

Exploring Humanitarian Law:
Preparing Teachers for a Pivotal Role

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Abstract

Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) is a programme of the International Committee of the Red Cross designed for secondary schools worldwide. The goals are that students develop a humanitarian perspective, an understanding of the rules of armed conflict, and a moral voice that will speak out when human dignity is threatened. The most challenging, though essential, aspect of the programme is its active pedagogy. The active pedagogy, in turn, requires a serious effort in teacher training. By the end of 2004, EHL was being piloted or implemented in 93 countries. In many of them, lecturing is the traditional mode of teaching. Although formal evaluation is not scheduled until 2007, formative evaluation reports indicate that teachers are learning and using the active pedagogies and students are gaining the hoped for perspective and even showing some behaviours that evidence the perspective. This article focuses on the teacher training program—its rationale, process, and requirements -- because if widespread implementation is to succeed, resources for teacher training must be made available.

Why teach humanitarian law to adolescents?

Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) is an education programme¹ about international humanitarian law – the rules of war – designed for worldwide use with secondary school students. The subject of international humanitarian law is so absent in schools, so little known to the general population that even the name sounds abstract and unfamiliar.

International humanitarian law (IHL), whose most familiar component is the Geneva Conventions, has long been disseminated to governments and their military branches, so why now a curriculum on IHL for adolescent civilians?

- As conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq attest, more civilians than ever are impacted by armed conflict.
- Blurring of who is a combatant and who is not is more of a problem than ever.
- The aftermath of war is often more devastating than the war itself.
- Young people are more likely than before to be directly involved in armed conflict, as victims or soldiers or peacekeepers.

¹ Developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross in cooperation with Education Development Center, Inc. Published in 2001.

- Today's media constantly and graphically make young people aware of global violence.

The EHL curriculum offers a humanitarian perspective on human dignity, the rules of war, ensuring justice, the aftermath of war, and chains of consequences. Young people need to know and understand the reasons for the minimum rules that states have agreed to respect in times of conflict. These rules allow youth to measure current events against the principle of humanity rather than political and economic criteria alone, and offer evidence of a universal standard that may help them resist feelings of impotence and indifference in the face of world events. These ideas are critical to preparing the next generation to be citizens of the world.

In their daily lives, young people need to be aware of the humanitarian perspective so that they may contribute to easing tensions in their own communities, so that they learn to reject acts that take account of only the end to be achieved and not the means, so that they learn that, even in the heat of battle, not everything is permitted and that the dignity – the justice – of a cause can never be defended by acts of barbarity any more than a worthwhile win at games can be achieved by cheating or humiliating the opponent.

Exploring Humanitarian Law is taught in a variety of settings around the world. By the end of 2004, almost 6,000 teachers in 93 countries had been trained to teach EHL. They include 313 in Asia, 550 in Western Europe, 1,517 in Central and Eastern Europe, 782 in the Americas, 1,066 in the Middle East and North Africa, and 1,673 in Africa.

While a formal, transnational evaluation will not be undertaken until 2007, formative evaluation with a set of teacher and student protocols is carried out continually, in teacher workshops and school classrooms throughout the world. When teachers and students report effects of the programme, they often comment on behaviours, which is interesting because compared to knowledge and attitudes, behavioural changes are considered most difficult to effect and to measure. For example, from different areas of the world, come reports that students and teachers show more respect for each other, show enhanced skills in communicating among themselves, manage conflicts better, and even bring some of these achievements home. These may simply be the enthusiastic reports that surface and

are remembered in initial evaluations and we are eager to see if such changes hold up in a more comprehensive evaluation.

What are the goals of EHL?

Developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in cooperation with Education Development Center, the EHL curriculum aims for students to develop:

- An understanding of the humanitarian perspective that underlies international humanitarian law
- An understanding of the rules of war and the complexity of maintaining a humanitarian perspective in war
- A moral voice that will promote a humanitarian perspective, fostering solidarity with people whose human dignity is threatened.

Clearly, EHL calls for rather complex understandings. In addition, the aim is that these understandings last lifelong, and that they be applied in life's difficult circumstances.

