of Oct 31st, 2024, I will be continuing the work of Rights-Centric Education for the foreseeable future. I outline here some of the planned activities:

Nov 20, 2024: Launching the Declaration of Child Rights-Centric Education

Je'anna Clements and I will be speaking at the [Inspire Education Summit](#) on Nov 20th, the 35th anniversary of the UNCRC. We will be launching the Declaration of Child Rights-Centric Education for public signatures on this day, and we hope it will be the instrument that paves the way for mainstreaming a system of education that is truly centered on the Rights of the Child.

We hope to gather signatures under the following categories, capturing whether the signatory is a Rights Holder, or Duty Bearer (and if so, in what capacity):

1. Children exercising their Right to be Heard (§ 12 of UNCRC)
2. Parents / Guardians / members of the extended family who are fulfilling their responsibility, right and duty to provide appropriate direction and guidance to their Child/ren in the exercise of their Rights (§ 5 of UNCRC)
3. State institutions (schools or other) established explicitly for the provision of education for the child, who have an obligation under the UNCRC to respect, protect and fulfill the Rights of the Child.
4. Institutions established by non-state actors exercising § 29 2 of the UNCRC who commit to act in loco parentis vis à vis § 5
5. Any other individuals or bodies who are duty bearers with an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the Rights of Children (even if they are not duty bearers for rights to, in or through education)
6. Any other individuals (adult or child) or bodies who wishes to express support for the Declaration

We will record “signatures” via an online form that captures their Name, City, Country, Date of Signing, Category (from above choices), as well as email address for future communication.

We hope that Founding Members (as well as any children they are duty bearers towards) will be signatories, and intend to collect “pre-signatures” so that when the Declaration is officially launched it will already be populated with a large number of signatures.

To make this as inclusive as possible, we hope to have the declaration translated to as many languages as we have capacity for, and also to have child-friendly versions available.

To amplify visibility of this launch, we will encourage signatories to

1. share that they have signed the declaration on their social media profiles (tagging Rights-Centric Education where possible).
2. write to the press in their city and country.
3. invite others to sign the declaration

Accumulating a critical mass of signatories will pave the way for RCE Framework, as it is what is called for in the last call in the declaration.

Nov 20, 2024: Opening the RCE Network for Regular Members

Once the Articles of Association receive consent from the Founding Members, we will be able to create an application form that can be used to obtain membership of the RCE Network. These members will be Regular Members, but will have the same benefits and opportunities as Founding Members, with the only privilege accorded to the latter being the recognition of being an early adopter.

We hope to launch this too at the Inspire Education Summit along with the Declaration, so that those who wish to contribute more than signing the Declaration have opportunities to do so – especially by participating in the RCE Framework.

Dec 10, 2024: Launching the RCE Policy Advocacy Program

Dec 10th is the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this is an opportune moment to launch the RCE Policy Advocacy Program, which is simply human rights defenders working in policy (e.g. advocacy) to support each other by sharing experiences, ideas, case studies, etc.

A few examples of how this could play out:

1. Earlier this year I wrote a guest column⁴⁴ on the complete lack of transparency and accountability in educational policy formulation in Sri Lanka in 2023/2024. Other Rights defenders may find this useful as an example of how to make use of RTI (Right To Information) requests, or simply the opportunity of writing to a newspaper.
2. I raised those concerns in a letter to the UN Special Rapportuer on the Right to Education – unlike the communication to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, this time there was an acknowledgement from her office, but nothing beyond that. Even though this was an example of failed advocacy, it is still a learning experience as others would need to think of what they need to do differently in order to receive a response.

⁴⁴ <http://ft.lk/columns/The-illegitimate-National-Education-Policy-Framework-2023-2033/4-761565>

3. I had the opportunity to submit suggestions to avoid similar issues in the future to the CSO supplementary country report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child – getting involved in the supplementary reporting process in their country would be something I would encourage every member of the RCE Network who wishes to engage in education policy.

Jan 23-25, 2025: Launching the RCE Framework

The First Phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education⁴⁵, approved by the UN General Assembly, included establishing “*a rights-based quality assurance system (including school self evaluation and development planning, school inspection, etc.) for education in general and create specific quality assurance mechanisms for human rights education*”.

No state party implemented this proposal. Rather than twiddle our thumbs waiting for them, we, as civil society, are going to action it as the main program of the RCE Network.

Every year, around the International Day of Education (Jan 24) the Learning Planet Institute organizes a 3-day Learning Planet Festival. We hope to be featured at the Festival to launch the RCE Framework

How we envision the process is

1. Any person who is a Duty Bearer for Child Rights in Education (e.g. a parent, a teacher or administrator in a school) can commit to participating in the framework by making a Pledge to the Children they are responsible for.
2. And then, in a process similar to the periodic reporting of state parties on their progress implementing Rights’ Treaties, the Duty Bearer will, preferably in consultation with the children, make a report comprising steps taken since the last report, the current status of Human Rights in education (this need not be limited to Child Rights – they must report on Child Rights but they can also report on other rights), and plans for the future.
3. The RCE Network will only publish the report – we will not authenticate the submission: that is something that only the Rights-Holders in that context can do. And that is why the Pledge to join the RCE Framework is made to the children in that environment. And in their determination, they can also benchmark what is happening in other environments that are in the RCE Framework.

