

A democratic school gives pupils power over the administrative aspects which are directly relevant to them, for instance the purchase of learning materials. It enables pupils to participate in the decision-making process of the administration of the individual school. It also gives them influence over the political decisions which determine the frame-work of the school's overall activities.

It goes without saying that physical abuse violates the spirit of democracy. It is also important that there is the possibility of appeal against repressive decisions. A pupil who has been expelled from school should be able to have his or her case reviewed. A good school should always endeavour to be a model of fairness.

The evaluations in Sweden have given a mixed feedback, but no one has concluded that the direction itself is misguided; it is more a question of refining the approach. But how relevant is this experience to other cultures? There were no differences in the Swedish evaluations between the responses from immigrant children and others, but that does not prove that the experience can be universally applied.

One conclusion in Sweden, which appears to be generally applicable, however, is that the knowledge and attitudes of the educators themselves appear to decide the pace. Progress in any country is unlikely to be faster than the teachers can manage or accept. They are of course also influenced by the community in which they live. Here is an obstacle but also an opportunity. Teachers, after all, are progressives in many societies.

8. The Role of Teachers, Parents and the Community

Teachers could find their job description in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its principles about non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, child development and respecting the views of the child are all crucial ingredients in the conduct of educators. Hardly any

profession is so important in realising the idea of children's rights. It would, indeed, be interesting if teachers developed a more detailed interpretation of the message of the Convention for themselves, a teachers' version. This could be the basis for a manual for teacher education and training.

Obviously, the Convention encourages the changing role of educators from 'lecturers' to 'facilitators'. Their skill is to encourage and assist pupils in the learning process, rather than to know all the facts. It is to help introduce democratic attitudes and prevent violence. It is also to make the school relate to the community and the outside world in a constructive way.

Teachers represent adult society and its pledge through the Convention, to young people. It is one of the political contradictions of today that so much emphasis is given to the importance of education and so little is done to give teachers status, support and reward. Their advice is too often ignored, or not even asked for, when decisions are taken about educational policy. They are typically underpaid.

In Cambodia, for instance, the average monthly salary for a teacher is USD 20, on which it is impossible to live. They are therefore forced to have other jobs as well. This in turn affects the quality of education, even if many teachers try to give their best in the classroom. The situation is not very different in a number of other poor countries. Even in the richer countries teachers have a relatively low status. One consequence seems to be a reduction in their capacity to change and adjust to societal developments.

Parents are given a key responsibility in the Convention for the upbringing of children. They should not be seen as bystanders in the world of education; every school would benefit from a constructive relationship with its parents. In fact, good schools tend to treat them and other family members as 'members' or partners of the school. Such schools usually function better than others.