To achieve these goals, students and teachers together become engaged in the activities of a five-module curriculum, which begins with exploring human dignity and what it means to have a humanitarian perspective, then moves to examining the legal limits in armed conflict and the dilemmas of carrying out the laws in action, goes on to considering the aftermath of war and the resources needed to repair the devastation, and ends with asking what actions youth can take. The modules are:

- Introductory exploration
- Module 1: The humanitarian perspective
- Module 2: Limits in armed conflict
- Module 3: The law in action
- Module 4: Ensuring justice
- Module 5: Responding to the consequences of war
- Closing exploration

Each module, composed of several activities (called “explorations”), poses one or more questions such as: What are your images of armed conflict? What is human dignity? What is the nature of humanitarian acts? What limits are needed in armed conflict and why? What dilemmas do combatants face? How can justice be achieved? What are the consequences of war? What can you do to make a difference?

To achieve the learning goals of *Exploring Humanitarian Law*, students explore these questions, analyze case studies or dilemmas that often have no single right answer, make

choices, discuss their views and give evidence for them. The explorations provide stories, case studies, films, dilemmas and photographs, which stimulate students to reflect on key ideas. EHL is not a rote programme in which students simply memorize the Geneva Conventions and reproduce them on a test. EHL requires a different kind of teaching, which, in turn, requires a different type of teacher training.

“The Blindfolded Captive”: a class discussion

In a senior high school class in *Exploring Humanitarian Law*, students are looking at a photo of a captured soldier. Blindfolded, the captive is seated in the midst of four soldiers who are smoking and casually keeping their rifles ready. After the students comment on the risks to the human dignity of the captive, the teacher asks,

How is the human dignity of the capturers at risk?

Students offer observations, observations that show their insight into a conquering soldier’s dilemma.

He’s caught between two walls, sir. [Teacher: In what way?] One, sir, he should follow his orders, and one of morals, sir. Not killing people and such things.

...implying that you don’t value another person’s life. You’re implying you’re an animal, you do not have feelings of how another person is feeling.

Then a third student disagrees:

I’m sorry but I have to disagree with [the previous student], sir. When he says that if you are human, you should have human values. I mean, being a soldier, you know what you expect and before you go to war you are taught that you kill.... Why should you think about human dignity and having to save someone’s life?... Then be a doctor or something else. [Teacher: Are soldiers not human beings?] Yes they are human beings but they forget all about human dignity. They focus on what is going to happen. Fire, explosions, and all.... It’s not easy for a man to kill a man. It’s not. They’re human beings, but they’re facing a very terrible situation. So I don’t think they have time to think.

After this discussion, the teacher will ask students to propose what they believe should be the rules of war. The interchange has brought out the crucial insight that in war, soldiers are at the mercy of frightening and unpredictable circumstances and powerful emotions--an insight that leads easily to recognition of the need for rules that guide behaviour in war.

This classroom was in Soweto, South Africa. Students were involved in one of the 20 EHL “explorations”. Similar classroom discussions are taking place in the 93 countries in which ministries of education have agreed to pilot or implement EHL as part of the secondary school curriculum. What this classroom and many others have in common is that before the program, lecturing was the predominant mode of teaching. It is new for many teachers to hear students addressing each other’s comments, to wait through silences, to not have the answers. When teachers view this “blindfolded-captive” discussion on video in the teacher workshop, many doubt that their own students would be capable of having such a discussion. Teachers fear that their students will either all talk at once and become unruly or not talk at all. When they examine the teacher’s interventions, they are surprised at how little he says.

What training do teachers need to be able to “host” a thoughtful class discussion?

The goals of the teacher training programme are largely the same as those of the curriculum itself. In order for teachers to teach their students, they, too, need an understanding of the humanitarian perspective that underlies international humanitarian law, an understanding of the rules and complexity of maintaining a humanitarian perspective in war, and a moral voice that will promote the humanitarian perspective, fostering solidarity with people who are vulnerable. Many EHL teachers also need to expand their teaching repertoire and practice methods that may be new to them. This expansion of repertoire extends to new ways to assess their students’ understanding of the key EHL concepts and questions.

To carry out these goals, EHL has designed a teacher training programme of ten workshops that introduce teachers to the concepts, methods, and exploring perspective of EHL. Usually supervised by a master trainer, the workshops are an opportunity for teachers to discuss substantive issues, practice a new set of teaching and assessment skills, adapt lesson plans to their particular classroom situation, and establish a community of practice with the other teachers.

