

Education: a fundamental right

This resource looks at the history of education in England and India, and relates it to changing concepts of childhood and child rights. It covers part of the history national curriculum requirement regarding British and world study, and can be used to teach citizenship requirements relating to international voluntary groups, the United Nations and human rights.

Changing concepts of childhood and child rights

Children's rights have been viewed in many different ways by people in different times and places. In Europe, the concept of childhood as a distinct stage of life was only developed with the introduction of formal education in the 16th century. In early European society children were viewed simply as miniature adults who were fragile and easily replaced. Improvements in infant mortality around the end of the 18th century led to a population boom, and children began to be seen as useful sources of industrial labour. The introduction of compulsory education in 1880 led to children being seen as burdens rather than as sources of income. The need to support children led to falls in birth rates and family size. Individual children then began to be seen as more important and children began to adopt a central role in the family. Punishment became more important as children began to be seen as innocent but easily corruptible.

In the 20th century, the focus moved towards care and respect for the child. The growing trend is to recognise children as of equal importance to adults and to listen to children's voices. This is clearly shown in the text from the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

"The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects a new vision of the child. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subject of their own rights. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognising children's rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child."

It has been argued that children's rights, and the concept of childhood itself, are Western constructs, but the fact that almost all countries worldwide have signed

the Convention shows there is a great degree of common ground. The fact that so many children are working today (including 2 million in Britain) reflects economic necessity rather than the absence of an understanding of childhood.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1990 the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. It contains 41 articles that lay out the rights that every child under 18 is entitled to. Almost all the countries in the world have signed up to the Convention; the only ones who haven't are the USA and Somalia. Although countries can't be forced to stick to the Convention, it gives people the power to put pressure on governments.

"The convention spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere – without discrimination – have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education and legal, civil and social services. States that are party to the Convention are obliged to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child."

Right to education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights first acknowledged that education was a basic human right in 1948. This right was reinforced in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which spells out the right to education in two of its articles:

Article 28 of the Convention sets out the right to education and the way in which countries should enable the realisation of this right. These methods include compulsory free primary education, accessible general and vocational secondary education, access to

higher education on the basis of ability, measures to improve attendance and drop out rates, and making information and guidance readily available. The article also mentions the need to ensure school discipline respects the child's human dignity and calls for international co-operation, especially to meet the needs of developing countries.

Article 29 mentions the type of education and the need to ensure the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities. It also mentions the development of respect for the child's background, identity and values; human rights and the natural environment. The focus is on the "preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society".

Education promises

World leaders have promised the right to free, quality education for all children for many years and yet promises are frequently broken. In a Conference at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 they said they would achieve universal primary education by 2000, but in 2000 in Dakar they changed the deadline to 2015. They also promised to improve gender equity in education by 2005 and increase levels of adult literacy 50% by 2015. Current trends suggest that the targets will be missed again.

ActionAid and education

ActionAid started out by sponsoring individual children but soon realised the problems with this (restrictions on spending and large administration costs) and so moved on to focus on building schools in poor areas. However, this failed to improve school enrolment or achievement and poor children were excluded as governments increased school fees. ActionAid then began developing non-formal education centres in the poorest communities. These allowed poor and working children to go to school but also enabled governments to escape responsibility. Children also found it difficult to move from non-formal programmes to government schools. It was realised that the real challenge lay in reforming the government system and enabling communities to demand quality education.

ActionAid believes that NGOs have an important role to play in helping communities and governments come up with solutions to the education crisis. Initiated by ActionAid in 1999, Elimu supported the emergence of independent national coalitions in 25 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. The name is taken from a word that means 'learning' in both Swahili and Arabic. Each national alliance or coalition brings

together community groups, teachers' unions, traditional leaders, religious and other organisations, for co-ordinated public action in support of better education. Through building grassroots citizens' movements, pressure can be put on governments and international agencies demanding that they act now to provide free, meaningful, basic education to each and every child and illiterate adult.

Education: a fundamental right

In the UK today we are guaranteed an education for at least 11 years, but for millions of the world's children education is a luxury they cannot afford. Even in the UK, full time education for all children is a relatively recent development.

