

JTU: Working towards Non-discrimination and Inclusion in School and Society

Japan Teachers' Union

AFTER WORLD WAR II ENDED, the All Japan Teachers' Unions Association, National Federation of Teachers' Unions and Association of University and Technical Colleges Educators' Unions representing around 500,000 teacher-members in different parts of Japan agreed on 8 June 1947 to unite into one nation-wide organization. This gave birth to Japan Teachers' Union (JTU).

The founding assembly was held in Kashihara Stadium, Nara Prefecture, where accommodation facilities were available due to absence of destruction from the war. The assembly went on from morning till evening to be able to adopt its statutes. While the organizations had many experiences on what they needed to do and how to achieve their mission, they built new roads in their journey through JTU. The founding declaration of JTU states:¹

Upon the consensus of 500,000 teachers from all over the country, we have just formed Japan Teachers' Union with great joy and expectation ... We are committed to playing an important role in the construction of a new democratic order and the creation of a new Japanese culture ... With all the strength of 500,000 teachers who are now connected with each other, we will seek for reasonable improvement of teachers' treatment and for the advancement of their social and political status. We also pledge to strive for the construction of rich and democratic education and culture, by combating and eradicating all the bad conditions remaining in our country, in broad solidarity with workers and farmers all over the country as well as worldwide.

Since then, JTU found itself in the midst of different struggles. The Korean War started in 1950, which led to the establishment of the Reserved Police, the predecessor of the Self Defense Forces of Japan. The following year witnessed the emergence of considerable controversy about whether

or not Japan should conclude peace treaties with all the previous enemies or principally with the United States. In that year, JIU took the lead in the labor movement by adopting the Four Principles for Peace (full pacification, adherence to neutrality, opposition to the provision of military bases and against rearmament) and the slogan "Do Not Send Our Students Again to Battlefields."

Vision of Society

JIU has made clear that it is working for a society that thrives in peace and non-discrimination. As stated by its Secretary General (Yuzuru Nakamura):²

The fundamental point is [that without peace,] education cannot be achieved. And also, [we envision] a society without discrimination. We should seek to educate our children in a way to ensure that they will grow up into adults with sensitivity to human rights, who can work for the elimination of discrimination, not only between men and women, but also on the basis of disability or family conditions. Our most important task is to help children acquire basic academic skills. At the same time, since we are witnessing worrying cases of juvenile crime, we also want them to develop healthy characters and relationships, so that they have self-awareness that they themselves will create a society in the future. We have currently many demands from the society, not only in terms of academic skills, but also concerning basic lifestyles, greeting and other disciplines and ways of using language. We need to talk with parents about each other's roles, telling them this is what we can do and this should be done at home.

JIU has members not only in primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools but also in State, public and private universities/colleges and specialized schools. And aside from teachers there are members who belong to other professions working at school, including administration workers, nutrition staff and manual workers. JIU is a union for everyone who works at school.³

"Gathering Drops One by One"

For more than fifty years since 1951, JIU has organized peer activities for the improvement of teaching all over the country. Teachers have gathered

for the annual National Meeting for Studies on Teaching to exchange the outcomes of their practices and reflections. Ms. Hideko Maruoka describes the National Meeting as follows:⁴

The National Meeting started at Nikko and is now going out from the springhead. Gathering drops one by one, introducing water from streams and coming together with other small rivers, it is getting more and more momentum.... One magazine wrote about the first meeting and said, "Consciences in Japan have got together at Nikko." While I was half-ashamed about it, I was sometimes moved almost into tears by the faces of the teachers who occupied the venues. For example, their shoes. When I was about to enter a workshop room, I found many shoes with patches and worn-out soles ... Even if the National Meeting is subject to mean criticism, no one will be able to cool down the hot heart of those who had come there along cold roads on which these shoes with a lot of holes [trod on.]"

The National Meeting drew much enthusiasm from teachers in Japan over the ensuing decades and, in January 2004, observed its 53rd anniversary in Saitama prefecture. 3,000 teachers from all over the country took part in the preliminary meeting on the first day. Members from Saitama Teachers Union and Saitama High School Teachers Union presented skits with children, introducing Maruki Gallery and its Hiroshima Panels (a museum that exhibits the paintings of Iri and Toshi Maruki on the Hiroshima bombing)⁵ and stressing the importance of human rights and peace. On the remaining days, teachers were divided into twenty-six workshop groups and discussed some eight hundred fifty teaching practice reports.

