

Fifty Years of Human Rights Education in Osaka

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The Osaka Prefecture Human Rights Education Research Association (Osaka HRERA) is an organization of 35,000 teachers and staff members of all kindergartens, elementary, and junior high schools in Osaka prefecture. Founded in 1953 as the Osaka Prefecture Dowa Education Research Association (Osaka Dowa ERA), it is now 50 years old. Reflecting on the past half century of research and training, generating information, and networking—all inherited from the results of Dowa education—I discuss the issues we must face in human rights education and what we need to do under a new international program as follow-up to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004).

Dowa Education as the Core of Human Rights Education in Japan

Dowa education after World War II evolved from Buraku¹ discrimination in schools. Thus, the beginning of Dowa education and, in turn, of Japan's human rights education, is rooted in the efforts to protect the rights of children. It is the result of encounters with discrimination, not an abstract, empty theorizing.

Start of Dowa education: Efforts to improve schooling of Buraku children

- *Efforts to encourage Buraku children to attend school (1950s–1960s).* In the 1950s and 1960s, teachers knew that Buraku children were staying away from school because of poverty and discrimination. Teachers began to make repeated home visits and to negotiate with local authorities for an increase in the number of teachers. Kochi City and later in Osaka prefecture subsequently increased the number of teachers as a result.

- *Pursuit of equal opportunity in education (1960s).* As teachers tried to persuade Buraku children to attend school regularly, a movement developed to provide textbooks free of charge, based on Article 26 of the Constitution: “Compulsory education will be free.” Begun in Nagahama, Kochi, in 1961, the movement resulted in a law in 1963 requiring distribution of free textbooks, benefitting all children.

In the latter half of the 1960s many children attended a school outside their district to avoid contact with Buraku. In Osaka and elsewhere, teachers, school staff, community members, and children protested this practice and brought it nearly to an end. Scholarships for Buraku high-school and university students were gradually made part of the system. Advocates of Dowa education joined with various other causes to give Buraku equal educational opportunities.

- *Community building, and ensuring education for disadvantaged students.* Children who “act up” or “act out” have difficult situations at home, feel hopeless, and do not have the academic ability to deal with these problems. To

understand such children, teachers had to know their home situations and daily lives. The importance of home visits as well the perspective of understanding the actual situation of children, which can be said to be the very soul of Dowa education, were emphasized in Osaka from this period.

Osaka Dowa ERA had already been organized and it continues to sponsor summer study and training seminars (*Shigi-san ken*, or Mount Shigi seminars), where teachers and staff can exchange their experiences in Dowa education and engage in thorough discussions and debate. (Although they have been organized, these summer study seminars have been held 45 times, serving as the interactive core for Osaka's Dowa education teachers). During these seminars, the teachers' very way of being are questioned, and their philosophy and practice as educators examined to enable self-improvement and self-reform. In this period was firmly established the sense that teachers must examine their perceptions of discrimination and how they confront it.

- *Spread and strengthening of Dowa education (1970s to the present)*. The Children's Association for Buraku Liberation helped children face and fight discrimination. Children were taught to detect discrimination, be proud, and live with one another.

Our work needed to expand to include children of resident Koreans, children with disabilities, gender—that is to say, human rights for all. Group work, or community building, which positions children with special issues in its center, is a growing concern. This has all been carried out in the name of Dowa education (sometimes referred to as liberation education), and the perspective and experience of Dowa education has expanded to include other human rights problems and to seek ways to solve them.

In 1970 a human rights reader, *Ningen* (Human Beings), was published and distributed to all elementary- and junior-high-school students in Osaka. Dealing with Buraku issues, this

book helped greatly to move human rights education forward. The book was the joint work of Osaka teachers and school staff who had been involved with Dowa education. *Ningen* has gone through successive printings and continues to be used in classrooms today. Other publications such as *Hiragana* (Letters) and *Sansu* (Arithmetic) were also based on classroom needs, and were used as Dowa education materials.

Various special measures were legally instituted. The Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects significantly advanced Dowa education. The joint work of various movements gave rise to policies to guarantee the education of children from families living under strain and stress. Results included hiring of more Dowa educators, improvement of school facilities, and establishment of more high schools.

- *International human rights education (latter 1980s to the present)*. Dowa education was highly influenced by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted by the United Nations [UN] in 1989, ratified by Japan in 1994), and the resolution passed in 1994 at the 49th UN General Assembly on the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004). A participatory learning style for human rights education was also introduced.

The action plans of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004) stipulated “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through imparting of knowledge and skills and the molding of attitudes.” This created a stir. We had to ask ourselves to what extent we teachers had cultivated an attitude intolerant to discrimination, skills to deal with discrimination, and ability to solve problems of discrimination. Were we only teaching knowledge about discrimination? Were we one-sidedly stuffing virtues into our students' heads? We were then introduced to popular education from other Asian countries and to multicultural and global education

from the West. Teachers eagerly studied this new style of education through participation.

We found common elements in concepts and methods of the imported participatory style of learning and of those in Dowa education. We became confident knowing that what we had been doing was indeed linked to human rights education found abroad: learning by interviewing victims of discrimination, conducting field work to find out more about the lives of the victims, then showing our findings in plays and skits, songs, and prose. The philosophy of Dowa education, which strives to cultivate a sense of pride among the oppressed, is to empower them.

However, some misunderstand participatory education as being superficial, like game playing, or as being the answer to all issues. We endeavor to further human rights learning through scientific and experiential teaching of human rights. Participatory learning is being introduced and developed in what is called the “period of integrated learning” through presentations, via extracurricular cultural activities, in homerooms, and in relationship-building activities among the children.