How things have changed

Compare – the two timelines and identify key differences and similarities.
 Research – the history of education in a third country and compare it to the histories shown here. <http://www.socsci.kun.nl/ped/whp/histeduc/index2.html> is a good starting point.
 Discuss – the reasons for making education compulsory. Why is the school leaving age set at the current level in the UK? What effects would raising it to 18 or lowering it to 14 have?

Education: pain or privilege?

There are probably days when you don't feel like going to school. You may even have come up with excuses not to go. Yet millions of children dream of going to school and don't get the chance. Over 113 million children of primary school age remain out of school and 60% of them are girls. There are 900 million illiterate adults worldwide, and the majority of these are women.

Some children miss out on school because the only schools available to them charge fees to attend, and do not actually provide a decent education, not because their parents don't understand the value of education. They may charge fees that are higher than a poor family's monthly wage, or they may be of such bad quality that children don't even learn how to read and write. Schools may also be several hours walk away, and children may be needed at home during the day to help with farming or household chores.

What is the United Nations (UN)?

The League of Nations was established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles. It aimed "to promote international co-operation and to achieve peace and security." The League of Nations stopped its activities after the Second World War, but it showed that co-operation was possible and prepared the way for the

development of the United Nations.

The name 'United Nations' was first used in 1942 by a group of 26 nations who pledged to continue fighting the Second World War together. The UN charter was drawn up in 1945 by representatives of 50 countries. On 24 October 1946, the UN officially came into existence, and United Nations Day is still celebrated on this date each year. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the UN adopted and proclaimed the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This date is celebrated each year as Human Rights Day. Today there are 191 member countries in the UN General Assembly.

List – the different types of work that you think the UN is involved in.
 Find out more - at <http://www.un.org> or <http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.htm>
 Read - the Declaration of Human Rights at <http://www0.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/declaration/index.asp>
 Read, watch and listen – for mentions of the UN in the news this week.

What are your rights?

Forty percent of the world's population are children, yet they are often forgotten when it comes to making decisions. In 1995, over a quarter of all deaths in the world were of children and 75% of these were under five years old.

In 1990 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was written. It describes the rights that every child under 18 is entitled to. These include the right to: survival; opportunities to learn and develop; family, cultural and social life; protection.

Almost all the countries in the world have signed up to the Convention, the only ones who haven't are the

USA and Somalia. Although its hard to force countries to stick to the Convention, it gives people the power to put pressure on governments.

Read – the Convention at http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/pdf/rights_poster_en.pdf

Discuss - do you think all the rights are equally important or can you put them in a list of importance? What are the differences between rights and wants? How are rights related to responsibilities?

Right to education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights said that education is a basic human right. The Convention on the Rights of the Child describes this right to education and lists the ways in which governments should help. These include providing compulsory free primary education and providing accessible general and vocational secondary education. The Convention says that access to higher education should be on the basis of ability. It also mentions the need to ensure school discipline respects a child's human dignity and calls for international co-operation, especially to meet the needs of developing countries. Another part of the Convention discusses the type of education provided and the need to prepare the child "for responsible life in a free society".

Discuss – who do you think should pay for primary, secondary and higher education? Why do you think this?

List – school punishments that you think respect dignity and those that do not. What are your views on corporal punishment?

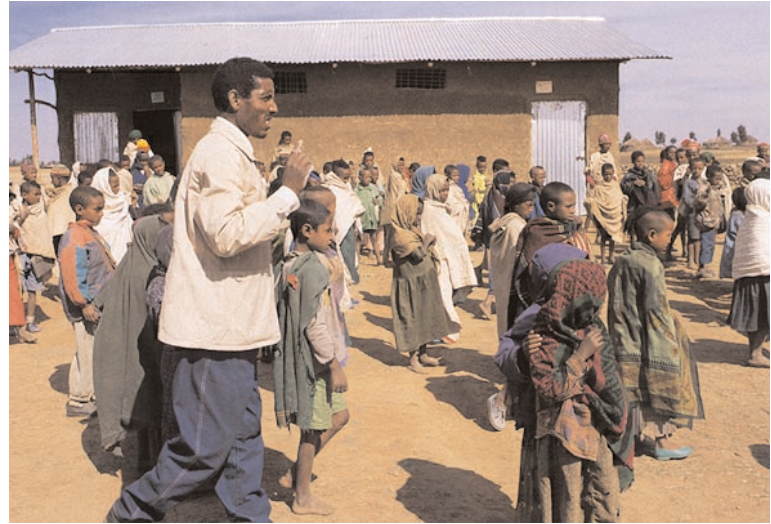
Voluntary groups and education

Different voluntary groups try to support universal education in a variety of ways.