In the special workshop on the issue of academic abilities, a panel was organized under the title of "Academic Abilities We Pursue: Redefining the roles of schools and teachers for the development of enriched academic abilities." The panelists expressed concerns, such as, "Propaganda about low academic abilities has led to growing influence of the education industry, such as *juku* (supplementary private) schools, as well as to more burdens on household economies and the widening gap between social strata." In addition, reports were presented from all over the country about practices of helping children to acquire the basics hard and fast and for promoting "comprehensive learning" in connection with academic subjects.

On the other hand, the Mothers' and Female Teachers' Association has held annual meetings in summer to confirm the importance of peace. JTU

also organized “Autonomous Curricula Development Courses” in order to improve teachers’ practices and capacities, which has continued to this day as “Educational Curricula Development Courses”.

JTU has offered many opportunities to its members to learn about their own rights through the years. JTU members learn about ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997) that ensure significant roles for teachers’ unions to play. Also, they have opportunities to join union trainings and seminars on what rights are stipulated by national laws and local government ordinances. Now that citizenship education is regarded as necessary, it is even more important for educators to know their own rights.

Recently, JTU focused on Reducing Working-hours Campaign and pointed out that the Special Measures Law on Salaries of Public Education Teachers should be amended or repealed.

This law poses a serious challenge on the rights of teachers. Public school teachers cannot be paid for over-time work except for students’ on-site training, school events, meetings of all staff and responding to emergencies. In fact, teachers overwork to be able to prepare for next classes, research teaching materials, and prepare examination papers, and other tasks. These tasks are regarded as voluntary work and are not paid at all.

JTU broadly focuses on basic labor rights as its fundamental agenda in working with both domestic and international teacher union movements.

Its affiliated unions issue booklets on the rights of teachers based on the concrete context of each prefecture. Members of JTU continuously learn about their rights through national and prefectural activities.

Peace Education and Human Rights Education

Chinese, Korean and Japanese teachers gathered online at the 10th Peace Education Material Exchange Assembly on 3 August 2021 and discussed teaching practices of the three countries for peace in East Asia. The participating teacher organizations were JTU, the National Committee of the Educational, Scientific, Cultural, Health and Sports Workers’ Union in China, and the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU).

General reports on history education and peace education practices were presented. While it was held online, the participants were able to learn

from each other and engaged in heart-to-heart discussion. At the end, they concluded that

Peace education coincides with human rights education. It is significant for teachers of the three countries to gather and exchange views. We will continue this remarkable opportunity.

Human Rights Education

JTU holds assemblies to learn about human rights, namely, National Conference on Educational Research (NCER) and National Assembly on Education on Human Rights.

NCER is held once in a school year with a breakout session on human rights education. The participants bring their practices at schools and discuss how to improve them.

The National Assembly on Education on Human Rights, on the other hand, is also held once per school year and focuses only on human rights education. At the plenary session, a keynote speech on the current situation on human rights education and/or relevant legal situation is delivered. The participants, on the other hand, discuss practices at school and how to improve them. At the last day, the participants usually do fieldwork such as visiting an isolated hospital for Hansen disease patients.



Plenary session, NCER, 2019.



Break-out session, NCER, 2019.

Human Rights Education Guidance

In 2007, JTU issued the *Human Rights Education Guidance toward Non-discrimination and Inclusive Schools and Society* (Guidance).⁶ This Guidance is meant to help JTU members teach human rights in relation to issues faced by their students and existing in their respective communities.

The Guidance was based on the discussions in the meetings of the JTU Institute for Education and its Subcommittees. JTU recognized that discrimination and human rights violations appear concretely in people's lives, and they are interrelated and complex. It also recognized the new forms of discrimination and human rights violations that occur due to structural changes in society.

The Guidance discusses human rights issues in the Japanese context related to human rights education. The list of human rights issues, however, is not an exhaustive one; other issues have not been covered by the Guidance.

The discussion of each issue includes the history of related educational initiative, the current status of the issue (as of 2007) and the problems that should be considered in understanding them.

The issues discussed in the Guidance relate to the following:

1. Buraku liberation;⁷
2. Gender equality;

3. Children with disabilities;
4. Resident Koreans and ethnic minorities;
5. Ainu people;
6. Child abuse and orphanage children;
7. Hansen disease patients;
8. HIV-infected persons.

