

**Canadian Secondary Social Studies Teachers & Humanitarian Education: Teaching
& Learning about International Humanitarian Law**

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Abstract

*Humanitarian law education can provide a foundation in the development of critical global citizens. Education in international humanitarian law is particularly important for today's youth due to the global impact of armed conflict. This study explores Canadian secondary social studies teachers' perceptions of the educational resource, *Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL)*. The key findings include the importance of teachers' knowledge of global issues on their teaching practices; the opportunity and challenges for implementing humanitarian-based curriculum material; as well as the teachers' perceptions about the benefits of teaching and learning about humanitarian law and the consequences of armed-conflict. Implications for classroom teachers and recommendations for future research are provided.*

Key Words: International Humanitarian Law; Global Citizenship; Social Studies; Youth Engagement; Teacher Professional Development; Curriculum; Human Dignity

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We have a choice today. We can either sit back, watch the devastation wrought by war and try to make our children look the other way; or we can choose to tell our children that what they see – or what they are themselves experiencing – is not acceptable, that this is not how it is supposed to be, and that they can behave differently, in ways inspired by deep-rooted respect for human dignity, both in peacetime and in the midst of armed conflict.

- Jacques Forster, International Committee of the Red Cross Vice-President, European Leadership Education, May 2006

Humanitarian law education provides a foundation in the development of critical global citizens. Education focused on human dignity and mutual respect can challenge young people to develop peaceful practices and conflict resolution skills that promote critical thinking and humanitarian action (Hinterlietner, 2010; LeRoux, 2001; Merryfield, 1993). “Modern society needs reflective citizens and intelligent inquirers who promote social understanding, cooperation, and peace” (Frantizi, 2004, p.2). It is through education that focuses on respect for life and dignity that intolerance, discrimination, and violence can be challenged (Tawil, 2000; UNESCO, 1995).

This paper presents an exploratory study that examines secondary social studies teachers’ perceptions of an education program entitled, *Exploring Humanitarian Law* (EHL), which is designed to increase awareness and understanding of international humanitarian law, the consequences of armed conflict, and the promotion of humanitarian action.

Social Studies & Critical Global Citizenship

Social cohesion and global citizenship can be enhanced through curriculum outcomes focused on encouraging active citizenship, which is often targeted through social studies courses (Tawil, 2000). In a study of social studies knowledge, Feinberg

and Doppen (2010) note that one of the primary goals of social studies curricula is to promote democracy and citizenship in a diverse society. In addition, a review of curricula across Canada found that one of the most often cited outcomes of social studies education was to prepare students for citizenship (Clausen & Lemisko, 2005). It is important to recognize that students often do not have a well-developed understanding of citizenship due to a lack of active participation and limited social justice perspectives (Feinberg & Doppen, 2009; Giroux, 2011). Furthermore, global citizenship is defined and understood in diverse ways (Gaventa & Tandon, 2010; Merryfield, 2002; Morais & Ogden, 2011). Gaventa and Tandon (2010) argue that global citizenship is often viewed from two distinct lenses: a vertical lens which focuses on the perception of the connection between a person and the state; and a horizontal lens which considers “how citizens perceive themselves as part of a broader global community” (p.2). For this paper we utilized a horizontal lens in combination with the representation offered by Morais and Ogden (2011) who define global citizenship as having three dimensions: a focus on social responsibility; understanding global cultures and norms; and participation in civic issues. The connections between the dimensions of global citizenship and social studies curriculum outcomes highlight an opportunity for social studies teachers to create a space for youth to increase their understanding of global and social justice issues while learning about the impact of democratic participation through a horizontal lens of global citizenship.

