

Human Rights Education Network: Japan Experience

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In the early 80s, Dowa educators assessed the more than 20 years of experience of Dowa education.¹ They clarified what it had achieved and planned for its future. They wanted a clearer vision of how Dowa education relates with other education programs, such as education about people with disabilities, the Korean minority in Japan, and peace. They recognized the need to empower everyone to protect and promote human rights. To do this, they realized that awareness on three main issues must be raised:

First, eradicating Buraku discrimination is more than raising to the national level the living standards and academic achievement of people in Dowa communities. It is necessary to raise the human rights awareness of everyone, those who discriminate and those who are discriminated against.

Second, the causes of discrimination against the Dowa and other forms of discrimination are closely connected. Some discriminatory attitudes and systems are perpetuated in more than one form. Those who are prejudiced against one type of people are often prejudiced against others, too.

Third, it is necessary to raise the human rights awareness of all people and to change the cultures and systems that perpetuate discrimination because no one is free from stereotypes and prejudices. It sometimes happens that those who suffer from one form of discrimination do not recognize their prejudice against another. It is also true that those who suffer from one form of discrimination can understand deeply the suffering that other minorities experience.

Subsequently, Dowa educators learned about the Mid-Atlantic Region "Japan in School" (MARJiS) program set up at Maryland University in 1986. MARJiS is a training program for

teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region, in the United States (US), including Maryland, Washington D.C., and Virginia. They found the program to be similar in many ways to the Dowa education program. In 1991, Dr. Barbara Finkelstein, director of MARJiS, started a project called National Intercultural Education Leadership Institute (NIELI) to organize educators and researchers from 25 states in the US to research on intercultural education.

HRE Network

In 1992, Dowa educators set up the Osaka-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) called Human Rights Education Network (HRE Network) to form a broad network of human rights educators and researchers and to develop mutual exchanges with MARJiS and NIELI members.

At its inception, HRE Network aimed to obtain information and suggestions on the three main issues identified by Dowa educators as important areas in further developing Dowa education. It wanted to have exchanges with educators, researchers and activists involved in multi-cultural education in the US.

The HRE Network has widened its mission by aiming to create a network of researchers,

educators, government officials and activists in Cambodia and Thailand who are involved in human rights education.

The main objectives of HRE Network are:

- To give seminars to educators, government officials, and citizens on human rights education as developed in Japan and abroad.
- To send study tour groups to the US, Thailand and Cambodia.
- To provide educational programs, including skills in making leather goods, and help eradicate illiteracy in Thailand and Cambodia.

HRE Network is trying to strengthen its relationship with organizations supporting minorities all over the world. It cooperates with a Japanese NGO (Shanti Volunteer Association, or SVA) and a Thai NGO (Prateep Foundation) in supporting marginalized people in Thailand and Cambodia. Through exchanges with SVA, HRE Network members learned some effective participatory methods to teach children about human rights, and some approaches to support the oppressed people in the community. HRE Network members, on the other hand, share ways of cultivating self-esteem among marginalized people, developing leaders in the human rights movement, and protecting and developing their traditional industries.

Dowa educators cooperated with people involved in the literacy movement and tried to learn deeply from the real lives and narratives of discriminated people. This helped them understand what discriminated people have achieved in economic, cultural and humanitarian terms and the significance of their experiences. Dowa educators hope that discriminated people all over the world will share their experiences and activities and cooperate with each other. This can help improve the Dowa education philosophy and policies.

When they contacted minority groups in Thailand and Cambodia, Dowa educators realized that they could learn much from them. This was the reason why HRE Network started

exchanges with educators, researchers and community activists and NGOs in Thailand and Cambodia. It started to teach skills on manufacturing leather products for people in the slum areas in Thailand because it was one of the many skills that had been developed to a high standard by the *Burakumin* in Japan. In return, members of HRE Network learned much from the Thai experiences of organizing people and developing their communities.

Study tour program

HRE Network started a study tour program in 1992. Its initial objectives were:

- To revise the network's concept of human rights education by incorporating ideas about multi-cultural education.
- To obtain suggestions on how to reform the Japanese education system by comparing American schools with Japanese schools.
- To give opportunity for study tour participants to get acquainted with their American counterparts and further develop their exchanges and studies.

HRE Network has now revised the objectives of the study tour program as follow:

- To get information on educational reform during the last 10 years in the US.
- To examine the future course of multi-cultural education in building up harmony and cooperation among people.
- To clarify the concept of human rights education by studying practices of multi-cultural education.
- To strengthen the relationship with some NGOs in the US to help activate the citizens' movements in Japan.