Each workshop focuses on particular concepts in the modules as well as on specific teaching techniques. A master trainer facilitates the introductory workshop. Thereafter, participants themselves take responsibility for leading parts of the following sessions, and the master trainer becomes an advisor. They lead discussions of videotapes of actual classroom experience, and guide their peers on how to apply the activity in their classrooms. In Yemen, for instance, according to the regional advisor for the Middle East and North Africa, teacher trainers introduce each EHL module and teach a sample lesson from it to the participating teachers. After observing the examples, the teachers in groups of five, deliver lessons to their peers, using the different strategies: discussion, brainstorming, dilemmas, role play, and working in small groups.

Like most students, teachers learn by doing; hence, the activities they explore during their workshops will tend to be the ones they use in class. The teacher training programme requires that teachers engage one another in discussion, role play, and dilemma analysis of the materials. In this way they practice the skills they will need in the classroom. They examine, for example, the photograph of the blindfolded captive, and do the preparation exercises that actually precede discussions such as the one quoted earlier. Like their students, they will first write down their ideas on the questions about human dignity, then defend their views in a small group – before discussing the feelings and thoughts of the captives and capturers in the larger workshop group. *“The photo and the discussion on it was wonderful,”* reflected a teacher in a workshop. *“I never knew that so much information could be taken out of a photo.”* Going step-by-step through the photo examination and writing activities reassures new teachers that, with proper preparation, their students too, might have such a discussion.

The EHL learning goals call for an active pedagogy. Also termed “active learning”, “student-centered learning”, “participatory learning”, or “experiential learning”, active pedagogy includes activities such as discussion, taking the perspectives of others, role playing, small-group work, brainstorming, reflective writing, and dilemma analysis. Active learning is well-documented in psychological literature as helping students to question and possibly to change their perceptions; to develop skills that are useful lifelong, such as bringing evidence to bear on a topic; and to internalize what they have learned, so that they apply it to their daily lives. Why? As the “blindfolded captive”

example shows, the active pedagogy in EHL helps students to learn new perspectives, develop their own opinions, articulate their ideas, and have a sounding board. In class they learn how to give evidence for their views, argue in a respectful way, and refine their own opinions. In addition, active pedagogy is very appropriate for content that is evolving. International humanitarian law is not static; it deals with the constantly changing nature of war and armed conflict, and as a subject matter lends itself particularly well to thoughtful debate and alternative interpretations.

Learning the art of exploring

The approach of the EHL curriculum is one of “exploring.” A class, guided by its teacher, reasons and develops answers together. EHL teachers need to learn the art of exploring. Exploring implies that, although there are guideposts, we are in somewhat unfamiliar territory and are often seeking new or better answers. Students may go down different paths and arrive at different types of answers. Sometimes there is no single right answer; sometimes it takes the diversity of a group to develop solutions. Helping students to practice these skills requires new behaviors on the part of teachers. Teachers are exploring perceptions, attitudes, and content along with their students. This is a new experience for most teachers, who, after all, are trained to be experts in a particular subject area. The teacher’s role is to mentor students in ways to explore, not necessarily to have all the answers.

The “exploring perspective” is one of EHL’s most important yet challenging aspects for teachers to learn and to understand. There are often no simple answers to the complex issues raised by the subject of international humanitarian law. Thus students and teachers need to approach the curriculum in a manner different from the usual classroom practice. As the Asian regional advisor and master trainer put it:

The whole idea of exploring itself is different. ...We have to acknowledge that we are exploring together. You need to undergo the [teacher-training] programme to appreciate the materials, the methodology and content; the understanding of the programme would be compromised if you don’t undergo it. With [one country’s] participants, we saw that they were not very keen initially to participate fully in the explorations. It was more “Let us know what’s there and we’ll be able to manage it.” That tells you that they were not very comfortable in exploring the materials. As time goes by, at the end of the session, they begin to see the value of

it. It's important that they go through it and if they don't fully go through the whole 5 days, they will not understand the whole notion of exploring. Again, it is the honesty of the journey. You have to be very honest with things in EHL, you find that there are a lot of discussions that take place which require going very deep....

Since the active pedagogy and the attitude of exploring clearly demand a serious effort in teacher training, it is incumbent to ask, how valid is the use of active pedagogy? Active pedagogy reflects three key findings in learning research, that are summarized in the book *How People Learn*²:

- (1) The importance of understanding and engaging students' preconceptions about how the world works:
"Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. And teachers must draw them out and work with the preconceptions. If students' initial understandings are not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for the purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom."
- (2) The need for a conceptual framework:
"...students must... understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and... organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application."
- (3) The need to monitor one's own understanding:
"A 'metacognitive' approach (and here metacognitive means, for example, monitoring one's own understanding, checking new information against the old, seeing analogies) to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them."