It is our hope that as we generate a corpus of experiences (successful and failed) from different environments, it will be much easier for everyone in the framework to adopt more rights-centric

⁴⁵ For relevant excerpts of the program (as well as a link to the full Programme), see [https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Revised_draft_plan_of_action_for_the_first_phase_\(2005-2007\)_of_the_World_Programme_for_Human_Rights_Education](https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Revised_draft_plan_of_action_for_the_first_phase_(2005-2007)_of_the_World_Programme_for_Human_Rights_Education)

practices. For example, if one school implements Restorative Justice practices as a means to address bullying, then other schools and families can try to learn from them and replicate it themselves.

This will also address the wicked question of determining if a child who outside the coercive system of compulsory schooling has done so as an exercise of their Right to be Heard in order to fulfill their Right to Education in a manner consistent with their other Rights (in which case they should be able to provide reports for the RCE Framework, and the state party can verify that by checking-in with the child concerned, and if legitimate (not faked), should support the realization of the child's choice to the best of their abilities), or has been compelled to do so by family members who wish to violate the child's rights (in which case they will not be able to provide authentic reports for the RCE Framework, and if they provide fake reports they can be verified by checking-in with the child, and with either missing or fake reports, the state party can intervene in order to uphold the best interests of the child – which could mean enrolling in compulsory schooling, but does not necessarily have to be.)

Ongoing activities

I expect that we will continue to recruit members, signatories to the declaration, as well as participants to the Advocacy and RCE Framework program.

Once the RCE Framework's reporting starts creating the corpus of examples, it will be possible to use the data for research purposes – which was also part of the First Phase, at least at national level, as *“Identify and support a resource centre for collecting and disseminating initiatives and information (good practices from diverse contexts and countries, educational materials, events) on human rights education at the national level”*. I hope the RCE Network will be able to fulfill this function at an international level in terms of the RCE Framework submissions.

REFLECTIONS

In reflecting on my experience of this capstone, I would like to share the following observations:

Rights-Holders to Rights-Defenders

The RCE Framework is, or at least I hope will be, a potentially catalytic example of how to support Rights-holders to act as Rights defenders for their own rights. Because it will be children in education who will assert whether the duty bearers around them are respecting their rights in education. And if they are not upheld to their satisfaction, they can hold them accountable in terms of the Pledge they signed to join the RCE Framework.

The reason this is significant is because, all too often, Rights-Holders are seen not as the subjects of their rights who can demand that duty bearers fulfill their obligations, but as beneficiaries of the benevolence of duty bearers towards whom they should demonstrate gratitude. This is deprecated “object of charity” saviourism approach that somehow still survives.

Of course, what we can achieve is still far from ideal, because it still requires that the relevant duty bearer acts on the Declaration and elects to participate in the RCE Framework by making the Pledge to the children. What happens if a School Principal refuses to do so? As civil society, we cannot directly intervene, but we can pressure the state to act to respect child rights (if it is a state school) or act to prevent the violation of child rights (if it is a school run by a non-state actor) – and the more schools and family environments we have participating in the RCE Framework, the more impactful this advocacy will be.

The Non-Hierarchical Community of Practice

I have nearly two decades of corporate training experience, a substantial part of which was team building programs to encourage different teams to work together rather than in silos. And I can say with confidence that these team building programs cannot have long-lasting impact unless the reward and remuneration measures reflect that synergy – i.e. no siloed KPIs and rewards.

This is also, I suspect, a problem when it comes to Alliances, Networks, Consortiums etc – especially in the Rights space where there is competition for funding, an entity will be reluctant to be part of an umbrella organization that could steal their thunder by accessing funds that would otherwise have gone to the entity that really did the work.

I hope that the way the RCE Network is organized will avoid that issue – as a non-organization, it can neither claim credit (credit belongs to the member) nor solicit funds. Our proposed articles allow for members to solicit funds from other members, but the RCE Network will play no part in that apart from publishing the request and recording contributions where the donor wishes it recorded. The Network will not act as an intermediary (donations should go directly to the requesting member), nor audit the funds received.

The value of Real Work

Everything I have done for my capstone, and indeed every assignment I have written as part of this program, has felt like real work. It is work that I am proud to showcase, not because of the grades they may have received, but because they represent work that I believe needed to happen. The timing may have been influenced by the schedule of the program, but this was not “busy work” done just to fulfill some arbitrary criteria of a program of study – of which there is far too much of in higher education.

I believe this kind of “real work” assignments can be encouraged if the BALPP took the bold decision to not engage in assessing assignments, because if assignments are real work, they should be assessed by the audiences they are intended for. BALPP’s assessment could be limited to authenticating if the work was done by the student (rather than, say, outsourced).

For example, my capstone is easily assessed in terms of whether or not it achieves, over a period of time, the objectives it set out to achieve. If a potential employer needed to make an assessment of my skills in education policy, they should be able to look at this essay, the results it has achieved, and then form an opinion on my suitability.

