

The Corren Agreement

In 2006 the BC Ministry of Education and two homosexual activists signed a private agreement to revise Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum to ensure “respect for diversity with respect to sexual orientation.” The agreement includes a provision designed to force children to attend lessons or classes despite objections from their parents. This provision is contrary to norms established in international agreements.

International Conventions and Declarations

- *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child*
- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*
- *Convention against Discrimination in Education*
- *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*
- *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*
- *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*
- *Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children . . .*
- *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Later agreements or declarations presume those signed earlier, and repeat or develop principles found in the earlier documents. They sometimes add to them, but they do not replace them.

Note: the documents cannot be cited

- to contradict or overrule each other;
- to subvert or limit the freedoms or rights that they recognize;
- to overturn or restrict rights or freedoms “recognized or existing in any country in virtue of law, conventions, regulations or custom.”

Relationship of parents and children

These international agreements insist that *parents* are primarily responsible for the upbringing of their children- not the state, not state schools, not professional educators, and not teachers’ unions or special interest activists. The role of the state and other agencies is to support parents in discharging their responsibilities, not to supplant them.

The natural family

The conventions and declarations were not meant to support the notion that a same-sex relationship could be the basis of either marriage or family. Instead, they presume that the natural family consists of father, mother and their children, though they do not exclude the natural extension of the concept to include blood relatives.

One sees here the recognition of the fundamental bond between child and family and acknowledgement that the natural family is the most suitable environment for the upbringing of a child. The fullest treatment of this theme is found in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), which again affirms that the family is “the fundamental group of society”, adding that it is “the natural environment” especially suited for the “growth and well-being” of children.”¹

Communities of faith and culture

After the family and extended family, but still prior to the state and its educational institutions, one encounters cultural and social communities. Children are kindred first to their parents and families and, through them, become members of these broader communities. Parents, extended families, and cultural and religious communities teach children how to responsibly exercise their freedoms and discharge their responsibilities. This is explicitly acknowledged by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.²

Children of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities and indigenous groups “shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.”³

Protection from exploitation

Children’s freedom to receive and exchange information is limited by the need to protect them from “injurious” information and material, bearing in mind the “primary responsibility” of parents for this, and the obligation of the state to assist them.⁴ Respect for “the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” is balanced by recognition that parents direct the child in the exercise of this freedom “in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.”⁵

The least that can be said is that these provisions support the authority of parents who might choose to withdraw their children from objectionable classes or lessons, and suggest that the state’s responsibility is to respect and even facilitate the exercise of that authority.

Parental authority in education

With respect to the exercise of fundamental freedoms of religion and belief, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states simply that parents “have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”⁶

This is developed further in subsequent declarations and conventions. The *Convention against Discrimination in Education* supports the establishment of denominational and independent schools that offer “an education which is in keeping with the wishes of the pupil’s parents or legal guardians.”⁷ It also insists upon respect for the “liberty of parents. . . to ensure . . . the religious and moral education of the children in conformity with their own convictions.”⁸

The same principles are reinforced and more fully developed in later documents.⁹

Conclusion

Those who want to compel children to attend lessons or classes that their parents find morally objectionable will not find support for their policies in these documents. Indeed: it is difficult to see how children could be taught tolerance and respect for freedom of religion and belief if these very freedoms are trampled upon by a school district or teachers’ union bent on enforcing the terms of the Corren Agreement.

Notes

1. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 16
2. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 5
3. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 30. See also Article 29.1.c; *Declaration on the Rights of the Child* (1959), Principle 7
4. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 17(e)
5. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 14
6. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Article 26 (3)
7. *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960), Article 2. See also *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), Article 13(3-4)
8. *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960) Article 5(b). See also *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), Article 13(3); *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), Article 29(2)
9. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), Article 18(4); *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981), Article 5(1); *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981), Article 5(2)

“...citizens do not surrender freedom of conscience and religion as a condition of attending a public school, nor do parents surrender their authority to the state, to a union, to a profession or to special interest activists when they entrust their children to a public school system.” (*CCRL letter to BC school districts*)

For more information -

The Corren Agreement

More detailed information and news about the position of school district with respect to parental authority. <http://www.ccr.ca/index.php?id=4835>

The Goose, the Gander and the Elephant

The response to Murray Corren's article in Teacher Newsmagazine that the BCTF refused to publish. <http://www.ccr.ca/index.php?id=452>

Parental Authority in Education: the International Context

A review of nine international covenants and declarations. Those who want to compel children to attend lessons or classes that their parents find morally objectionable will not find support for their policies in these documents. <http://www.ccr.ca/index.php?id=4836>

Permission is given to copy and distribute this pamphlet. Additional copies can be downloaded from <http://www.ccr.ca/doc/PamphletInternationalLaw.pdf>

Catholic Civil Rights League

301- 46 St. Clair Ave. E,
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M9
Phone: 416-466-8244, Fax: 416-466-0091
ccrl@ccrl.ca <http://ccrl.ca>

Revision Date: 2007-04-24

Parental Authority in Education

The International Context



Those who want to compel children to attend lessons or classes that their parents find morally objectionable will not find support for their policies in these documents.