

Teaching children values and human rights education essay



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Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity.

In South Africa the protection and maintenance of human rights has become an important facet of society. In this regard, refer to the preamble of, as well as sections 1, 7 (1) and 7 (2) of the Constitution of South Africa. In addition, the Bill of Rights deals with all fundamental rights applicable in the relationship between the government and individuals or groups of people (and interests), as well as the rights applicable in the relationships between individual themselves, and between individuals and private organizations.

The government is seen as the guardian of the state and the state's interests, and therefore government must see to it that individual and group rights or interests are cared for. This has resulted in the theme of human rights playing an important role in society.

According to the findings of, An evaluation of South Africa's Primary School Nutrition Programme, (Coy: 1997)[2]there were many anecdotal accounts of improved school attendance and classroom performance as a result of this programme.

This evaluation raised a number of concerns with its implementation. Despite its broad range of objectives, the implementation of South Africa's Primary School Nutrition Programme was generally limited to being a school feeding programme.

The feeding component of this programme encountered many logistical problems with the delivery of adequate and appropriate food, especially in the schools in need. As a result, the coverage of school feeding has been poor for significant periods of time in some parts of the country.

In addition, the evaluation pointed to the fact that this programme was from the outset an ambitious but brave attempt to address a major problem of malnutrition through a logistically difficult and challenging programme.

It was also implemented soon after the 1994 elections which was a difficult period during which the health system was being significantly transformed and restructured (SAJCH OCTOBER: 2009 VOL. 3 NO. 3).

This paper will demonstrate the importance of a practical development plan to promote and improve a child's Constitutional right to basic nutrition.

The South African Constitution, 1996, boldly protects the right of access to food as a self-standing right, Section 27 (1) (b) of the Bill of Rights states; "Everyone has the rights to have access to sufficient food". This right is extended to everyone but the Constitution gives extra protection to children in Section 28 (1) (c) by providing that; "Every child has a right to basic nutrition".

The Government has an obligation to promote Human Rights in Education, especially in vulnerable populations. This was emphasized in the Constitutional Court case *Governing Body of the Juma Musjid Primary School & Others v Essay N. O. and Others*[3], Human rights education must not be limited to formal schooling.

As an educator, I feel that this basic right to nutrition is not being met in my school, because according to experiences I had in my school that is located in a previously disadvantaged community, I had to ask myself the question over and over;

“ How can I as an educator teach learners in a classroom if their nutritional needs are not met?”

A poor state of nutrition amongst children in the classroom, leads to malnutrition and has a negative effect on education and learning.

This is why I chose to focus on this particular Human Right, the right to basic nutrition and is worthy of support and it is a worthy cause in my school.

The Bill of Rights

The interim Constitution of South Africa became effective from 27 April 1994, which brought about three main changes that form an integral part of the discipline of Constitutional law, namely:

The end of 300 years of racial and gender discrimination (introducing effective exercise of the equality principle).

The end of the application of the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty (introducing the supremacy of the final Constitution of South Africa).

The introduction of a federal structure which ended years of central and minority governance.

Before the interim Constitution was introduced, there were three Constitutions to be found in the history of South Africa namely:

The Union Constitution (1909).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1963).

The Tricameral Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1983).

These Constitutions were not supreme, and Parliament could, without much effort, amend the content of the Constitution. Even the common law could not escape, in that although the common law could be applied in order to protect some rights, Parliament had the authority to also amend or ignore the common law via legislation. State of emergencies, could also be put into action whenever Parliament so chose, which also had a negative effect on fundamental human rights.

Consequently, the IC was formally accepted by the then serving Parliament. After the elections in 1994, the new Parliament and government of national unity was created, and South-Africa was, as from 27 April 1994, governed under the Interim Constitution. The aim was, among others, to regulate the process for the materialization of the final Constitution.