Familiarity with human rights and local-national-global connections among children and youth are limited (Covell et al., 2010; Giroux, 2011; Mitchell, 2010). Additionally, there are barriers for teachers wishing to teach global issues within

classrooms as many global issues are considered controversial and require pedagogical principles and sensitivity to explore within the confines of provincial, regional, and school level policy (Barton & McCully, 2007; Byford et al., 2009). It is important to note however, that instruction in the area of human rights does positively affect students' willingness to advocate for human rights (Covell et al, 2010; Gaudelli & Fernekes, 2004). Educating students about these topics can build skills that enable youth to become critical citizens, who are aware of their ability to effect change at the local, societal and global levels (Clausen & Lemisko, 2005; LeRoux, 2001). To become a critical global citizen, it is important for students to explore internal aspects of culture and to consider multiple perspectives (Clausen & Lemisko; Merryfield, 1995). Supporting youth to develop an understanding of international conflict issues, which include a focus on the respect for diverse perspectives, is an essential learning in today's global community (Le Roux, 2001; UNESCO, 1995).

International Humanitarian Law & Humanitarian Education

“The suffering caused by armed conflict is one of the most tragic shared historical experiences of human society” (Tawil, 2000, p.1). War and conflict have existed since the beginning of humankind, however, as the means and methods of conflict have changed, so too have the codes of conduct of war. Although all states have signed and ratified the Geneva Conventions of 1949, one of the greatest challenges of adhering to this legal obligation is the lack of knowledge of international humanitarian law among entire populations (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005; Sassoli & Bouvier, 1999).

Young people all over the world are increasingly exposed and affected by situations of armed conflict, therefore understanding international humanitarian law and

humanitarian action are becoming increasingly important in today's age of globalization (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2006; Tawil, 2000). Children and youth are directly exploited in combat as child soldiers; they are displaced from their homes and separated from families; and they experience the impact of weapons such as anti-personnel landmines. Indirectly, young people are impacted by the imagery they view on television; they may have classmates or neighbors who have fled from a conflict affected region; and they have expressed an increased concern about the impact of war (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2006; Tawil, 2000). Although the number of students directly affected by armed conflict within any given Canadian classroom may be small, increased globalization and migration contributes to all students being directly or indirectly affected.

Signatories to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are legally bound under Article 1, to “respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances” (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949, p.23). Education about International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is the first step to ensure protection for people affected by conflict. For IHL education to be truly effective, it must occur in an organized system with entire populations, in peacetime as well as during armed conflict (Sassoli & Bouvier, 1999). Sassoli and Bouvier affirm that, “once an armed conflict with all the hate upon which it is based and which it creates, has broken out, it is often too late to learn the message” (p. 222).

Signatories to the Geneva Conventions are also legally bound to “disseminate the text of the present Convention as widely as possible... to include the study thereof in their programs of military and, if possible, civil instruction, so that the principles thereof may

become known to the entire population” (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949, p.42). The importance of international humanitarian law and humanitarian education is widely accepted and encouraged to be included in educational systems (Kadam, 2001; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004; Tawil, 2000). IHL education promotes respect and is essential in all societies regardless of a country’s history with violence and/or armed conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2006; Tawil, 2000). In fact, countries not currently engaged in armed conflict often have significant influence to curb violations of IHL by applying political and moral pressure on the belligerents involved (Staub, 2003). Integration of programs that focus on humanitarian law and action, such as *Exploring Humanitarian Law*, provides an opportunity to explore these impacts within a larger classroom population, by guiding students through a process focused on learning and respecting others (Johnansson, 2005).

Exploring Humanitarian Law

One way to help youth gain an understanding of humanitarian law and respect for others is through educational programs in public schools.

Education is at the heart of any strategy for peace-building. It is through education that the broadest possible introduction can be provided to the values, skills and knowledge which form the basis of respect for human rights and democratic principles, the rejection of violence, and a spirit of tolerance, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups, and nations (UNESCO, 1995, p.38).

Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) is an international educational program developed to enhance young peoples’ level of understanding of human dignity, humanitarian action, as well as awareness of and respect for international humanitarian law. The learning outcomes focus on humanitarian issues such as respect for human dignity; the limits to armed conflict; human rights; international law; justice; and the

consequences of war. Developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in association with the Educational Development Center, EHL consists of over 35 hours of educational activities focusing on the impact of conflict on people and communities. EHL integrates skills such as literacy and numeracy with learning values and attitudes that focus on leadership development of young people between the ages of 13-18 (Tawil, 2000). The program is transnational in scope and designed to be taught in diverse educational settings.

