

**HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND MALAYSIA:  
FAITH AND SECULAR SCHOOLS' KNOWLEDGE AND  
PRACTICE.**

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work have been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(signed).....

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Associate Professor Cathie Holden and Dr Gill Haynes, who closely supervised my work, for their time and effort.

My research could not have been done without great support from all the Research Student Unit staff and my colleagues at the Graduate School of Education Exeter.

I would also like to thank the University Malaysia Sarawak for sponsoring my postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, children and parents, who have been my inspiration.

I also hope my contribution to this field is useful.

## **Abstract**

This thesis reports the findings of a study into human rights education (HRE) in four secondary schools in England and Malaysia. A key aim of the research was to investigate the extent to which faith may impact upon the delivery of HRE. For the purposes of comparison, one faith school and one secular school were sampled in each country. In each school, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the curriculum coordinator and teachers responsible for delivering HRE and questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews were carried out with students in Years 8 and 9. Data were gathered in relation to: the nature and positioning of human rights education in each school; teachers' levels of confidence in delivering HRE and their pedagogical strategies; and the students' knowledge of human rights principles and the extent to which this knowledge shaped their attitudes and behaviour.

Findings from this study indicate that the teaching of human rights education is addressed differently in schools, depending on their staffing, curriculum priorities and religious status. In the English faith school, HRE was taught within the RE curriculum and was seen as a means to teach about Christianity; in the secular school, the emphasis was on human rights as universal values, delivered through the Citizenship curriculum. In both schools in Malaysia, where Islamic principles strongly underpin the national curriculum, human rights education was delivered as part of the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, but taught by RE teachers. Common concerns amongst teachers in both countries and both types of school related to appropriate training, sufficient curriculum time and confidence to teach about controversial issues. While there were school-level factors influencing delivery, these could not be disassociated from the wider socio-cultural, political and educational policy contexts.

The findings in relation to students' knowledge and practice of human rights also reflected the different contexts of each school and country. The key influences appeared less to do with religion (in that this did not appear to be a key factor in the differing responses from the two English schools) than with cultural, social and economic factors, though Islam underpins these in Malaysia. In general, English students had a deeper understanding of human rights but there was some dislocation between understanding

and actual attitudes and behaviour. In Malaysia, a much newer democracy, levels of understanding about human rights were somewhat lower but there were many issues on which English and Malaysian students expressed similar views. The most noticeable exception was in relation to respect for individuals regardless of their sexuality.

This was a small study and it is therefore not possible to generalise from its findings. However, it has raised some important issues about the teaching of HRE in both England and Malaysia. In both countries there needs to be further consideration of where in the curriculum HRE is best positioned, in order to ensure that it receives sufficient curriculum time and resources. More and better targeted in-service education is required to support teachers of human rights, with particular emphasis on the pedagogy of teaching controversial issues. In both countries it is important that teachers and students work together on understanding and practising the principles underpinning human rights.

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## **Abbreviations**

ACT	The Association for Citizenship Teaching
AST	Advanced Skills Teachers
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SUHAKAM	Malaysian Commission of Human Rights
TDA	Training and Development Agency