There are provisions of the Constitution that emphasise the pride of place of the Bill of Rights in when trying to ascertain the meaning of constitutional provisions. What the provisions tell us is that we should always have in mind the principal objectives of the Constitution whenever we attempt to understand, interpret and apply the Constitution. The following provisions

are prime examples:

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Society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental freedoms (preamble)

Values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms (section 1(a))

Affirmation of democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (section 7(1))

Respect, protection, promotion and fulfilment of rights in the Bill of Rights

When interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court must promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom (section 39)

The Bill of Rights applies directly in the following cases (Currie & De Waal: 2007),

Where a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights has been violated;

The violation is perpetrated by an individual or juristic person with a duty to respect, promote and/or fulfill right

The enforcement of the right is sought on South African territory

Indirect application of the Bill of Rights covers all those cases where the Bill of Rights has relevance, but one or more of the above elements is missing.

Indirect application applies to the majority of cases in which the matter is already governed directly by common law, legislation, or customary law. The

Constitution requires courts to develop common law, customary law in a way that promotes the spirit, purport, and objects of the Bill of Rights.

Human Rights

Human rights are highly inspirational and also highly practical, embodying the hopes and ideals of most human beings and also empowering all people to achieve them. Human rights in education share this inspirational and practical aspect (Currie & De Waal, 2005).

The need for human rights is of high importance, because it sets standards but also produces change. Change is needed in our society and effective human rights in education can produce changes in values and attitude (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Human Rights awareness can produce changes in behaviour, empowerment for social justice and develop attitudes of solidarity across issues in schools and communities.

Once people embrace human rights concepts, they begin to look for their realization in their own lives, examining their communities, families, and personal experience through a human rights lens. In many cases people find these values affirmed, but human rights in education can also lead to recognition of unrealized injustices and discriminations.

This sensitization to human rights in everyday life underscores the importance of not only learning about human rights but also learning for human rights: people need to know how to bring human rights

home, responding appropriately and effectively to violations in their own communities (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Human rights have the following characteristics (Nieuwenhuis; 2005- 26):

they are judicially enforceable;

they are universal;

they are not dependent on the recognition thereof;

they place obligations on individuals and state authorities; and

they set minimum standards for social and government practices.

The right to human dignity (section 10 of the Constitution), has an uncertain and general nature. Though we can be certain of the pivotal importance of human dignity in the Constitution we can be less certain of the meaning of the concept. As is typical of its treatment of important abstractions in the Constitution, the Constitutional Court has not ventured a comprehensive definition of human dignity. Though a difficult concept to capture in precise terms, it is clear that the constitutional protection of dignity requires us to acknowledge the value and worth of all individuals as members of society. Human dignity is the source of a person's innate rights to freedom and to physical integrity, from which a number of other rights flow. Human dignity is not only a justiciable and enforceable right that must be respected and protected, it is also a value that informs the interpretation of possibly all other fundamental rights and that is of central significance in the limitations enquiry.

Since the rights in the Bill of Rights stem from dignity and are more detailed elaborations of aspects of the concept, the core right to dignity has decisive application only relatively infrequently (Currie & De Waal; 2007 - 273-275).

The duty on educators

My interpretation of Section 28 of the Constitution is, is that no one should be licensed to enter the teaching profession without a fundamental grounding in human rights. What a difference might be made in children's lives if teachers consistently honored the child's right to express opinions and obtain information and promote a child's human dignity. Teachers do not work in isolation, however. To succeed, with this human rights project, is that it requires the endorsement and support of the whole staff at my school, including those who oversee continuing education, the School Governing Body, and the maintenance staff.

Many people never attended school in South Africa, due to Apartheid's abuse of human rights. Such people have no less right to know their rights and far greater need.

Only by working in collaboration with these vulnerable groups, in this case learners, can human rights educators develop programs that accommodate their needs and situations.

Complexities to overcome

To promote values and human rights in your school and community, I chose a project to empower the school to start with a program to promote Human Rights.