Active pedagogy is critical to implementing these three ideas. Below are examples of how they are used in EHL.

(1) Understanding and engaging preconceptions

Exploring Humanitarian Law begins by helping teachers and students to make explicit their own preconceptions about the subject. The introductory lesson poses a series of questions for students to discuss: What is human dignity? How would you define it?

² *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, Washington, DC, 2000 ISBN 0-309-07036-8 National Academy Press, Washington D.C., 2000.

What images come to mind when you hear the word ‘war’ or ‘armed conflict’? What wars are currently going on in the world today? Can attacking civilians ever be justified? How? Why do children take part in armed conflict? How should prisoners be treated? Do you think it makes sense to have laws to limit the suffering in armed conflict? Why or why not?

Similarly, teachers need to understand their own preconceptions both about the questions raised by the course and about the teaching methods necessary to teach the course. The teacher training programme is based on the idea that the best way for teachers to understand the EHL curriculum is to actually work with the materials and concepts with their peers in exactly the same way that they will later do with their students. Thus, in the first teacher-training workshop, participants divide up the questions (such as, “What is human dignity?”), choose one, and conduct a mini-discussion with the other teachers. The teachers explore the issues as adults (as opposed to impersonating adolescents) and thus begin to clarify for themselves how they think about issues of the course, in a subject area that the vast majority have never studied. *“I got much knowledge about IHL,”* said a Thai teacher after the introductory workshop. *“I felt worried about what I will tell my students about the legal killing in the wartime, because in my religion, Buddhism, killing is a sin. But I am very happy to know that education is prevention and if war occurs, [to know] what is the right thing to do.”* The discussion helped this teacher to understand her preconceptions about issues raised in the curriculum; and it helped her see the value of teaching about humanitarian law, even though the law accepts that in war combatants have the right to kill other combatants.

Through the training, teachers also begin to practice specific teaching methods that may be unfamiliar to them. Then they have an opportunity to watch and analyze films of actual classroom experience of teachers working with the same methods and materials in class, as they did with the Soweto classroom discussion cited earlier. Finally, they have an opportunity to assess their own learning and design a lesson plan on how to apply the explorations in their own classrooms.

(2) The need for a conceptual framework

The EHL curriculum uses organizing concepts that go beyond a single subject area. For example, the materials repeatedly invoke a systemic concept that draws on the social, biological, and physical sciences as well as on history and philosophy – “chain of consequences”. When students are seeking to understand which actions are violations of IHL and why, they are asked to trace possible chains of consequences of outlawed actions. Consider, for example, the mounting of a gun on a hospital roof by defenders of a territory: one consequence students may suggest is that the attackers will shoot at the hospital, perhaps setting it on fire, which then can lead to lack of medical resources for all and further injury for those who are already hospitalized, which then can lead to outrage on the part of the defenders, which then can lead to the defenders’ disregarding humanitarian norms in their treatment of the attackers. The news that the attackers shot at or destroyed hospitals can travel fast and affect the character of the war.

A chain of consequences can take more than one direction. For example, a different first consequence to the mounting of a gun on the hospital could have been an internal fight, with some of the defenders objecting and forcing the others to take it down, thus starting a totally different chain. The concept of chain-of consequences has broad use-- students learn to use it to explore and remember many phenomena related to humanitarian behaviour (or the lack of it) in war: the chain of consequences of an individual humanitarian act—such as sheltering a vulnerable family, the chain of consequences of someone stepping on a landmine, the chain of consequences of a village’s loss of a resource such as its water supply.

Student learning around a concept, such as “humanitarian act” or “chain of consequences”, will be most memorable if students do the activities on their own (or in small groups). For example, the realization that one violation leads to another is more powerful when students discover the pattern through making concrete predictions of what will happen next rather than being simply told. In addition, by working out the chain, they discover along the way other violations of IHL. But teachers must not only hold back while students do the activities; they must also intercede when students are stalled. Thus, they themselves must have a flexible and lively enough understanding of the

concepts to help students along – envisioning diverse situations of war, suggesting relevant stories students may have read or films they may have seen, and finally, helping students make applications to their own lives. This understanding comes from participation in the teacher workshops, where teachers discuss the same issues and develop the same chains of consequences among themselves that they will explore later with their students. In fact, according to the Asian regional advisor, the more experienced teachers tend to go deeper into the substance, because in order to lead a thoughtful classroom discussion, they need to know the ramifications that the discussion might take. For the less experienced teachers, the methods themselves tend to be the immediate focus

(3) The need to monitor one's own understanding

There are many opportunities in the EHL programme for students to reflect on and try out what they are learning. The students in the “blindfolded captive” discussion in Soweto were doing just that – sharing their views of the situation, and thus clarifying to themselves and others where they stood on the issue and what reasoning lay behind their viewpoint.

