

**REMARKS OF FELISA TIBBITTS, HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION
ASSOCIATES (HREA)**

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Honorable state representations, Council members, colleagues and friends,

I deeply regret that I am not able to join you at this culminating conference on the European Year of Citizenship through Education. I had very much looked forward to participating in enriching discussions about the essential supports for education for democracy and human rights.

Ms. Ólafsdóttir has kindly allowed a brief statement to be read on my behalf, and I thank her for allowing me a few minutes of your time. As my organization, Human Rights Education Associates, is an international NGO that is focused on human rights education and learning, I think that I would like to focus my main comments from a human rights perspective. I understand that I am supposed to offer some “provocative” ideas, so this is my aim.

Democracy Learning

My first set of comments concerns the topic of this panel, which is “democracy learning.” Last year I conducted a literature review on human rights education in schools. I found that human rights education and the associated concept of global citizenship are linked with three related practices: the promotion of the idea of a “shared humanity”, a critique of state power, and skill development related to political action. I would like to remind us to retain these elements in upcoming conversations regarding the promotion of education for democracy and human rights. I elaborate on these briefly now.

Promotion of a “*shared humanity*” is accomplished in human rights education teaching materials through the use of case study examples that present the experiences of others suffering from human rights violations. Vulnerable groups already included in HRE materials used in schools include children in armed conflict or forced labor situations, girls and women, refugees, poor people and minorities, among others. Education for democracy means sensitization to those whose human rights have been severely compromised. Creating a sense of shared humanity is not merely a matter of values, but also the promotion of care and empathy, and even an allowance for outrage.

A second feature of global citizenship promoted by HRE is a *critique of power*. The human rights framework calls us to hold states and duty-bearers accountable for realizing these standards. This awareness cannot be naïve. If we are to educate for democracy and human rights, we need to create awareness about state power and authority – both formal

and tacit. Without understanding how power operates, citizens cannot affect how it is exercised and distributed.

My final point regarding “democracy learning” and human rights is *skill development for social action*. Taking action can involve not only voting and electoral engagement but also community activism. Education for democracy and human rights cannot be afraid to address social change both historically and prospectively. Those of us promoting this form of citizenship education should have special sensitivity to those individuals and groups who are disenfranchised or for whom political processes and social structures have worked less well.

Rights-based Approach to Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights

My second set of comments is in relation to what I will call the “rights-based approach to education for democratic citizenship and human rights.” This approach calls us to not only look at the goals and outcomes of our work but how the work itself is organized and carried out according to human rights principles. I will try to apply this briefly to our collaborative work here through a series of questions.

Principle 1. Express linkages to rights

Questions for us:

Are our educational efforts linked expressively to human rights? Do these efforts include the full range of human rights? Do the human rights that are explored in depth have genuine relevance for needs and issues in our communities, or can these connections be made? Are we willing to move beyond our personal “zone of comfort” in linking our work to human rights values?

Principle 2. Accountability

Do those of us who are government representatives or employed by the state see ourselves as accountable for ensuring education for democracy and human rights? In what ways are we accountable? How can “rights-holders” ensure such accountability?

Principle 3. Empowerment and participation

Let us think for a moment of those we feel responsible towards in terms of guaranteeing education for democracy and human rights. Have we incorporated the ideas of all those who are affected by our policies and activities? Who is not present at this gathering that has a stake in our conversation? If they are not here, or not involved in conversations back home, how can we bring them to the table? How can we facilitate their points of view on the when, how, who and what of education for democracy and human rights?

Principle 4. Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups

Finally, and in relation to the last point, who are the groups that are least likely at the present time to benefit from our programming, and how can we help to ensure their participation? The very groups that enjoy the fewest benefits of “citizenship” – the marginalized, the vulnerable, the discriminated against – are the ones who will benefit most from our educational efforts. How can we identify them, reach out to them, and create educational programs that are genuinely meaningful for them?

I hope that I have given you some food for thought in these words and, once again, I regret that I cannot be with you to engage with you directly in conversation about this important topic. I commend the Council and its member states for organizing this excellent program and I look forward to hearing the results of what will no doubt be fruitful conversation.