EHL is an on-line resource (www.ehl.icrc.org) comprised of an introductory exploration followed by five core modules and a closing exploration. The *Introductory Exploration* encourages learners to consider their perceptions of human dignity, the limits of armed conflict, and the impact of war. Module 1: *The Humanitarian Perspective* explores the role of bystanders and the complexity of humanitarian action. Module 2: *Limits in Armed Conflict*, aims to introduce learners to the rationale and evolution of the basic rules of armed conflict, the plight of child soldiers, and the impact of anti-personnel landmines as a means to reinforce the necessity of international humanitarian law. Module 3: *The Law in Action* encourages learners to examine critically the notion of responsibility and the implementation and enforcement of international humanitarian law. Module 4: *Ensuring Justice* examines the evolution of the international justice system, the complexity of justice, and the diverse systems to hold perpetrators of violations accountable for their actions. Module 5: *Responding to the Consequences of War*, focuses on the impact of war on people and the essential humanitarian needs that evolve. Finally, the *Closing Exploration* focuses on youth engagement and the promotion of global citizenship.

The methodology utilized in EHL encourages a constructivist approach to learning that employs a multitude of strategies that foster student engagement through diverse ways of knowing. Learners are actively involved in considering multiple perspectives, role-playing, story analysis, dilemma analysis, identifying consequences and solutions, and problem solving. EHL utilizes educational resources that bring the voice of youth to the forefront of each learning activity.

Purpose of the Study

The International Committee of the Red Cross engaged in a global exploration of the *Exploring Humanitarian Law* program and was keen to learn about the impact of EHL in Canadian classrooms. During this process, the Canadian Red Cross was encouraged to understand EHL implementation in a Canadian context. The purpose of this study was to explore initial teacher perceptions of the educational resource *Exploring Humanitarian Law* and their perceptions of the impact on students' knowledge and understanding of humanitarian issues. While this study focuses on preliminary awareness and knowledge of humanitarian law, the intention was to get a sense of the initial response to teachers' experiences using EHL in classrooms. The overarching research questions for this exploratory study of *Exploring Humanitarian Law* were:

1. After attending a three-day conference on EHL and prior to teaching the curriculum modules, what were the initial perceptions of participating teachers regarding this educational resource as having the potential to increase students' awareness and understanding of humanitarian law, international conflict issues, and global citizenship?

2. After teaching curriculum modules from EHL, what were the participating teachers' perceptions about this educational resource and did EHL contribute to students' awareness and understanding about international humanitarian issues? If so, how?

Design of the Study

Qualitative research allows for an exploration of people's interpretation of their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Within the realm of interpretative research, a qualitative approach explores social constructions assuming that learning and perceptions are socially constructed (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). We utilized a qualitative research approach based on a social constructivist theoretical framework. As social constructivist researchers influenced by the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, the focus of this study was on the teachers' perceptions of their experiences with the three day in-service on EHL and on their own teaching experiences implementing modules from the EHL curriculum resource. Using a social constructivist lens, the lived experiences of the teachers become a key component allowing for influences of the contextual factors to be identified. Social interactions and the way that the teacher involves the student in the activities can be an important part of their teaching practices. The teacher's selection of curriculum materials, the types of instruction methods and assessment decisions make a powerful impact on students' learning (Jadallah, 2000). A social constructivist approach emphasizes the need to apply concepts to real life situations and of the need to have students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become active participants in our ever-changing society.

Questionnaires were selected to gain insight into the initial teacher perceptions and experiences teaching and learning about international humanitarian law. The

standardized pre- and post- questionnaires were comprised of structured, semi-structured and open-ended questions and were designed for use in various educational settings in countries implementing EHL (Education and Development Centre & International Committee of the Red Cross, 2003). The questionnaires were developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for dissemination in many different national contexts. Although the structure of the questionnaires has limitations, such as a focus on the methods, the questionnaires still provided a good base to assess the participating teachers' pre- and post-teaching perceptions of 'how' and 'why' EHL influenced their teaching of humanitarian law and humanitarian issues, and their perceptions of the impact on student learning. Considering the international scope of EHL, we utilized the standard questionnaire to allow for potential international studies to compare the experiences of youth and educators engaging with this educational resource in different geographical and political contexts.