The Guidance discusses matters that should be considered regarding education on the different issues. The discussions reflect the different problems of the students affected by the issues:⁸

1. Dowa education (education on the Buraku issue)
 - Career education to guarantee academic ability and open up career paths;
 - Creating a group (friends) which can support the Buraku students inside and outside the school;
 - Empowerment of children who are disadvantaged in education, including Buraku children;
 - Learning about human rights and Buraku issues;
 - Collaboration between parents, communities and specialized institutions (researchers).
2. Gender equality education
 - Are you giving guidance or advice such as division of roles or career decision based on gender?;
 - Gender equality education for faculty and staff;
 - “Check your own fixed way of thinking and prejudices (gender bias)” - understanding the fixed way of thinking and prejudices of each child and giving guidance and advice to foster a sense of self-affirmation.
3. Education for children with disabilities
 - Inclusive education as human rights education;
 - From “special needs education” to inclusive education;
 - Meeting and facing each other - What you need to do in a regular class;
 - Efforts of the school as a whole;

- Collaborative learning efforts;
 - Career security efforts;
 - Maintaining indispensable conditions supporting children with disabilities.
4. Koreans in Japan, ethnic minorities and education
- Realizing a multicultural society/school - necessity of changing the consciousness of the Japanese, who constitute the majority;
 - Impact of modernization policy based on the monoethnic state view after the Meiji era (1868-1912) that went against multi-ethnicity (culture);
 - Assimilation and exclusion that alienate coexistence with other ethnic groups;
 - Transformation of Japanese children's consciousness.
5. Ainu people and education
- Establishment of multicultural educational policy;
 - Promotion of livelihood security and improvement of educational conditions for school attendance;
 - Developing teaching materials on elimination of discrimination;
 - Creating an organization for voluntary activities such as local children's associations;
 - Development of career security;
 - Promotion of exchange and research activities for school faculty and staff.
6. Child abuse and orphanage children and education
- Early Detection – “Don't miss signs of abuse;”
 - Consultation with/notification to specialized agencies as the beginning of support for abused children;
 - Guaranteeing the child's right to express opinions and giving support to children;
 - Training request/participation and self-reflection;
 - Establishing conditions for support for teachers;
 - Establishing a system for cooperation with third-party organizations.

7. Education against Hansen disease discrimination
 - Continued violation of human rights despite scientific knowledge about Hansen disease;
 - “Discrimination and prejudice” - understanding the reality and hardships of healed Hansen disease patients, their families and their thoughts;
 - Prejudice and discrimination against Hansen’s disease – caused by Japan’s modernization policy, and related to discrimination against the Buraku people, Korean residents and Ainu people;
 - Forms of human rights violations and discrimination (exclusion), such as the national policy and sanatorium response to Hansen’s disease;
 - Movement of Hansen’s disease patients - activities for interaction and/or support regarding the state, Hansen’s disease patients, and the medical profession;
 - History of hardships of family of Hansen’s disease patients.

8. Education against discrimination of HIV-infected persons
 - Correct knowledge about HIV infection;
 - Perspective of “living together” - How to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against HIV-infected persons and AIDS patients and create a society where they can live together with other people;
 - Dignity and support system for HIV-infected persons and AIDS patients.

Regarding the problem of assimilation and exclusion consciousness, the Guidance recommends organizing activities such as “Ethnic Fureai Festival,” “Foreign Culture Exhibition Announcement” as means to facilitate acceptance of differences in the language and culture of non-Japanese children, and foster a sense of solidarity that supports “Us as Friends.” These activities can also provide the opportunity to learn about inclusion from the perspective of anti-discrimination.

National Conference on Educational Research

The breakout session 13 on Human Rights Education in the 69th National Conference on Educational Research held on 24-26 January 2020 discussed the curriculum and human rights education.

In 2016, three laws relating to human rights education were enacted and enforced, namely, Act on Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disability, Hate Speech Elimination Act and Act on the Promotion of Elimination of Buraku Discrimination. Some people viewed the laws as challenging teachers to use the laws' basic principles as resources when implementing human rights education at schools. At the same time, the legal response to online discrimination was very insufficient and thus a significant problem.

The "special subject on moral education," started in 2018 with the aim of evaluating the sense of values and way of life, should be recognized as dealing with a subject (moral) that could be a human rights issue. With this view, it would be possible to teach it as human rights education, though the difference between the two (moral education and human rights education) must be carefully kept in mind.

The Act on Securing Educational Opportunities and the Act on Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disability is a necessary material in analyzing how human rights issues could be included in laws. Discussion has to be made, for example, on whether or not children who do not go to school might be excluded from schools as the law ensures diverse learning places, and whether or not the laws define disability from the viewpoint of social model based on Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The democratization of Japanese society is measured by solving discrimination against the Buraku people, the people with roots in the Korean peninsula, returnees and other minorities. Laws to solve those issues and to support democratic citizens are required.