Other ways to monitor personal understanding involve applying one's understanding in a variety of ways; participatory learning activities provide continual opportunities to do this. Consider, for example, students' learning about the rules of international humanitarian law. First, before they even see rules, they are asked to propose their own rules for armed conflict, and only after that they are given a copy of the basic rules of IHL and can check their own ideas against them. What did they propose that **isn't** in the rules, and why? How would their rule make the experience of war different? What did they not think of that **is** in the rules? The next time they work with the rules, they read quotations from people speaking about war – for example, “There are a lot of situations when soldiers changed uniforms for actual suits” – and the students' task is to identify the rule that applies. Can they recognize an abstract rule in the detail of real life? This type of recognition makes the learning viable for lifelong use. Activities that allow students to test and deepen their understanding of rules continue throughout the course: finding news

articles, stories, or films in which a rule is relevant, analyzing dilemmas in which more than one rule is at stake, estimating of the scope of effect of a particular rule violated, brainstorming methods to limit violations of rules, and teaching others about the rules through artistic activities such as freeze-frame drama. A final, obvious way to monitor one's understanding is the recommended written "ballot" at the end of classes, which asks students "What did I learn today?" and "What questions do I have?".

Similarly, the teacher training programme helps teachers to be aware of their learning on several levels. First, they learn ways of assessing what they and their students are learning about the humanitarian perspective. In addition, they acquire assessment methods by leading seminars and evaluating their efforts at facilitation afterwards. At the end of each workshop day, teachers complete a written "ballot" indicating what they learned from the session and what questions remain. These questions are often used by the trainers the next morning. On the last day of the workshop, teachers create a plan for using *Exploring Humanitarian Law* materials back in their schools and classrooms. They then present the plan to the other participants for their feedback. Often teachers display resistance to the idea of preparing these plans, but invariably they are grateful to be leaving with concrete next steps in their hands. "*It was the best thing to do to involve everybody in presenting the activities*", commented a teacher. "*Now I have a concrete taste of what I have to do....*"

In sum, active pedagogy is key to EHL's use of these three factors critical to learning: understanding and engaging preconceptions, using a conceptual framework, and monitoring one's own understanding.

Challenges of global implementation

Exploring Humanitarian Law is taught in a variety of contexts around the world. The programme is used in countries with current or recent armed conflict as well as in countries with no conflict. It is taught in school and outside of school, using government teachers or Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, in boarding and day schools, in urban and rural communities, with veteran teachers and neophytes. It is taught in countries with

highly trained teachers proud of their expertise in subject areas and lecture pedagogy and in countries where teachers lack basic teacher training.

How can the EHL programme adapt to the challenges of training teachers who come with this broad variety of backgrounds? Some challenges relate to the active pedagogy, others relate to the complexity of humanitarian law issues, and still others relate to a country's recent experience with conflict (or the lack of it). The past four years of piloting and implementation have illuminated important pedagogical challenges including:

- emotional issues in the classroom
- trouble with aspects of the active pedagogy
- perceived irrelevance of the subject matter in countries with no conflict
- difficult questions inherent in international humanitarian law

One key to answering these challenges is the teacher training programme, and the flexibility and resourcefulness with which regional advisors and master trainers implement it. Following are some examples.