Context & Participant Selection

The Canadian Red Cross hosted an *Exploring Humanitarian Law Teachers' Conference* for high school teachers, resulting in 18 teachers participating in EHL in-service. The three-day conference structure included a focus on implementation as well as an in-depth learning opportunity on humanitarian law and international conflict issues associated with curriculum outcomes. The facilitation team consisted of teachers with experience using EHL in their classrooms, Red Cross legal advisors, Red Cross delegates with experience in conflict-affected communities, and representatives from the Office of the Assistant Judge Advocate General from the Canadian Armed Forces. As a result of previous education activities, the Canadian Red Cross expressed a desire to gather

feedback on EHL, the implementation process within classrooms, and the impact of youth learning about these issues. This study, developed in partnership with a university in Eastern Canada, explored the teachers' perspectives on the value of the educational resource.

The participants in the study consisted of 18 secondary social studies teachers who had participated in a three day, Canadian Red Cross EHL in-service. The participants were teaching in six regional school boards and in 16 different high schools in both urban and rural areas in Eastern Canada. The years of teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 31 years.

Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

Letters of invitation were sent to administrators in eight school boards, inviting them to send teachers to a three day conference on teaching humanitarian law using the Exploring Humanitarian Law educational resource. During the conference, the teachers were actively involved in exploring the EHL modules (see Appendix A).

At the end of the three-day conference, 18 teachers agreed to be participants in the study; they signed letters of consent, and completed the pre-teaching questionnaire. During the following school year, teachers were encouraged to teach from the EHL educational kit and complete the post-teaching questionnaire. Of the 18 participants in the study, eight participants submitted post-teaching questionnaires. Completed post-teaching questionnaires were either placed in self-addressed envelopes and mailed or e-mailed to the principal researcher. An additional six participants communicated to the primary researcher that they could not complete the post-teaching questionnaire because they were on maternity leave, on sabbatical leave, did not have a permanent teaching contract

and thus not a permanent classroom, or they had experienced a course re-assignment. All six of these participants expressed an interest in implementing EHL in the future.

Through the social constructivist lens, the data analysis was viewed with the belief that teachers' construct their understandings of concepts through their interactions within the contextual influences in the classroom and school culture. The analysis was guided by the research questions, which sought to learn about teachers' perceptions of their three-day in-service on EHL as a teaching resource, and their teaching experiences implementing EHL in their classrooms. The generated data was based on the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. There were several steps involved in the process. Both researchers read through the data once, and then reread the data independently, systematically coding responses. The second step was to compare and discuss the coding responses. The researchers discussed the rationale for the coding until there was agreement. We then began to categorize the coding to provide inter-rater reliability. This led to refining and defining the categories through constant comparisons. Negotiation and reconciliation of variances led to categories based on the number of references, common issues and cross-coded topics. The emerging patterns of related responses were identified and grouped under specific themes.

Findings and Discussion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the educational resource *Exploring Humanitarian Law*, as a tool to increase students' awareness, understanding, and action. Data was generated through the use of pre-and post-teaching questionnaires. Three central themes emerged from the analysis of the data: a) teachers' perceptions about the benefits of EHL on student learning; b) the opportunities and challenges for

implementing humanitarian-based curriculum material; and finally, c) the impact of teachers' knowledge of global issues on their teaching practices.

a) Impact of EHL on Student Learning

The participants' responses to the pre-teaching questionnaire focused largely on their own personal growth and learning. In contrast, the post-teaching questionnaires focused almost exclusively on the perceptions of their students' experiences engaging with EHL. A majority of the participants stated that although students' knowledge of humanitarian law and international conflict issues was limited prior to engaging with EHL, their interest and motivation to learn was "*impressive*". One participant stated that, "*most of my students didn't realize that war had rules. They had a simplistic view of war and did not consider its impact on the people and soldiers. They saw war from the normal way it is studied in history*". Another participant stated that, "*students are interested in conflict issues. They want to be an active part of a positive solution. There are many more significant issues going on in the world than what we hear on the evening news*".