The study tour is held annually and consists of three parts. First is visit to schools involved in effective multi-cultural education. Participants discuss with their American counterparts the curriculum, lesson plans, and other materi-

als. Second is visit to NGOs to know about their activities and to learn lessons using participatory method. Third is visit to peace and human rights museums like Tolerance Museum and Japanese-American Museum (both in Los Angeles), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (in Washington D.C.), and Museum of Jewish Heritage (in New York). Participants stay at the houses of host families.

A study tour program is about 10 days to two weeks long. Japanese human rights education research associations and teachers' unions help disseminate information about the program.

HRE Network wants the educators, researchers, local government officials, community workers and college/graduate students who have keen interest in human rights education to join the program. Average number of participants in a study tour is 20 to 50. About 300 people have participated in the program. During the past 10 years, the participants have created their own programs, as follow:

- Some teachers attended training programs in the US to become facilitators of diversity education developed by the World of Difference Institute in New York. They have started to give seminars about it in Japan.
- Teachers from Fukuoka prefecture had their own study tours to Oakland, California, a sister city of Fukuoka.
- Teachers of Kunijima Senior High School and activists in the community set up an exchange program with educators and local governors and students in San Francisco, a sister city of Osaka City.

Under the HRE Network study tour program to the US, Japanese educators visit every year the offices of NIELI in Maryland; the offices of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR) and the World of Difference Institute of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), both in New York; and the Japan-Pacific Resource Network (JPRN), the Art, Research and Curriculum

Associates (ARC), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and the Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), all in California. The study tour program to Thailand and Cambodia was created later.

Participants in the program found interest in several matters:

- **Education on technology.** The Thomas Edison Technical School in Maryland is equipped with the newest technical facilities and machines. It has several sections that resemble the reception hall of a hotel, car repair factory, beauty salon, and housing construction factory. It has computers with the newest house designing computer programs installed, for example. The "students" here are not enrolled as regular students. They come from several schools where they study the regular course. They come to the Thomas Edison Technical School either in the morning or in the afternoon. They learn skills related to different industries. In Japan, to acquire those skills students have to enter private technical schools after graduating from senior high school. The participants think that the Thomas Edison Technical School system gives functional literacy to students.
- **Communication skills development.** The tour program covers special education classes for people living with disability. These classes help disabled students develop their ability to communicate their needs, wants, impressions, and opinions. A student with mental disability has his or her own communication tool in the form of a palm-size computer. It looks like a picture board with many pictures showing various needs and wants. By touching the pictures, a sound comes out expressing their meaning to other people. Touching a picture of a cup gives out a sound saying, "I want a cup of water." Since the student cannot move his or her arms or hands, a light gear is attached to his or her head, and head is used to move the gear to the pictures. The participants are impressed by the zeal of the teachers in developing the com-

munication skill of their students. They realize the need to have good communication ability to realize human rights and practice democracy. They come to understand that communication ability should be more stressed in Japan.

Results of the HRE Network program(s)

HRE Network found the ideas in the *Multi-Cultural Education 10-Year Curriculum—1990 to 2000* developed by the Board of Education of Prince George County (Maryland) very relevant to Japan. The philosophy on how to reform the school system and the recommendations in developing effective school curriculum gave many hints in developing the “Guideline for Human Rights Education” in Japan.

HRE Network also found one particular educational resource that has become popular in Japan—“People Colored Crayons.” This kit includes many colorful crayons representing the various skin colors of people living in the world. Since every Japanese student buys crayons as art material when entering the elementary school, the use of “People Colored Crayons” was promoted. Activities using these crayons are developed. Many students think that the Japanese people have only one skin color. By using the “People Colored Crayons” students are taught about the reality that the Japanese people have varying colors of skin. The crayons help explain the stereotype about racial homogeneity in Japan and make students recognize the differences of skin color among the Japanese people. This helps the students understand that people who do not have “pale orange” skin color suffer from discrimination.

With the help of IMADR, HRE Network contacted communities of indigenous people in the US. A program to study the problems faced by the indigenous communities in the US has been developed.

HRE Network also learned much from several exchanges with ADL. It gained a clearer

perspective on multi-cultural education, human rights education, and anti-discrimination education. It learned that multi-cultural education is a basic philosophy in education, human rights education is education for political actions, and anti-discrimination education is education to cope with human psychology and the cognitive process. In learning about these education programs, HRE Network recognized more deeply the elements of Dowa education.