Emotional issues in post-conflict countries

In post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, communities feared that introducing EHL would result in strong emotions erupting in the classroom. To cope with this challenge, Group MOST³, an organization with background in training and psychology and experience in the post-conflict environment, was brought in to facilitate the EHL teacher training, giving careful attention to the issue of how to handle strong emotions and the fear of them. They gave special emphasis to four aspects. First, Group MOST has an international humanitarian law expert on hand to deal in depth with IHL aspects of emotionally charged issues that come up in the workshop. Second, Group MOST trainers ask teachers in the workshop to brainstorm problems they anticipate. Teachers list a host of possibilities such as:

...students who undermine, or a person who doesn't want to speak a word, or a person who breaks down in class, a student who is not interested; negative responses and overreacting of students; possible quarrel and conflicts in the class because of different opinions; no adequate specialists (psychologist, pedagogical

³ MOST is an acronym for "Miroљubivost, Otvorenost, Saradnja, Tolerancija" (Peace-promotion, Openness, Cooperation, Tolerance.). In addition the word "most" in Serbian (as well as in Bosnian and Croatian) means "bridge".

specialist) in the school; lack of teaching material for doing this type of class; negative reaction from parents; negative reactions from the surroundings.

The facilitators examine the problems, one by one, and have the group propose strategies to overcome them. Third, Group MOST helps teachers handle potential emotional issues by helping them see the distinction between personal and professional ways of reacting, as an ICRC workshop observer reports:

A few typical 'hard' situations were extracted and participants were taught how to see the difference between personal and professional reaction. Based on that they played dramatic scenes' and displayed the good, professional response to such situations.

A fourth aspect involves dealing with teachers' or students' intransigent anger at members of the community that had been the enemy. In this case a useful technique is role play or role reversal, putting the angry student in the shoes of the other person. Ask the intransigent participant to take the other side, examine its position on a contested issue, and defend that position.

Lessons that go awry

EHL teachers often find themselves in uncharted territory, where they have to improvise and correct lessons that went awry. Although it may be more efficient to schedule all workshops in one block before teachers start teaching EHL, regional advisors in Eastern Europe, in Asia, and in Latin America have all suggested that the teacher training be divided into three phases: an initial workshop of two days, a one-day mid-course meeting to evaluate and share experiences of teaching EHL thus far, and, finally, a concluding session which completes the training.

Scheduling some of the workshops to take place **after** teachers have taught some EHL classes gives teachers the opportunity to share experiences, insights, and problems, as well as to get advice; and develop solutions. An example of one teacher's problem and the way it was worked out is as follows. Role play, as a method for analyzing dilemmas, has many benefits and some pitfalls. During the pilot test in Thailand, students enacted a role play on a soldier's dilemma about how to know if a fisherman and his sister were combatants or civilians. Both the students in the role play and those in the audience treated the whole thing as a joke, laughing at outlandish costumes and exaggerated

actions. The teacher, disappointed that her students treated a serious issue – the dilemmas involved in applying IHL in war – in such a lighthearted and superficial way, brought her problem to the next workshop. A participant from Hong Kong suggested that the group work out step-by-step guidelines for role playing. In so doing the group formulated a key step – given the purpose of making students aware of each party’s perspective, start with questions that help them define each role, questions such as, “What decision is each person involved trying to make?” Rehearse the role play and, before presenting it, ask the audience to look for particular things. Afterwards, lead a discussion of the issues raised by the dramatization. These steps focus students on the issues, and make it less likely that they will laugh at the portrayal. When workshops are scheduled so that teachers can bring their EHL experiences to them, teachers often come up with excellent solutions, and realize along the way that each is not alone in having teaching problems.

Relevance for countries not in conflict

In countries that have not experienced armed conflict recently, teacher trainers and teachers develop approaches for making clear the relevance of the EHL programme. In a workshop in Malaysia, a master trainer reports,

Teacher trainers brought in newspaper clippings which relate to international humanitarian law... We encourage participants to look for materials, cut them out, and put them up on the board. It’s around them... it helps them to see the relevance of IHL – that it is very contemporary, it’s around them all the time...

In a Middle Eastern country, a teacher introduced the EHL programme by showing the film “Saving Private Ryan”, a film that dramatically shows the dilemmas of applying international humanitarian law.

The mentoring role of teachers: not always having the answers

Some teachers are puzzled by the pedagogical idea of exploring and of not having all the answers for students. An EHL curriculum feature that addresses this issue is the “No easy answers corner,” essentially a display area in the room where teachers can write questions that come up and that do not seem easy to answer. The “No Easy Answers

Corner” is intended to give teachers and students time to research information on such questions, as well as a place where students can jot down ideas in cases where no simple answer exists. While some teachers value the support of the “No easy answers corner”, the concept continues to puzzle others. As a regional advisor explained:

Teachers find ‘no easy answers’ difficult to use and they are not very comfortable with it. Maybe [they have] the idea that the teacher must be able to provide answers, which is not the case in this programme....