All teachers who submitted feedback after teaching EHL in their class stated that EHL had an influence on their students' attitudes about war and conflict and that EHL contributed to enhancing their students' awareness and understanding about the impact of war. The participants indicated that the three most important things that learners gained from the implementation of EHL were: a) an enhanced awareness of the world and the impact of war; b) a deeper, more critical understanding of the complexities of armed conflict; and c) an "*eye opening*" experience that exposed students to another reality. In

this study, teachers stated that the focus on child soldiers and the use of youth voices in videos and case studies, significantly contributed to students' interest in the EHL material. Multimedia instructional strategies have been shown to induce a kind of 'historical empathy' by grabbing students' attention through a format to which they can relate (Mangan, 2005).

In the area of student engagement, all respondents expressed the fact that their students were engaged from the moment they started teaching about humanitarian law. The participants explained how their students were learning about empathy, respect and knowledge. They wrote the following about their students' experiences:

Given the opportunity adolescents will open up, express ideas and want to know more about the world around them.

I learned that students really do have an interest in humanitarian law.

Students were genuinely interested; they were full of valid questions and expressed detailed opinions.

The students were keen on the content.

They [the students] showed particular interest in the sections on child soldiers, voices of war, the dilemmas, My Lai and the refugee camps.

I saw the biggest change in the students' attitude, knowledge, empathy and compassion throughout and after teaching and learning about this [EHL]. EHL brought the class together as a whole, discussing challenges and solutions.

At the heart of the EHL resource is student dialogue that promotes diverse perspective taking and understanding of complex issues. As Rossi (2003) explains, "Conflict is, among other things, the process of building and sustaining different perceptions and interpretations of reality" (p. 151). Becoming sensitive to the pain of others and acknowledging their perspectives is an important aspect of ending conflict and building peace (Frantzi, 2004). As students begin to understand conflict, underlying

themes of justice, equity and fairness emerge as issues that are shared by people in all parts of the world. EHL content encourages critical reflection on the media, popular culture, cultural norms and customs so that teachers and students start to gain a deeper understanding of humanitarian issues and how armed conflict affects people, basic life supporting services, and community infrastructures. This finding is supported by Barton and McCully's (2007) research which demonstrates that when students are engaged in discussions related to controversial issues it can result in students' future participation in civic events such as voting, supporting democratic values, interest in political news and a sense of confidence in engaging in public issues. Involvement in activism can be a potential intervention that encourages positive reactions to how students feel about their school and future education (Taines, 2012).

The perceptions of the participants demonstrate the importance of teaching about global issues in a practical, hands-on, constructivist pedagogical approach that allows the students to build on their existing knowledge. Students learned about the lives of children and youth who may be different culturally and linguistically, but not unlike themselves in age, who are engaged and/or directly affected by armed conflict. The use of images and videos help the students to contextualize the content of EHL. As Newmann (1989) stresses, students will be engaged in learning when "it involves participation, connection, attachment and integration in particular settings and tasks" (p. 34).

Students participating in programs like EHL are given the opportunity to analyze contemporary world events through exploration of international policy and its impact on nations, including their own. In addition, students develop the skills necessary for a basic critical understanding of historical research and analysis by formulating questions about

armed conflict and investigating how diverse viewpoints can be addressed and reconciled (Fix, 1999). Teachers explained how EHL has helped, both their students and themselves, to learn together and to begin to understand the world in which they live. They gained a deeper appreciation of the complexities of humanitarian issues, for example, a deeper understanding of justice for the perpetrators and the victims when learning about child soldiers. Misco and Patterson (2012) stressed that engagement in these discussions on controversial issues can help student to view themselves as “agents of change” (p.521). They also state that this opportunity to discuss complex issues can increase students’ civic participation, enhance their critical thinking skills, improve interpersonal skills and increase their future political action.

