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

Submitted by Zaimuariffudin Shukri Nordin to the University of Exeter as a thesis for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, April 2010.

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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)………………………………………………….
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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

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