Human Rights Council

Parental rights in the determination of the education curriculum

Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2023

"let us sing songs of freedom together"

Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Issue: Parental rights in the determination of the education curriculum

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

As societies strive to provide quality education, questions arise regarding the extent to which parents should shape their children's educational experience. The complex interplay between parents' rights to speak up for their children's educational needs and educational institutions' rights to determine what is taught revolves around this committee's topic. When confronted with controversial issues like sex education or religious studies, this delicate interplay between parental rights in education and the rights of educational institutions frequently reaches its peak complexity. Divergent cultural and ethnic perspectives in these situations highlight the complex difficulties of integrating various points of view into educational programs. With the world in a delicate phase of innovation and evolution—in an era of unprecedented transformation, we must ask ourselves: When should parents' concerns for educational content be heard, and when should they be ignored?

Definition of Key Terms

Parental Rights:

The legal and moral rights granted to parents or legal guardians to make decisions and have authority over matters concerning their children's upbringing, including education.

Education Curriculum:

The planned set of courses, subjects, and learning activities designed to be taught in schools or educational institutions. It outlines the content, objectives, and methods of instruction for students.

Inclusive Education:

An educational approach that aims to provide equal opportunities and support for all students, including those with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs. It promotes an environment that respects and accommodates individual differences.

Ideological Bias:

The inclination or preference towards a particular set of ideas, beliefs, or values that may influence educational content or teaching methods. It is often a subject of concern when discussing parental rights in determining the education curriculum.

Cultural Sensitivity:

The awareness, respect, and understanding of different cultural backgrounds, practices, and perspectives. In the context of education, cultural sensitivity ensures that curriculum content and teaching methods are inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural identities.

General Overview

Shaping Education: A Complex Dialogue

Parental rights in the education curriculum have regularly been considered an unconditional privilege. As parents often have unique insights into their children's educational needs, values, and cultural backgrounds, their involvement would undoubtedly be beneficial to educational curricula. However, there are issues where parental views conflict with governmental views, such as the topics of gender identity and sex education.

Several international organizations have developed standards and guidelines that relate to this committee's topic. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the rights of children in education and steps that should be taken to protect students, including protection from (abusive) parents. Similarly, Article 26.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." UNESCO has also issued guidelines for inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between parents, schools, and communities.

As mentioned in the British Journal of Educational Studies, "the invocation of a 'right' in moral or political argument is essentially persuasive". Considering this and the current state of the world, we cannot be truly certain of what *is* right. Hence, we cannot adequately validate every claim that is made whilst exercising parental rights in education. One key challenge is finding a balance between parental input and the need for standardized and comprehensive education, a standard that the international community already lacks with its inclusion of so many different education systems.

Historical Evolution: Striking a Balance

In order to impart knowledge, morals, and talents to their children, parents' roles have always been incredibly important. The majority of education was informal and taught at home, meaning that had a direct impact on what their children learned. As formal education systems evolved, courses became standardized and were under institutional control. To ensure that their children receive an education that is consistent with their values and worldviews, parents have frequently stated that they would like to be involved in curriculum development.

As such institutions evolved, so did the acceptance of certain topics. In July of 2023, Canada amended Policy 713 (the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity policy) to forbid teachers in New Brunswick from using the preferred pronouns of students under the age of 16 without the consent of their parents. This interaction between institutional rules and parental rights mirrors larger discussions about the goals and purview of education. Educational institutions influence students' values, attitudes, and understanding of other cultures in addition to disseminating academic knowledge. Schools turn into forums where divergent points of view converge as societies struggle with shifting conceptions of gender identity, inclusiveness, and diversity.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America (USA)

The USA (particularly the Republican Party) recognizes the importance of parental rights and emphasizes how parents should have a say in their children's education from the subjects they are taught to the books they read. The USA advocates for strong parental involvement when it comes to this committee's topic.