If they make the employment decision without such scrutiny, choosing to blindly trust a grade, then they are likely to end up hiring graduates who have made it a ‘pass’time to pass exams – much like I was when I was undergraduate at the University of Moratuwa.

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⁴⁷https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org/esa/files/2019-08/ThinkPiece_9_LearnerCentredEducation.pdf [retrieved Oct 30, 2024]

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APPENDIX I: CALLS TO CENTER HUMAN RIGHTS IN EDUCATION

The following are examples to show how the Human Rights' Discourse has consistently reiterated Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), § 26 2:

"Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"

The Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), § 5 a:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; it shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace;

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), § 13 1:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), § 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;*
- (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.*

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011)

Reaffirming that States are duty-bound, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in other human rights instruments, to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,

The Abidjan Principles (2019)

The right to education is not only a human right in itself, but also an empowerment, multiplier, and transformative right. It includes a right to education, rights in education, and rights through education. Education plays an essential role in advancing individuals' physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development, and for parents, families, and communities to transmit social and cultural values and practices, while respecting human rights. Education also contributes to achieving the public good and developing and maintaining healthy, open, transparent, tolerant, just, non-discriminatory, and inclusive societies that provide an environment conducive to the realisation of human rights. It is particularly important for vulnerable, marginalised, and disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples, girls and women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and persons living in poverty.

APPENDIX II: DECLARATION OF CHILD RIGHTS-CENTRIC EDUCATION (DRAFT OCT 27)

Preamble

WHEREAS the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was the first legally binding treaty recognizing children as the subjects of their own rights, obliging member states to respect, protect and fulfill every child's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; and

OBSERVING that § 5 of the UNCRC obliges the state to respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of the family of a child (parents, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, and legal guardians) to provide appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise of the child's rights by the child; and

EMPHASIZING that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' call (§ 26) to center Human Rights in education ("*education shall be directed... to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*") has been consistently reiterated in multiple instruments including, inter alia, The Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960, §5), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966, §13), the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989 §29), and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011); and

BEARING IN MIND that the United Nations General Assembly, in the "First Phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education", further reiterated this as "*it is essential to ensure that educational objectives, practices and the organization of the schools are consistent with human rights values and principles*"; and

RECALLING that General Comment 1 (2001) of the UNCRC on § 29 (1) "The Aims of Education"

- Recognized that education "*goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society*"; and
- Called for "*the fundamental reworking of curricula to include the various aims of education and the systematic revision of textbooks and other teaching materials and technologies, as well as school policies*" in recognition that "*approaches which do no more than seek to superimpose the aims and values of the article on the existing system without encouraging any deeper changes are clearly inadequate*"; and
- Emphasized that "*Efforts to promote the enjoyment of other rights must not be undermined, and should be reinforced, by the values imparted in the educational process. This includes not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place, whether it be the home, school, or elsewhere*"; and

REASONING that

1. Presently mainstreamed practices of education evolved, and were mainstreamed, while children were considered property (of the state or parents); and
2. This was several decades, sometimes even centuries, prior to the recognition of children as the subjects of their own rights by the UNCRC in 1989; and
3. Therefore it is understandable that those mainstreamed practices of education do not explicitly center child rights; nevertheless
4. Child rights are inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent and there cannot be any justification for practices of education to violate them; and

REASONING FURTHER that,

5. While states have an obligation to compulsorily ensure access to at least primary education (UNCRC § 28) to all children without discrimination; and
6. They maintain ‘schools’ as the institution established explicitly for the provision of education in fulfillment of their role as a duty bearer; and
7. Therefore “*it is essential to ensure that educational objectives, practices and the organization of the ‘schools’ are consistent with human rights values and principles*”; nevertheless
8. The recognition that education encompasses a “*broad range of life experiences and learning processes*” taking place at “*the home, school, or elsewhere*” makes it imperative that the protection of human rights values and principles be extended to all environments (institutional and non-institutional) providing education for the child.

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, amplifying the call for education to be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, CALL FOR all duty bearers with the responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights to, in, and through education to

1. absolutely and without reservation recognize children as the subjects of their own inalienable and indivisible civil, political, economic, social and cultural Rights; and
2. define education of the child in broad terms as "*all life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society irrespective of whether they take place at home, school, or elsewhere*"; and
3. take progressive measures to fundamentally rework all practices of education to ensure they are consistent with human rights values and principles, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
4. ensure that this process of pulling education into alignment with human rights
 - a) prioritizes human rights, and especially child rights, whenever they are in conflict with mainstreamed educational practice, even if the practice has widespread social and/or systemic acceptance; and
 - b) includes taking progressive measures for the full implementation of all relevant instruments, including, inter alia, General Comment 1 (aims of education), General Comment 12 (right to be heard) and General Comment 13 (right to freedom from all forms of violence); and
 - c) be prioritised in schools and other institutions, both state and non-state, established explicitly for the provision of education for the child; and
 - d) includes also the non-institutional provision of education by the family of the child; and
 - e) be mainstreamed by the "*establishment of a Rights-Based Quality Assurance System for education in general*" as called for in the First Phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.