

Human Rights Education in New Zealand Schools

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There is now an increasing supply of written materials on human rights education in schools. Among them are recent publications by the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center in Osaka, Japan. The first chapter of the center's 1999 publication, *Schools, Human Rights and Society*, provides a useful analysis of human rights education in Southeast, Northeast, and South Asia. Its analysis could well apply to New Zealand, and equally to Australia, Canada, and the United States. Many of the publications about human rights education have a number of common themes, most of which have been carefully captured in the materials provided for this workshop.

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights and most national human rights commissions and related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) justifiably place a high value on the school as a critical site for the promotion of understanding and for acquiring competence in human rights matters. New Zealand articulates a similar view. The Office of the Race Relations Conciliator, where I work, has signaled an altered strategic approach by which New Zealand's race relations and race discrimination issues will be addressed through a sustained educational program. The school is a primary site in the strategy.

We all seem to take a values-based experimental approach to sensitizing students to human rights concepts. In most of our countries, both government and NGOs, with varying levels of involvement, are the providers of the programs. The materials that have been developed to date have many similarities.

In most countries, however, despite the quality of human rights education materials produced for use in schools, the topic is usually relegated to compete with other aspects of the school curriculum. We often find that unless

the teacher has a particular interest in human rights, it is left virtually to chance to determine whether or not the topic will be included in the teaching/learning program. Some schools gladly include human rights topics while others do not see it as part of the basic curriculum at all. Too many schools seem interested only in the basic curriculum with subjects such as reading, writing, science, mathematics, language, and the like, but place much less weight on values, critical thinking, fairness, and equity. Consequently, many students are not introduced to human rights issues.

The New Zealand Experience

Despite the generalities, the specific form of human rights education a country adopts is context specific. In New Zealand, for example, understanding the context requires some knowledge of New Zealand history, the country's definitions of what constitutes human rights, the nature of its education system, the structure of the education curriculum, the value placed on human rights by administrators and teachers, leadership for human rights,

the general culture of New Zealand, and the resources allocated to human rights education.

My task is to explain New Zealand's experiences and the lessons we have learned over the 27 years that we have had a human rights institution.

New Zealand is a Pacific nation of 3.8 million people. It was established by the Treaty of Waitangi between the sovereign Maori tribes and the British Crown in 1840. In 1996, 71% percent of its people were of British or European origin, 15% Maori, about 5% Pacific Islanders, and 4% of Asian background. In less than 50 years, it is projected that only half the population will be of European origin, indigenous people will make up 20%, and Asian and Pacific peoples about 12% each. New Zealand society is going through demographic changes that will vastly alter its population mix.

While New Zealand's history is one of the usual excesses of colonization, its more recent history reflects a desire to resolve the breaches of the treaty by the Crown and to acknowledge our indigenous peoples. The resurgence of the importance of our founding document over the last 20 years or so has changed the nature of the relationship between the government and the Maori, and its imprint is seen in many aspects of New Zealand life. Consequently, some people feel that the focus on indigenous people has gone too far and believe it is time to create "one law for all" and to treat everyone the same. We all know this is a code for wanting everyone to be like the majority.

When we examine human rights today, we do so against a background of considerable recent discussion and debate about the rights of particular sections of our society. There is some sensitivity amongst non-indigenous people about the issues and the demand to resolve treaty grievances. A number of large claims have been resolved, in turn creating further tensions. The important point is to realize that the conflicts are also interpreted as human rights and race relations issues.

New Zealand's more recent immigration policies have shifted from attracting migrants from traditional European sources to skill-based and investment-based migration from any country. The result is a much greater mix of cultures and increased migrant visibility in our neighborhood. The pace of change is fairly rapid and citizens have not been fully informed about the impact of the changes or of the many efforts to plan for the future impact of the changes.

Human rights education in New Zealand also has to be seen against the background of two macro developments. First, the country shifted to a deliberate and aggressive market model in its purest form in 1984. Its ideological position has for the past 15 years determined the purpose and role of government, the role of the market, greater competition, the notion of individual choice and responsibility, less state intervention in the lives of citizens, and a systematic reduction in welfare.

While a great deal of attention has been given to providing the "right" conditions for economic development, the human-capital side of the development equation has been left to the market to determine. The impact of these profound shifts on citizens and their human rights is not to be underestimated.