b) Opportunities and Challenges for Implementing New Curriculum

A common concern related to professional development opportunities is that teachers will be very excited about the in-service but that the content and/or approach will not be implemented into teachers’ daily classroom practices. Teachers referred to EHL as “*a powerful tool;*” however, they debated about how much of the content they would have time to implement and how they would make decisions about which modules to use in which subject areas. As one participant wrote, “*How can I integrate all this information into so many aspects of my teaching?*” Another participant was concerned about “*sensitive ways to introduce students to these subjects.*” Still another referred to the dilemma of introducing new curriculum content, “*If I use this, I will need to eliminate something else.*” The participants were concerned about how they would find the time to explore the resource in a more in-depth manner and how they would integrate the

teaching of this content into the existing provincial curriculum outcomes. This is an understandable concern given the busy world of teachers and the many expectations related to student outcomes, particularly around standardized examinations (Hargreaves, 2003). Misco and Patterson (2012) have also identified barriers within the contextual factors of schools such as school policies, set curriculum, time restraints, and teachers' fear of offending others or of reprisals for teaching controversial topics.

The teachers wondered how they would motivate students to become actively engaged in humanitarian law issues. One participant shared that their, "*main concern now is ensuring that my ambivalent, unconcerned students truly become engaged.*" Additional questions included: *What resources will be available to supplement the teaching of the modules particularly with so many learners with diverse needs in their classrooms? How will I assess the students on this knowledge? How will I answer student questions when this knowledge is so new to me? How will I explore the important role of humanitarian organizations and how do I address the issue of neutrality?*

Although there were concerns, the participants' responses demonstrated that there was a sense of excitement about implementing this new resource. One participant reflected: "*On my part, I can't wait to get buried in all this information provided. I think that EHL should become a mandatory part of the Global History/Geography 12 curriculum, as it's very valuable in today's society and changing times.*" Another participant stated, "*It's crucial our students know this information*".

Several challenges were identified for implementing new curriculum, however, the participants who returned post-questionnaires all indicated that they were able to implement from one to five of the modules (3-35 hours) with approximately 320 students.

Several participants shared that they found the implementation of EHL to be straightforward and they were impressed with the modules. They were particularly pleased with the supplemental resources such as info sheets, videos, and the range of strategies for both teaching and student assessment. Participants' comments included:

What surprised me most about the program is how easy it is to use.

The curriculum is very good.

[EHL] was an 'eye-opening' experience.

I found all aspects easy to teach, to express and to get across to the students.

There are endless possibilities that can result from EHL.

c) The Impact of Teachers' Knowledge of Global Issues

The third key finding of this study involved the impact of teachers' knowledge of global issues on their teaching practices. The participants all highlighted a sense of an overwhelming need to develop a basic foundation of knowledge about conflict related humanitarian issues and humanitarian law, in order to teach effectively about these issues. Participants discussed the role of culture and their geographical location as contributing factors forming the basis of their limited knowledge about local and global humanitarian issues. The participants also stressed a need to interact with other teachers about these issues. In order to develop an understanding of international issues, "we must begin with reflecting on our relationship with the world of which we are a part and the symbols that we develop in perceiving and making sense of it" (Young, 2008, p. 5). Self-reflection is vital to the successful implementation of global education as reflection

encourages a deeper understanding of our own values and ways of knowing (Merryfield, 1993).

Participants cited a need to enhance their basic understanding of international humanitarian law, legal terminology, current facts and statistics as they relate to international conflict, as well as the real impacts of conflict on people. One participant reflected on their experience stating, *“It makes me realize there is so much more to the stories that get coverage for [sic] mainstream media”*. Another participant stated, *“When I hear a news item from Afghanistan, I will understand the rules better. I can see the dilemma faced by the soldiers”*. The participants’ emphasized and reflected on the evolution of their basic foundation of knowledge of IHL and related issues as a result of the EHL in-servicing experience.