Results were fruitful on the West Coast. HRE Network had an opportunity to observe the community-based support programs for minority children with the help of ARC. It got a lot of information from activists and lecturers involved in various ARC projects. Four participants were impressed with the research carried out by ARC about how people internalize several cultures and sub-cultures. With the help of AFSC, four participants learned about the “Tolerance Museum” in Los Angeles. It is a museum where people can learn how the Holocaust happened and how they can realize or understand their own prejudices through participatory learning. HRE Network introduced this museum to the Japanese public and gained the support of the National Japanese-American Museum with the help of JPRN and the Little Tokyo Service Center. Through exchanges with these groups, HRE Network became known to other organizations in the US, including the “Oakland-Japan Project” and “California Tomorrow.”

Lessons for Dowa Education

Dowa educators learned the following lessons through the exchanges with the educators and researchers involved in multi-cultural education:

- There is a clearer understanding of the structure of discrimination especially in the field of group psychology and cognitive psychology. Dowa educators had studied discrimination mainly from the economic structure and income gap among social

strata. Participants of the study tours disseminated the importance of social psychology theories developed by G.W. Allport and others. They also introduced the educational programs based on those theories. One of these programs was the one developed by the World of Difference Institute, which was set up by ADL.

- There is recognition of a need for more methodologies to improve not only the human rights awareness but also the attitudes of students. Effective participatory methods—including group work, field-study, interview, discussion, newsletters, and “writing about oneself”—are deemed necessary. There is a clearer recognition of other methods, including simulation, role-play, debate and games.
- There is more understanding about the principles of multi-cultural education. Some of these principles are explained by “One from Many,” highlighted by Dr. Barbara Finkelstein. Multi-cultural education under this concept has three sources: (a) the concept and the provisions of human rights in the Constitution of the US and the Declaration of Independence; (b) the idea that it is a fundamental human right to live in a society where diverse cultures co-exist and cooperate with each other; and (c) the idea that multi-cultural education comes from humanism and human ethics. These important definitions are expressed clearly by the term “One from Many.”

“One from Many” also clarified the future tasks of Dowa educators. They realized that people have multiple identities. For example, some people who live in Dowa districts want to participate in anti-gender discrimination movements and in the movements against discrimination of people in Dowa communities. Some people want to eradicate discrimination against the people with special needs and against Korean minorities in Japan. Some want to

tackle job-related discrimination and to join peace movements. “One from Many” sets the future course of Japanese society in getting more closely linked with other peoples in the world.

Future Plans

HRE Network assessed its programs for the past 10 years and decided that it has to initiate or continue in the next few years the following:

- Develop multi-cultural education, including a study on civic education and on moral education, which are supposed to be its basis.
- Develop teaching materials for multi-cultural education with educators, researchers, and activists in the US, Thailand and Cambodia.
- Support Japanese schools that send study tours and make school trips to these countries.

Multi-cultural education is deemed important in Japan because of problems relating to non-Japanese residents in the country. One reason for the problems faced by non-Japanese residents is the lack of appreciation of their cultures by the Japanese. One important task of multi-cultural education is the clarification and analysis of the power relations that occur due to cultural differences. This is exemplified in the situation of Korean residents in Japan.

To make all cultures co-exist equally and peacefully, two courses of action are needed. One is law and governmental system reform. Laws and government systems should recognize the need for cultures to co-exist equally and peacefully in society. This is the legal aspect of multi-cultural education. This is the reason why HRE Network members want to study civic education.

The other course of action is a study of the psychological and moral aspects of multi-cultural education. Recognition of and solidarity with the plight of oppressed people is neces-

sary. It means understanding the concept of justice. In this sense, HRE Network members see a link between multi-cultural education and moral education.

Conclusion

Multi-cultural education, which HRE Network has been introducing in Japan, has contributed to the development of the concept of human rights education. HRE Network members realize the importance of participatory learning method. They have noticed that lectures are not enough to make students change their attitude and behavior. HRE Network has obtained many ideas on how to develop better teaching materials and participatory methodologies. HRE Network members also realize the need to give more attention to prejudice. They now have more information on how prejudice is formed and strengthened. They have learned about

teaching/learning approaches for each level of the students. They also recognize that Dowa education is universal and has many common features with human rights education programs in other countries.

Educators, researchers, and activists in the US, Thailand, and Cambodia understand what Dowa education is. They encourage HRE Network members to improve Dowa education through exchanges with them. They also believe that HRE Network members help encourage their counterparts in other countries to improve their programs.

Endnote

1. Dowa education is a program to eradicate discrimination against the *Burakumin*. The Burakumin are Japanese people with the same race as the majority of the population.