Another major change that has been taking place and which informs the context of human rights education in schools is our education reforms. Compulsory primary and secondary education is provided by the state. Reforms were spurred by the drive for efficiencies. Now all schools are effectively run by locally elected Boards of Trustees, who are usually, although not exclusively, the parents of the children in the school. Many schools have been directed by their Boards of Trustees to focus on the essential curriculum, usually reading, writing, mathematics, science, and the like.

The challenge to traditional human rights education is enormous. An environment that values individualism at the expense of cooperation, that tolerates significant levels of un-

employment and differential access to quality health services for all risks discrimination and endangers the whole society. The converse is an inclusive society giving attention to the relationship among citizens and between government and citizen.

The second challenge is to address the issues arising out of the nation's founding document, initially to increase understanding of the constitutional and historical significance of the treaty and its present-day status. Conflict has developed between social sectors that accept the treaty and its implications and those that want it completely excluded from any consideration. The matter is further complicated by the fact that government has accepted that many of the cultural and property rights of the indigenous people have been disregarded.

The third challenge is to come to terms with growing ethnic diversity and to prepare for dramatically altered inter-ethnic relations.

The fourth challenge is to increase the level of knowledge about international human rights conventions and the provisions of New Zealand's own human rights legislation. The challenge includes making more avenues available to citizens to lodge complaints of discrimination and receive information about their rights.

The School Curriculum Structure

The school curriculum provides many opportunities for human rights education. It is guided by nine principles that guide all teaching and learning. It specifies seven essential learning areas that describe in broad terms the knowledge and understanding that all students need to acquire, seeks the development of eight essential skills by all students, and indicates the place of attitudes and values in the school curriculum.

The key principles for the New Zealand education curriculum are the following:

- Establish the direction for learning and assessment in all schools.

- Foster achievement and success for all students.
- Provide for flexibility, enabling teachers to design programs appropriate to the learning needs of the students.
- Ensure that learning progresses coherently throughout schooling.
- Encourage students to become independent and lifelong learners.
- Provide all students with equal educational opportunities.
- Recognize the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi.
- Reflect the multicultural nature of New Zealand society.
- Relate learning to the wider world.

The seven learning areas include:

- learning and language;
- mathematics;
- science;
- technology;
- social sciences;
- the arts; and
- health and physical well-being.

The eight essential skills include those related to the following:

- communication;
- numbers;
- information;
- problem solving;
- self-management and competition;
- social and cooperation;
- physical ability; and
- work and study.

Finally, the school curriculum is required to reinforce the commonly held values of individual and collective responsibility that underpin New Zealand society: honesty, reliability, respect for others, respect for the law, tolerance, fairness, caring or compassion, nonsexism, and nonracism.

The curriculum framework provides for a flexible approach to education where one ac-

tivity could address a number of curriculum goals. Consequently, while human rights do not constitute a curriculum area, they could be taught under a number of learning areas and essential skills. Opportunities to include human rights in lessons exist in social studies, the arts, and health and well-being, and in teaching communication, problem solving, and socializing and cooperation skills.

Definition of Human Rights

A wide range of educational experiences would qualify as human rights education. While the Human Rights Commission and the Race Relations Office have specific programs in schools, other organizations have also secured opportunities to offer courses or develop materials for use by teachers. The organizations include the following:

- The Peace Foundation, which offers courses on learning peaceful relations (for primary schools) and extending peaceful relations (for secondary schools). It provides books of activities that the teacher can use to achieve several curriculum goals. It also offers a “Cool Schools” program, a school-based mediation program run by students, which is copyrighted and available only to people who have gone through their training program.
- The Youth Law Office, which offers legal education programs to young people to make them aware of the range of legal provisions that affect them and how to access legal help when required.
- The Human Rights Commission, which offers three courses, one each for primary, intermediate, and secondary schools. All three courses follow the inquiry process and incorporate values exploration and social decision making.

Courses are divided into six modules. Each module is structured so that it allows teachers to focus teaching and learning both on the

objectives of the national curriculum and on understanding human rights.

The activities range from warm-up games, class discussion, brainstorming, group work, individual work, debates, and information interpretation. Most courses have an enrichment and an extension suggestion that links the students to the wider community and then to the global one.

The Race Relations Office offers a range of learning opportunities for young people. Usually a staff member provides the education input. The office aims to achieve a heart-and-mind shift by having people think and feel during the learning experiences.

A separate program, “In Tune,” is available to schools. It focuses on the Treaty of Waitangi, its historical origins, current application, and impact on New Zealand society. It is available in the country’s two official languages and is designed to fit into a number of the topics in the national social studies curriculum themes.