Since 1996 Osaka HRERA has incorporated the findings of participatory learning in teaching materials and posters such as *Watashi/Deai/Hakken Parts 1–4* [Me, My Encounters, My Discoveries]; *Machi/Hito/Kurashi 21* [Our Community, People, Our Life 21]; *Jibun o ikiru 21* [Living as myself 21]; and *Ima donna kimochi?* [How do you feel right now?]. These are being used in schools and in community education.

Resolving to advance human rights education in Dowa education, in March 2002 the Osaka Dowa ERA was renamed Osaka HRERA.

Action Plan for the UN Decade for Human Rights Education

The action plan conceived in March 1998 was twofold, tied together by the key objective, “Bring human rights culture to schools.”

- *Part I.* Aiming to unite Dowa and human rights education. Summary of the direction of human rights education and theoretical ordering of Dowa and human rights education.
- *Part II.* Thirty ways to help children shine. Suggestions to create a school environment where a human rights culture and awareness prevail.

The second part is unique, proposing 10 viewpoints and 30 actions for teachers and staff to use in evaluating their attitudes and skills to improve their methods.

A message calendar was created based on this action plan, and posters with slogans such as “The children’s voices are our starting point” and “The wonder of meeting you” were distributed to schools and kindergartens.

Results of the activities of the Osaka HRERA

Despite the lapse of the Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects (1969) which aimed at eliminating discrimination against Buraku children, the Osaka Dowa ERA moved forward with the following:

- Theoretical ordering
 - Concepts and practices key to Dowa education carried over to the newly re-named organization to pursue human rights education.
- Research activities
 - Comprehensive human rights learning, assuring academic ability, assuring future study or work, community building.
 - Study of Buraku issues, gender-free education, education for children with disabilities, study and training for education of non-Japanese children.
 - Defining problems and proposing suggestions regarding child development (including specific problems among grade-1 classes due to poor adjustment at home or to school and/or from in-

- fantile and frustrated behavior, building human relationships).
- Publication and distribution of research and teaching materials
 - Human rights education materials such as the series *Me, My Encounters, My Discoveries* and *Living as Myself 21*.
 - Posters such as *How do you feel right now?*
 - Surveys
 - Annual surveys on children's matriculation, living situation, self-esteem, thoughts for the future, gender, bullying, learning motivation.
 - Conducting and analyzing questionnaires sent to teachers, school staff, and parents on grade-1 problems.
 - Since 1998 publication of an annual white paper, *The Children of Osaka*.
 - Training
 - Twice yearly, large summer study sessions and training conventions, drawing over 4,000 people, and more specialized study seminars.
 - Developing human rights education, passing it on to the next generation of teachers and staff (one fourth of the participants at summer and other conventions have been teachers for less than 6 years).
 - More than 400 visits a year by association staff to schools to promote joint research or study.
 - Schools designated to promote Dowa education and expand awareness of human rights issues from schools in districts that have Dowa areas to schools that do not.
 - Networking
 - Networking among human rights education organizations of the 40 villages, towns, and municipalities of Osaka.
 - Promoting human rights education at 80 schools selected as human rights education research survey schools even after the expiration of the Law on Special Measures.
 - Networking with administration and various related agencies.
 - Serving as a hub to connect university researchers and schools.
 - Providing information
 - Publishing a newsletter (40,000 copies, 11 times a year), maintaining Web site.

Future Issues

I have traced 50 years of Osaka's Dowa education. The following are issues we need to continue working on.

- Human rights issues for the children of Japan (1998 concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child).
 - Refusal to go to school, physical punishment, bullying, teaching children with disabilities.
 - Discrimination against minorities, including the Ainu, resident Koreans.
- Educational concerns brought to light by the survey of Buraku problems in 2000.
 - Differences in high school and university matriculation, dropping out, digital divide (difference in computer ownership and Internet access for Buraku and non-Buraku areas), literacy, discrimination in marriage.
- Concerns of the schools
 - 130,000 children who refuse to attend school, breakdown of discipline in the classroom, and grade-1 problems; violence in schools; physical punishment; sexual harassment; discrimination against people with disabilities, Buraku, and foreigners.
 - Differences between academic ability or achievement and matriculation of students from Buraku and non-Buraku districts.
 - Need to advance and deepen human rights education.
- Promotion of child-rearing support and community education network.

- Networking of human rights education organizations in Osaka.

Serious issues remain in human rights education of children. However, reports of those who participate in the annual human rights meetings are encouraging, and their interest and eagerness to learn is positive. Despite experiencing severe discrimination or encountering discriminatory incidents, these children know they are not alone and that their peers will stand with them. The future is indeed in these children. This past half century is propelling us forward. Our resolve is to work with the many organizations and groups that hold a common vision and purpose to having a new international program to follow-up on the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004).

Note

1. The word *buraku* literally means village. But at present it is used to refer to Japanese people who suffer from discrimination because they are considered descendants of an outcast section of the populace during the pre-feudal or feudal period of Japanese history. This outcast people were given supposedly dirty tasks such as burying dead animals, slaughtering animals, collecting garbage, and also cleaning of temples. They developed the now well-known Japanese garden, theater and drums. Some Buraku communities today still maintain livelihood relating to animals such as the leather industry including leather tanning and production of leather goods. At present, any Japanese who stay in a Buraku area or community may likewise be treated a Buraku, and thus discriminated.