My project is to start a self-sustainable and reliable food supply, to meet the nutritional needs of the learners in my school. This project will demonstrate the skills to empower themselves for the realization of Human Rights.

Securing resources and funding

To get this project started, I wrote a letters of request and mailed it off to various stores and organisations close to my school. The reason I chose organisations and food markets close to the school, is to get the community involved in this project.

I made sure my letters included all the information necessary for them to make the donation in the easiest way possible. I explain the nature of the event, inviting them to contact me if they had the need to visit the school.

I visited the Chamber of Commerce in my community's website and send an email off to each of these. I have got in touch with the local Newspaper and they agreed to do an article on human rights. The aim with this was to promote human rights awareness in the community.

My aim was to ensure that my project will be on-going, to teach the children responsibility. To achieve my aim, I needed a cow, to supply daily milk. I needed egg laying chickens, to provide eggs. I needed feed for these animals and vegetable seeds and gardening tools.

With the donations I received from the community and local business, I secured what I needed to launch the project.

The project launch

Firstly, the educators in my school agreed to participate and manage the project. This enabled them to learn of the values I tried to promote at the school.

With the help of the other educators, we decided on a piece of school yard that will be practical to grow the vegetable garden. We decided on an old garage on the school grounds to keep the chickens and cow.

Secondly, we worked out a responsibility schedule and divided the learners into groups, under guidance of each educator. The long term aim here is that the learners can learn to guide themselves in sustaining this project and take responsibility.

To reach this aim, was educating the learners knowledge and understanding of the reason why this program will improve their lives. In the work groups we achieved this aim.

A duties program that was set up helped guide the learners to care for the vegetable garden, feed the cow and chickens in the long term. This helped improved their involvement and promoted a sense of self-empowerment amongst them.

How schools can be able schools care

Through a project like this my school and hopefully community will be encouraged to identify and solve their own needs, in this case nutrition problems, and by this promoting human rights.

The mobilisation of the school structures will therefore be a central part of this strategy. Growth monitoring and other initiatives that promote and protect this project will be actively supported, due to the visual chance that can be seen in my school.

The active and sustained involvement of the learners is critical to the successful implementation of this project. It is unclear how the community would be mobilised and how this involvement would be sustained, due to the poverty and lack of resources in this community.

Objectives

The first objective is to get the project started, by leading by example and to get the school staff involved, to start with a sustainable program that demonstrates the need to care for others.

The second focus is, to get the learners involved, to ensure that this program is sustainable and not a once-off event. A benefit of teaching the learners of this particular right is that it teaches the learners values and responsibility.

This will achieve my overall object; to teach the learners in my school the value of Human Rights and what they can do to realize these rights and improve their own lives.

My project aim was to provide a sustainable nutritional supply to the most vulnerable individuals in a previous disadvantaged community; mobilise all educators as well as learners to take responsibility for improving the nutritional status in their school and creating awareness of human rights

through a needed development strategy, with nutrition surveillance as the primary management and monitoring tool of these values.

The successful implementation of my project will be evaluated according to:

The students will be able to define compassion and self-empowerment

The Students demonstrate being a caring person

There is a change in students grasp of society an responsibly

The empowerment of poor people and previously disadvantaged households

To avoid malnutrition in Children

Creating a sustainable food supply

Conclusion

First, this project must be subject to full transparency. The nutrition development community often subscribes to a general respect for confidentiality as commonly practiced in development circles, in contrast to the full transparency that is a hallmark of the human rights approach. Since empowerment, as a principle of the human rights approach, is impossible without transparency in all school affairs, the community must insist on absolute transparency regarding the project.

Second, the learners must have opportunities to claim their legal human rights related to the right to adequate food from the relevant duty holders.

This can only be achieved, if they invest themselves in this project.

By this they can help develop or strengthen their, by leading by example.

In turn the community will be able to draw inspiration from this, to claim their other relevant rights.