New Zealand’s human rights education in schools mirrors much of other countries’ experience. Human rights education is usually not explicitly identified as such except in the programs that are about to be introduced by the Human Rights Commission. The programs are offered by a number of organizations and are designed to be flexible enough to be incorporated into the school curriculum at a number of different levels and in different learning areas.

Perhaps the only remarkable element about New Zealand’s human rights education is the pervasive influence of the Treaty of Waitangi. Our founding document prescribes the relationship between tribes and the Crown, but many citizens have some way to go to fully accept its status and importance. Issues relating to the rights of indigenous peoples are often submerged because of the status of the treaty in New Zealand law and because of the significant progress that has been made to resolve the disputes of the past.

Implications

Despite much of the excellent work that has been done in human rights education, our experiences and lessons learned might be the same as other countries’.

- Human rights education is optional.

The carefully designed programs aimed at different aspects of the curriculum will come to nothing unless teachers accept it as an idea worth supporting. Human rights education cannot remain as a one-shot act of conscience but must be sustained by a strong belief in the human rights perspective. Such a powerful educational program needs continuity in the higher grades at school. If a series of inputs is meant to follow a reasonably precise order, then missing one or two critical sessions will tend to negate the impact of the program overall. No element of public policy that has an optional aspect to it has a good record of achieving behavioral change, especially when some are cynical about its importance and others take it on board grudgingly.

This shortcoming can be fixed by a much stronger commitment on the part of the educational fraternity. Whether it will occur on a voluntary basis is a matter for conjecture. Consequently, some thought may need to be given at the level of policy to make human rights education in schools compulsory.

- Human rights education requires a human rights mindset.

We still have some way to go to develop a pervasive mindset that supports human rights education and sees it as a powerful element of national development. To do so requires a major promotional exercise that has to demonstrate the benefits of enhancing human rights protection. For as long as the focus is on the excessive compliance costs of human rights protection, the issue will remain one to be brought out into the open a little more

deliberately. At times it seems that people feel that human rights are fine provided human rights education doesn’t get out of hand.

- Human rights education needs powerful leaders to promote it.

Only powerful national leaders will be able to promote human rights education in schools, communities, businesses, and in public policy consideration. We live in times where evidence of ethnic conflicts and human rights abuses are well documented internationally, which should provide the impetus for renewed focus on developing a discrimination-free society.

- Human rights education should be approached holistically.

There is no doubt that schools are a natural site for transforming society into a more rights-conscious society. However, we are unable to calculate the extent to which the good work done in the schools is being undone by parents and others in the community. In order to ensure that this does not happen, other members of the community ought to receive appropriate human rights education as well.

- Human rights education teachers must be trained.

One wonders if we will ever have enough resources to introduce human rights education in all schools. It is therefore imperative that the next generation of teachers be trained to internalize the human rights perspective and then to provide classroom training themselves. The model of human rights education in New Zealand and in many other countries, which is dependent on human rights commissions and NGOs developing material for optional use by schools, will ensure that inconsistencies continue and the educational fraternity is absolved of its broader responsibility for human rights education. Thus, an effective human rights education strategy for teacher training is required.

- Human rights education efforts should be evaluated.

We need to be sure that our educational efforts are successful. Consequently, appropriate, longitudinal, and cross-sectional studies need to be commissioned to evaluate the effects of human rights training programs. We need to know if we are affecting thinking and action and in what direction. We need to know the extent to which parents corrupt the learning that children experience and the conditions under which the learning is enhanced by their interests.

- Program development should carefully plan the actual use of materials.

It takes a long time to develop and produce effective materials for human rights education in schools. It is heartbreaking when so much has been done to produce material, which then sits on the shelves unused.

Conclusion

The New Zealand experience of human rights education in schools has much in common with other countries in the region. Our programs follow a similar logic and methods. The historical treaty-based context of New Zealand provides it with some special challenges that have to do with indigenous rights and breaches of the covenants. Perhaps the underestimated element of human rights education in New Zealand has to do with the politics of implementation as there are political considerations, from the conceptualization to the development and implementation of an educational program. If we could strip the process of the considerations that limit the resources available, that frustrate the introduction of programs into schools, and that subvert the message of positive human rights, then we could develop a true human rights culture where people do not miss out on that to which they are entitled simply on the basis of what nature and circumstance have endowed them.