

Introduction

THIS VOLUME compiles diverse articles that reflect experiences in Asia and the Pacific. The articles speak of different modes of education – from the non-formal to the formal, and sometimes somewhere in-between. They cover different education programs that have human rights content, alongside those that have been established as human rights education programs.

The different perspectives expressed in the articles enrich human rights education in general, and provide insights and learnings educators look for.

Theater

Theater plays an important role in increasing consciousness about social issues and awareness of human rights among the general public. As a medium for entertainment, theater has strong public appeal. Combined with social messaging, theater becomes a potent tool in human rights promotion. Socially-oriented theater groups in the region have taken up human rights issues as themes in their productions.

An interesting and probably defining component in the use of theater in reaching out to the public is the localization of theater performances. This is seen in Seeds Theatre Group's approach of writing scripts based on their study of the communities they work with. They develop scripts that "reflect the lives of people in the community that the Seeds Theatre Group members have heard, seen, and experienced."

The same is true in involving the members of the communities or students in the theater performances. They can act out the issues they face. The Rainbow Theatre Group's production on persons with disabilities shows both the capability of the persons with disabilities to act and the desirability of getting them involved in the advocacy for the societal recognition of their existence as well as their rights.

BITA, on the other hand, provides an example of using theater to campaign against a prevalent and difficult exploitative practice of human trafficking. Its school-based program is an important support for human rights education in the school system. Using theater in making learning joyful as well as relevant to real life situations is an important measure that the school system has to consider to formally adopt.

Legal Literacy

Law and the legal system are important components in enjoying human rights and in seeking remedies whenever the rights are violated. Legal literacy is no longer limited to the discussion of laws as purely “domestic” matters, but as domestic means to enforce obligations under international human rights agreements. Many countries have enacted laws as well as mechanisms that relate to rights that ratified international treaties contain. This can be seen in laws and legal mechanisms for children, women, and people with disabilities. In the same manner, national human rights institutions have been established in many countries in Asia and the Pacific to address human rights issues. Legal literacy therefore has evolved to the extent of discussing issues and legal rights from a human rights perspective. The BRAC program is an example of making human rights an explicit part of legal literacy program. This can also be seen in the work of the members of the Global Legal Empowerment Network.

Mass Media

Another institution that deserves attention from human rights educators is the mass media. Television and radio still dominate the mass media in any given country, and influence the people’s thinking and behavior. They have been communicating information about social issues and have been supportive of campaigns for action to address them. The Child Rights Award of the two big mass media organizations in Asia and the Pacific is an important support for the human rights promotion work of the television and radio companies. This award boosts local initiatives in presenting child rights to the mainstream audience, an important component in educating the public about human rights. The stories being shown in television programs are valuable teaching and learning materials for the teachers and the students in school. They are also the best materials that can start public discussion or debate on issues that have likely been hidden from or ignored by the people in general.

Teaching and Learning Materials

The development of teaching and learning materials comprise one of the significant tasks in any human rights education program. Such teaching and

learning materials must promote human rights as knowledge, values and skill. This is illustrated in the experience of ASPBAE in developing its training toolkit that includes human rights.

Education for the Public Servants

The human rights education programs for government officials are needed in addressing many of the human rights issues facing societies today. Government actions directly affect the lives of people, which can either protect and realize human rights or violate them. The indispensable role of governments in ensuring that people enjoy their human rights require that government officials, the so-called public servants, know the human rights significance of their work. They have to face the reality that public servants exercise authority that can trample upon the rights of the people. Thus human rights education programs for government officials deal to a large extent on how to apply human rights principles to government systems. Human rights must become an integral part of the government policies, systems and mechanisms, and the government officials have to be prepared to undertake the task of working for human rights. The experiences of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia and the National Human Rights Commission of Korea provide examples of how “public servants” are being trained on serving the public in accordance with human rights principles.

The program of the university-based Castan Centre for Human Rights Law in Victoria, Australia provides an example of other institutions that play equally important role in making human rights integral to government operations. The training of government officials, particularly those faced with challenging situations such as post-conflict situations, is crucial in establishing government systems that respect human rights.

This leads to the role that the academic institutions have been playing in helping promote human rights through the formal education system, including the “open university” system. The program of the Chang Fu-chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights in Taipei illustrates the increase in the number of universities in Asia and the Pacific that offer human rights courses in undergraduate and graduate levels. The program of the Open University of Kaohsiung city provides an example of how the academe can be seriously engaged in local government human rights initiatives.

Social Education

The article on social education in Japan not only traces the history of social education in the country but also analyses the legal and local government policy development critically. It points to the changing national educational policy that affects to a large extent the educational policies and programs of the local governments. It criticizes the legal developments as meant to re-define the principles of social education that espouses freedom of education and supported by the idea that people have the right to decide on the kind of education they would like to have in their community. In other words, the original notion of democracy in and through education has been changed. The most significant impact is in depriving people in the local community of their right to decide what to learn using public facilities.

The article discusses examples of measures that affect social education such as staff transfer and management outsourcing. Both negatively affected the implementation of social education programs.

Kominkan, as a primary venue for social education, represents a good example of community-influenced, if not managed, educational facility that can be used for human rights education. Its spread in Japan from the 1950s represented the strong appreciation of the value of education among members of the local community. Such yearning for learning, an exercise of freedom to learn, provides a basic element that supports human rights education. The existence of Kominkan is therefore very significant in terms of implementing human rights education at the ground level. Unfortunately, the Kominkan did not get the kind of appreciation it deserved through the change of policies on government public educational facilities.

In the effort to lower local government expenses, social education and the Kominkan suffered.

The article discusses also the irony of introducing new educational policy and program that displaces an older and certainly valuable educational policy and program. The introduction “lifelong learning” has the effect of minimizing the role of social education. Recent educational programs should help improve the existing local initiatives instead of supplant them. The irony lies in the fact that “lifelong learning” is an internationally supported educational initiative that has in effect contradicted social education, instead of supplement it, at least in the case Japan. Is lifelong learning, as conceived internationally, meant to supplant social education?

Social education and the community-based educational facility (like the Kominkan) are important vehicles for human rights education. Devaluing them leads to restricting the venues for non-formal human rights education program that should properly exist in local communities.

Programming for Human Rights Education

The experience of HURIGHTS OSAKA illustrates the importance of developing programs for sustained human rights promotion. Similar to the experiences expressed in the other articles in this publication, human rights education programming is not a simple case of developing activities and implementing them. Many factors can restrain full blown program development and implementation. HURIGHTS OSAKA's experience shows to some extent the desirability of adopting the collaborative approach in human rights education programming. Such an approach has a better chance of making the best use of limited resources and also the raises the reality that human rights education is a multi-institutional undertaking.

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