Sweden

Sweden is known for its support of child rights and the provision of inclusive education. Placing importance on parental involvement in education while ensuring a balanced approach that takes into account the rights and well-being of children, it is important to argue for a balance between parental rights and the best interests of students.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's culture influences parental rights in the education curriculum through religious and cultural considerations. With a clear interest in education, Saudi Arabia has prosecuted parents who refused to send their young children to school.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

International cooperation in education, research, culture, and communication is encouraged by UNESCO, a special UN agency. UNESCO has participated in educational projects and created structures and norms to guarantee equitable access to high-quality education. It emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in education and encourages dialogue and cooperation between parents, schools, and communities.

Timeline of Events

1990	Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the UNGA
2005	UNESCO issues the "Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All"
2006	UNHRC holds a thematic discussion on the right to education and parental involvement
2010	Committee on the Rights of the Child publishes General Comment No. 1 on the Aims of Education
2014	The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education releases a report on the role of parents in education

Possible Solutions

Establish Clear International Guidelines for Parental Involvement: Recommend or outline the appropriate level of parental involvement in determining what may or may not be included in the education curriculum and encourage countries to amend their current national guidelines (if any) to strike a balance between educational objectives and parental rights. These guidelines should be considerate of cultural backgrounds and the inclusivity of human rights, as they would provide a framework for defining the boundaries of parental involvement in education, striking a balance between educational objectives and parental rights.

Implementation of Parental Education Programs: Promote the implementation of Parental Education Programs to ensure that parents fully understand the educational system and the reasoning behind the inclusion of certain aspects such as religion, world history, and different perspectives. These programs should equip parents with the ability to actively engage with their local schools to foster a collaborative approach to learning, as the programs would empower parents with a better understanding of the educational system and the rationale behind its specific contents. Parents who are worried about the curriculum and teachers who are looking to forge closer bonds with parents will find this option especially helpful.

Promotion of Open Dialogue and Consultation: Emphasize the importance of open communication between school boards and parents nationally and locally. Encourage the establishment of regular sessions where parents can voice their concerns and opinions regarding their local education curriculum and allow for an inclusive decision-making process. This solution fosters inclusivity and a collaborative decision-making process, guaranteeing that parents can express their concerns and viewpoints and gives them a say in how the curriculum is developed. This approach would incredibly benefit parents, as it directly offers them a voice in curriculum development and strengthens community relations.

Sources

Gambino, L. (2023, March 24). *'Parents' Rights': Republicans Wage Education Culture War as 2024 Looms*. The Guardian. http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/24/republicans-parents-rights-education-culture-war

Gunnarsson, L., Nordenstam, U., & Korpi, B. M. (1999, December). *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden*. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/education/school/2479039.pdf

Nabbout, M. (2018, September 4). *Saudi Arabia to prosecute parents who don't send their kids to school*. StepFeed. https://stepfeed.com/saudi-arabia-to-prosecute-parents-who-don-t-send-their-kids-to-school-2023

United Nations. (1990, September 2). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

United Nations. (2005). *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140224

United Nations. (2020). *Special Rapporteur on the right to education*. https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-education

United Nations. (2001, April 17) *General Comment No. 1*, 26th Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/general-comment-no-1-aims-education-article-29-2001

United Nations General Assembly. (1948, December 10). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

Jonathan, R. (1989). Choice and Control in Education: Parental Rights, Individual Liberties and Social Justice. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *37*(4), 321–338. https://doi.org/10.2307/3121343

Dubow, E. F., Boxer, P., & Huesmann, L. R. (2009). Long-term Effects of Parents' Education on Children's Educational and Occupational Success: Mediation by Family Interactions, Child Aggression, and Teenage Aspirations. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 55*(3), 224–249. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23096257

Ceka, A., & Murati, R. (2016). The Role of Parents in the Education of Children. *Journal of Education and practice*, 7(5), 61-64. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1092391

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3–42. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001003

Yousif, N. (2023, July 3). *Policy 713: LGBT School Policy Change causes political turmoil in Canada*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-66061514