For questions that have researchable answers, teachers learn that they can emphasize their co-exploring role by, for example, devoting the next ten minutes of class, or the homework assignment, to looking up information just as they will ask students to do, and then pooling what they find.

But some questions really don’t seem to have researchable answers. For example, “Why doesn’t IHL consider people who are conscripted to be victims – isn’t their human dignity at risk?” Responding to such a question is more a matter of reasoning together. Here teachers learn that they can bring in the chain-of-consequences concept, asking “What would happen if” questions, and along the way arrive at interesting ideas, such as that a law has to be practical for a country to accept it. In workshops, teachers can learn the value of guiding students to pursue “no easy answer” questions in depth.

Can a discussion go too far afield, making it difficult for the teacher to find a way back to the central topic? It can. To encourage teachers to allow a discussion go into depth even where the endpoint isn’t clear, each EHL exploration presents a set of key ideas that teachers can use when closing the lesson, wherever the discussion has taken them.

The role of teachers and teacher training in national expansion

Providing adequate planning and resources for teacher training is crucial to implementing the EHL programme successfully. Education decision makers need to consider who should teach EHL, how to get feedback from teachers, and what are workable models for expansion. Expansion models will differ among countries according to the supply of trained teachers, the nature of the teacher education institutions, and the teaching traditions.

Choosing teachers for EHL

It is unanimously agreed that no teacher should be forced to teach EHL. The regional advisor for Latin America gave several criteria for the type of teacher most suitable to teach EHL: experienced, flexible, willing to learn new ways, and not raw from recent conflict. An Eastern European advisor, noted regarding one of her countries:

We still don't have a teacher-training institute or something which prepares teachers for a teaching profession apart from teaching very low (primary) grades. In vocational schools of the technical kind, most of the teachers have no preparation for teaching as such. If you want a sweeping option for EHL teaching, teachers who are prepared for technical vocations really need additional methodology training. The question depends on what kind of teachers you want to teach EHL or whether the teaching of EHL is open to all. We believe that there is no definite answer to that question and that the factor of personality is relevant. We did the training for a variety of teacher backgrounds, and our conclusion is that the first and most important criterion for teachers is their being interested.

Getting feedback from teachers

Teachers are an important source of feedback about how a program is working. First, when resources or coordination are lacking, it is teachers who feel the pinch; second, they are closest to the students and can report concrete indicators of student interest and achievement. The Latin American regional advisor regularly holds evaluation meetings in each country piloting or implementing EHL. Teachers are invited along with school and regional officials. At one such meeting in El Salvador teachers reported obstacles such as insufficient time allotted to EHL classes in the schedule or timetable, and lack of support for teachers after the training. Nevertheless they reported that students “became aware of the world around them” and they gave concrete examples of ways that students put their learning into action: One school organized a 20K “walk for non-violence”. Students at another donated the money they had raised for an end-of-year party to a home for orphaned and abandoned children. At a third school, students and teachers decided that they needed copies of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, so they planted cucumbers in the school garden, sold the harvested produce for \$13 US, and

took the money to the village cyber-café, where they downloaded the entire Geneva Conventions from the Internet.

In Peru, at the evaluation following the first workshop, teachers comments about the programme included:

-A valuable tool that encourages one to affirm life and negate death.

-It strengthened my spirit.

-It promotes and reinforces the right behaviour, virtues, and values.

-It will help us recover lost values, boost self-confidence and respect the rights of others.

At an evaluation session after the teachers had taught EHL, the regional advisor reports,

Teachers arrived with samples of classroom work... photos of group activities, filing cards, notebooks and binders in which pupils expressed EHL concepts in their own words. All of this testified to a huge effort.... [One piece was] a "letter written by secondary-school pupils from the Andean high plateau, near Puno, to the "guerillas of the world" asking them to "seek other ways."

These evaluations, albeit informal, are important for ministries of education, because they relate to their new goals for education, and thus can affect the resources that are allotted for teacher training. According to the regional advisor for Latin America, there is

"...a growing awareness at all levels – public and private – of the need to work with the younger generations in order to foster a society that values peaceful coexistence, solidarity and respect, and that is grounded in basic humanitarian values and principles."

This new awareness seems to be influencing education goals in other regions as well, for example, the countries of the European Union.

