

REIMAGINING EDUCATION THROUGH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

online
Conference

Concept Note



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Over the past couple of years, a growing disconnect between students and the way they learn in schools has been observed. The results of the survey conducted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education on students' views of their education echo one shared message: children and young people feel unheard by their schools and broader education systems.

While more than 70% of the students in the network would choose to continue attending school, they also express a clear need for structural change and an education that is more humane, relevant, and respectful of who they are.

This call from students converges with the growing academic field of human rights education, which not only promotes learning about human rights but also emphasizes the realization of students' rights within education itself. Rather than treating children human rights solely as a subject to be taught, this approach seeks to ensure that learners' rights are respected, protected, and enacted throughout educational settings, shaping both teaching and learning processes and affirming students' right to participate meaningfully in, and co-construct, their education.



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Children's right to participation and decision-making has likewise gained increasing recognition in international educational policy, reflecting a growing understanding of children as individuals with their own rights, perspectives, and agency. One prominent example is UNESCO's global student consultation on education beyond 2030, open to children and young people from ages 11-17, to help co-shape future education.

Yet an important question remains:

How is children's right to participation realised in their school environments?



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Children have many different roles in contemporary societies, such as citizens, family members, patients, athletes, students, and many more. In each of these roles, they have the right to express their views and to have those views taken seriously. In schools, however, meaningful student participation often remains difficult to achieve. Teachers and school leaders may face barriers such as rigid classroom structures, limited time for non-instructional activities, top-down decision-making, and insufficient opportunities for collaboration (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007), resulting in a missed opportunity for students to experience their right to be heard in the environment that they spent most of their time during their childhood: their school!

¹ Bäckman, E., & Trafford, B. (2007). Democratic governance of schools. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://theewc.org/resources/democratic-governance-of-schools/>