The participants’ responses described the value of the in-service and how their increased knowledge of humanitarian issues and IHL would better support student learning and action. Participants’ comments included statements such as:

I feel very confident to return to my classroom and with these materials I am equipped to start teaching EHL.

The workshop clarified so many issues for me and I’m returning to the classroom with a renewed confidence and spirit.

I was concerned about not knowing enough to teach this. Now I feel so much better informed.

Teachers’ fear of lack of knowledge in the teaching content has been identified in the literature (Misco & Patterson, 2012). This can be based on the fear of reprisals from the school or community when teaching controversial topics. Barton and McCully (2007) have developed recommendation for teachers when teaching about controversial issues. Their first recommendation stresses the need to create a respectful classroom

where students feel safe to express their emotions as they discuss issues from different perspectives. Openness to uncertainty and doubt needs to be accepted. The second recommendation relates to activating diversity among common positions and diversity among different positions. Using an historical context can help to bring an understanding of the differences in the past which can be a strategy to encourage critically thinking about current controversial issues. A final recommendation for teachers is to find and develop supportive networks within their school, community and professional colleagues. Together, teachers can work toward implementing a flexible curriculum that allows openings for controversial issues to be discussed from many different perspectives. The recommendation for supportive networks is encouraged by Misco and Patterson's (2012) research on contextual barriers, such as school administration policies and practices, an emphasis on standards and provincial/state exams, and common curricula practices.

Many participants expressed the importance of not only gaining a basic level of knowledge of the issues but of finding ways to learn more about these topics. Utilizing an existing personal framework to comprehend global issues in combination with accessing new information through EHL resources was viewed as an important foundation to begin to understand international humanitarian law. The participants' level of confidence on international issues and law was regularly cited as a barrier prior to receiving training. The significance of teachers' perceived competence and the ability to access on-going support is highlighted by the participants as key factors influencing their practice. Compared to teachers who feel confident in the subject matter, those who are less informed are less likely to consider variation in prior student experiences, and will often engage in inflexible teaching practices (Tan, et al., 1994).

All participants in this study reported that the three day in-servicing provided a foundation of knowledge that would enable them to begin dialogue with their students on international humanitarian law and conflict issues. Participants who completed the post-teaching questionnaire felt that teaching EHL changed the way they saw the world. One participant indicated that, “*it puts a face on some of the situations that we hear about during times of conflict*”. A majority of the participants stated that EHL not only provided the basic framework for understanding IHL and conflict related issues, but that it enhanced their understanding of the complexities of conflict, thus contributing to their ability to help students to explore multiple perspectives within complex humanitarian issues.

One strategy to continue to engage teachers’ interest in support networks and on-going learning and understanding around international conflict issues, is to invite teachers to participate in on-line asynchronous educator forums that encourage sharing and dialogue within the teaching community. This approach allows teachers to interact with other teachers, both locally and internationally, around topics of interest at a time that is convenient. Teachers could be encouraged to use the on-line forum that exists within the *Exploring Humanitarian Law* virtual campus organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (www.ehl.icrc.org). Another avenue to learn new strategies about implementing EHL is to access the American Red Cross EHL site where teachers can view videos capturing peers using EHL in classrooms (www.ehl.redcross.org). A final strategy to support new and experienced teachers using EHL could be to work towards creating innovative changes that would allow for teachers to meet and learn from each other during school designated in-service days.

Limitations & Challenges

This study involved 18 secondary social studies teachers in a three-day conference on an educational program designed to develop young peoples' awareness and understanding of humanitarian issues, international humanitarian law (IHL) and the plight of people affected by armed conflict. Upon completion of the three-day conference, 18 teachers completed the pre-teaching questionnaire and eight of these teachers completed and returned the post-teaching questionnaire, which was to be completed after implementing EHL in their classroom. Despite this limited sample size, the findings have merit. The teacher responses embodied a range of perceptions about the value of teaching humanitarian law and the positive impact of this curriculum material on students' learning. Secondly, the findings demonstrate that there are a group of dedicated social studies teachers who are motivated to learn about humanitarian law and international conflict, and are willing to implement humanitarian-based curriculum modules, which support student engagement despite the controversial nature of social justice issues. A follow up workshop with the participants may be of benefit in identifying additional barriers to, and strategies for, implementing EHL.