Models of expanding teacher training

El Salvador and Malaysia, present two models of ways to train the increasing numbers of teachers that will be needed as the programme expands. As the regional advisor for Latin America explains, El Salvador's plan is based on total immersion at the local level. The plan is to consolidate EHL within the schools where it is currently taught, and to expand only to other schools in the same department. EHL will be implemented throughout one

department before venturing out to another. The next step in El Salvador is to organize a training workshop for facilitators who can then train others in EHL.

Malaysia, on the other hand, in the third year of its pilot program, is focusing on the national level. First it is helping to integrate EHL into the official national curriculum. Experienced EHL teachers work with the Ministry of Education on translation and adaptation of the EHL modules. In 2007, EHL will be part of the new national civics syllabus. In addition, it will be used in language studies at higher grade levels, because the materials help generate discussion and debate.

Now that EHL has a place in the national curriculum, Malaysia's concern is how to train teachers nationwide in EHL methods and approach. As Asia's regional advisor put it:

We need to develop the local capacity that will be able to deliver the tone.... Understanding the program, that's crucial. We need to have a pool of teachers working with the Ministry. ...In 2006 there should be teacher training that would be ongoing in different parts of the country. We need people available in different regions so they can go in and conduct the training. There are 14 states and we need at least 2 from a state. ...this year we are going into more parts of the country. So we'll have teachers who are there, available, in each state and the ministry will fall back on them.

Unlike a cascade model, this plan creates a pool of experienced EHL teachers to provide teacher training nationwide. After being trained, two teachers from each state teach back in their schools, then take part in a second training as trainers, and become the teacher trainers for their state.

The strategic goal of the ICRC is that the EHL programme becomes fully accepted and integrated as part of basic education in formal secondary school curricula across the world. The number of teachers to be trained to fulfill this goal is enormous. To bring in distance learning as a technology to help in this effort, the ICRC is developing an "EHL Virtual Campus". While not all teachers have access to online programmes, the number who do, particularly if they come to teacher centers, is increasing. One of the goals of the Virtual Campus will be to provide online teacher training within the context of a true community of practice. The design of the Virtual Campus will be quite a challenge, as have been many other aspects of the EHL programme, and it will depend somewhat on regional advisors to put together teacher groups and provide social opportunities that help develop the context of communities of practice at a variety of levels.

Conclusion

With the geometric increase in information that students must learn in school, educational leaders have a difficult time deciding what to teach and what to eliminate, particularly when it means adding a new subject. Both the perspective on learning of EHL and the demands of the curriculum require new skills and knowledge on the part of teachers. Active learning requires active teaching. In the process of learning new teaching and assessment techniques as well as an innovative approach to exploring unfamiliar material, EHL teachers begin to develop an expanded sense of what it means to be a teacher. No matter how experienced, inventive and motivated the teacher, this change in teacher role does not happen automatically. Teachers cannot just read the materials and then teach them, but need to learn the issues and techniques by actually discussing and practicing them in the context of a learning community. The teacher training programme has led to transformations in teachers' views of themselves and their students. A Thai teacher expressed her surprise: *"Are all of the decisions in choosing the materials and running the class dependent on us, the teacher? How powerful I am!"* A Ukrainian teacher also spoke about her new role *"I am happy that I have become a creator I was simply a teacher-performer at my school."* But asked what surprised them most about the programme, most teachers will say, "My students." They are intrigued to discover the interest, skill, and depth with which students can explore the complex ideas of humanitarian law.

Exploring Humanitarian Law: Preparing Teachers for a Pivotal Role

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“*Exploring Humanitarian Law:* Preparing Teachers for a Pivotal Role”

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Barbara Schieffelin Powell helped design the teacher education and evaluation guidelines for Exploring Humanitarian Law. Prior to that Dr. Powell was a researcher for a multi-year study of high school change for the Coalition of Essential Schools, Brown University. She has taught secondary school in Blantyre, Malawi and junior high in the Newton (MA) public schools. She has been a secondary school principal, and has taught at Wellesley College, Harvard University in the US and the University of Bielefeld, Germany. She has consulted on policy, planning, program and staff development at McLean Hospital, Polaroid Corporation and the Education Development Center. Her recent publications include *Toward Understanding* (Annenberg Institute for School Reform monograph, Fall 1996) and (co-author) *Looking Together at Student Work*. 1999. New York: Teachers College Press.

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), an international non-profit organization, bridges the worlds of research, policy, and practice. EDC manages more than 350 projects in 40 countries to advance learning and healthy development for individuals and institutions around the globe.