Discuss – the advantages and disadvantages of each of the different tactics below.

- 1 Sponsor individual children to let them go to school
- 2 Build schools in poor areas
- 3 Provide non-formal education for children who can't go to school
- 4 Campaign for rich governments to support education in poorer countries
- 5 Encourage poor people to ask their governments for quality education.

Read – about ActionAid's education work at <http://www.actionaid.org>



Education

England

- Middle ages** Sons of rich families were taught Latin and 'life skills' eg sword fighting.
- 1385** English grammar schools started to teach English instead of French.
- 18th C** Children of poor families who 'deserved' it were educated in Christian religion and morals. 'Dame schools' run by elderly women taught reading to younger children. Voluntary, fee-paying day schools taught older boys.
- 1844** The Ragged School Union was formed to provide schooling for those unable to afford fees.
- 1870** School boards were introduced to provide elementary education for all children.
- 1876** London University started to give degrees to women.
- 1880** Elementary education was made compulsory between the ages of 5 and 10. Classes were taught by 'pupil teachers', an idea from Indian schools.
- 1893** The school leaving age was raised to 11.
- 1899** The school leaving age was raised to 12.
- 1902** School boards were abolished and replaced with Local Education Authorities (LEAs).
- 1906** The School Meals Act allowed LEAs to provide free food.
- 1918** School was made compulsory until age 14 and fees were abolished in elementary schools.
- 1920** Oxford University started to give degrees to women.
- 1944** The school leaving age was raised to 15. Pupils sat an exam at age 11 (the 11+) which placed them in either grammar, technical or secondary modern schools.
- 1946** The School Milk Act ordered the issue of daily free milk to all schoolchildren.
- 1948** Cambridge University started to give degrees to women.
- 1964** The newly elected labour government instructed all LEAs to introduce comprehensive schools to replace the three tier system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools.
- 1970** The school leaving age was raised to 16. Comprehensive schools were introduced.
- 1971** Free school milk was abolished.
- 1986** Corporal punishment was banned in all state schools.
- 1988** The National Curriculum was made law.
- 1998** The National Literacy Strategy was introduced into primary schools.
- 2000** Citizenship was introduced as a curriculum subject.

India

- Before MA** Pupils chosen from the aristocracy were taught Hindu traditions and 'ideal' behaviour.
- Middle ages** Islamic schools were introduced to provide an education for boys.
- 16th C** Islamic universities were introduced.
- 1600** The British East India Company (BEIC) was set up as a trading company. It later became a political power.
- 1698** BEIC set up some charity schools, mainly for Anglo-Indian children.
- 18th C Early** Village schools taught rural boys the three 'Rs'. The BEIC started to educate some wealthy Indian children to prepare them for state positions. A broad classical curriculum was taught.
- 19th C** English speaking schools were opened by Christian missionaries. Indigenous education continued in village schools. There were no printed books and younger boys wrote in the dust. Older pupils were paired with younger ones in order to teach them. This monitor system was later adopted in Britain.
- 1813** An Education Act compelled the BEIC to take responsibility for the education of Indian children.
- 1822** An Education Report showed about a quarter of boys were attending school but very few girls. More girls' schools were opened after this.
- 1835** A new policy encouraged English language education but some of the Indian population objected.
- 1838** A system of testing teachers and payment by results was introduced. District English schools were set up and entrance exams introduced.
- 1854** Universities were established to teach students the professions of medicine, law and engineering.
- 1920-2** The 'National Schools Movement' set up schools to educate pupils in their own language. Gandhi was involved in this movement.
- 1937** Gandhi proposed universal education between the ages of 7 and 14.
- 1943** Primary education was made compulsory and was supposed to be free, but universal attendance did not happen.
- 1947** India won independence from Britain.
- 1979** An education programme was set up for the poorest families.
- 1986** The National Policy of Education recommended universal enrolment up to age 14, and a national curriculum and testing scheme.
- 1992** The Indian Supreme Court declared primary education to be a fundamental right.
- 1993** The government attempted to make primary education universal and a media campaign promoted education for all.
- 2000** Basic education was made a constitutional right after a large campaign.