Future research could draw participants from a wider geographical area and include a more comprehensive sample that goes beyond teachers who volunteered to participate in an optional professional development workshop. It should be noted that these findings are not meant to be generalizable to other teachers; however, they provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of teachers. This approach gives recognition and respect for the teachers' diverse voices which can become an important part of future

teacher in-servicing on global education and support for the implementation process. As with all self-report studies, the results are limited by the participants' responses.

An additional limitation of the study is the diverse uses of the educational materials. Additional questions need to be considered including: In what way do the different modules of EHL impact student learning and future engagement as global citizens?; Does the order in which the modules are introduced or the selection of modules utilized, have an impact on the effectiveness of EHL?; How does the EHL training received by teachers impact the implementation and effectiveness in the classroom?; and finally, What are the experiences and voices of youth engaging in EHL in their classrooms?

Final Thoughts & Recommendations for Future Research

This study on teachers' perceptions of EHL is important as it explores teachers' actual teaching experiences, thus giving voice to the practitioners who are implementing a new resource in their classrooms. The use of pre- and post-questionnaires has deepened our understanding of teaching culturally sensitive issues related to international law and armed conflict. There is limited literature that focuses on teaching the complex, sociopolitical issues related to the laws of armed conflict and its impact on people. The EHL educational program encourages learners to consider the complexities of armed conflict and is based on the belief that education is central to an understanding of humanitarian law and resulting practices. As one participant stated, *"Every school should have at least one person with EHL training. The Department of Education needs to integrate this into the Global curriculum"*.

This study has identified the need for additional research on how best to support teachers in the implementation of international conflict issues into the existing social studies curricula. Recommendations for improvement that were consistently discussed by the participants were to increase the length of the conference from three to four days to allow for more time for teachers to engage with other teachers on how best to implement the program within their current curriculum. Time is always an issue when addressing new curriculum initiatives. Creating space for new and experienced teachers using EHL curriculum materials, to openly discuss their concerns regarding the implementation process, may reduce the barriers shared by the participants.

The teachers' responses illustrate the importance of developing the ability among youth to begin to analyze global issues critically, particularly armed conflict issues. The teachers indicated that their teaching practices, based on the modules in EHL, enhanced students' awareness, knowledge, and respect for human dignity. One direction for future research would be in-person explorations, in both individual and group sessions, that focus on the teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning about international humanitarian issues with youth in school settings. Future research could also explore the impact of this program on the overall school environment and students' ability to address other conflicts such as bullying. Respecting the human dignity of all people must be incorporated into existing institutional programming and policy during times of peace and war.

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Appendix A

Exploring Humanitarian Law: *Teacher Conference 2007***Day 1:** Introduction to Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement

- Origin, History & Structure
- Fundamental Principles
- Canadian Red Cross

Module 1: The Humanitarian Perspective

- Images & Perceptions of Conflict
- Humanitarian Acts
- Showcase EHL Student Work

Module 2: Limits in Armed Conflict

- History & Evolution of International Law
- Human Rights Law & Humanitarian Law
- Basic Rules of International Humanitarian Law
- Focus: Child Soldiers

EHL & Global Education Curriculum

Day 2: Module 3&5: Responding to the Consequences of War

- Focus: Anti-personnel Mines
- Needs That Arise from the Devastation of War
- Internally Displace People & Refugees
- Protecting Prisoners
- Restoring Family Links

Using Exploring Humanitarian Law

- EHL Overview
- Integration of EHL
- Build A Camp for Displaced People
- Questions/Answer/Discussion

Day 3: Module 4: Ensuring Justice

- Identifying Violations
- Who Is Responsible?
- A Case Study – My Lai
- Rationale For Justice
- Enforcement: Domestic Tribunals & Evolution of Int. Tribunals

Youth Mobilization & Taking Action

- Even Wars Have Limits