NCER discussion and reports

During NCER, teachers share and discuss problems faced by students including human rights issues. In the 2020 NCER, some members reported on students' situations and discussed them:

#1 Recognize the reality of discrimination and aim at emancipation in children's behavior and lives

a. Member of Tokyo High School Teachers' Union

The member reported on the case of student 'A' of a night high school. A's grandmother has Korean root and his father once stayed in jail. The father fell ill and A took care of him but he passed away. Finally A graduated after eight years and made a representative speech at the graduation ceremony.

b. Member of Fukuoka High School Teachers' Union

One student experienced the divorce of parents and the passing of her/his mother. The student wrote about them and shared it with fellow students who in turn supported her/him.

c. Member of Kumamoto Teachers' Union

Student B transferred to the teacher's class in an elementary school after her/his (B's) parents divorced. B improved her/his study and learned to speak about his/herself such as making speech on "what is my family's job" and studying the Minamata disease. When B met a person in the community talking about the disease, the person told him to "stay as you are," which encouraged her/him very much. The teacher said that "what children want others not to mention, they [children] want them to understand it most."

#2 Share experiences of teachers changing their own selves

a. Member of Saitama Teachers' Union

The member teaches at a junior secondary school. When a student said "I cannot believe the teachers," the member was shocked and questioned him/herself as a teacher. The student also said that she/he (member) did not talk about Buraku issues regarding her/his longtime friend though she/he knew that the friend was from the Buraku area.

b. Member of Kagoshima High School Teachers' Union

A student who uses violence on others has parents who also use violence. If teachers consider such student as an annoyance, other students

of such teachers would think in the same way and the student her/himself would think so too. Children are not happy bothering others. When a student behaves roughly, the circumstances make her/him so. We teachers need to accept her/him first.

#3 Show the children's change toward anti-discrimination through our teaching

a. Member of Nara Teachers' Union

The member working at a junior secondary school had a student (B) with ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). The teacher tried to make her/his class comfortable for all students including B. The teacher encouraged the students to be the peers of B who could be asked for help. Gradually, the students accepted B.

b. Member of Kanagawa Teachers' Union

The member reported on the process of establishing a new night junior secondary school in Sagami-hara city. She/he made a survey to gather support for the need for such education and demanded cooperation from the local Education Board. The teacher emphasized the meaning of learning, which strongly links with the students' lives. Also, through human rights education (which cannot be evaluated by test scores) students were able to bond with families and friends.

#4 Show teaching practices that promote emancipation and anti-discrimination as well as develop a culture and academic environment that encourage children to have a sense of human rights and zest for living

#5 Utilize JTu Human Rights Education Guidance toward Non-discrimination and Inclusive Schools and Society (2007) and build a "human rights culture" of anti-discrimination in school and community

a. Member of Fukuoka Teachers' Union

It is important to recognize that discrimination is a problem of those who discriminate. The teacher let students write about their lives. Through writing, the children bonded to each other.

b. Member of Saga Teachers' Union

The member described in detail how a child with disability took an entrance examination for secondary school and suggested what reasonable accommodation should mean in such situation.

Reports and Discussions

We teachers should not single out children but need to try to change school/class environment so that every child can study comfortably. Saying "This is good for this student" is an authoritarian decision. It is necessary to recognize those issues happening in the society. Without this view, the issues could be individualized and trivialized.

70th NCER

The 70th NCER was held on 23 January 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the plenary and breakout sessions with educational reports were held online. The plenary sessions featured the keynote speech and panel discussion, among others, that were watched by a wide range of online viewers from all over Japan.⁹

In his opening remarks, JTU President Hideyuki Shimizu mentioned the new human rights issues that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic including discrimination against patients and prejudice against medical workers on social media. He called on educators to seamlessly teach human rights based on JTU *Human Rights Education Guidance toward Non-discrimination and Inclusive Schools and Society* (2007).

He likewise said that

[d]ue to COVID-19, teachers and school workers have been facing a lot of challenges to take care of children and teach them while responding to emergent requirements. Indeed, we have difficulties, but now is the time to stand up together sharing our wisdom and good practices to secure quality education and wellbeing for all children. Our educational research is the key.

He concluded by reconfirming the importance of educational research and expressing appreciation for the great efforts that JTU members have been doing for the last seventy years.

After the opening ceremony, a photojournalist, Ms. Mitsuki Yasuda gave the keynote speech on the theme “Children in Conflict and Disaster Areas Shown in Photos.”

A panel discussion on “COVID-19 Pandemic and Children, School and Society” was held with Mr. Minoru Sawada, Sophia University, as coordinator and panelists representing students, parents, teachers, and researchers, respectively. They discussed school situations during the pandemic and school education in the future while sharing their experiences.

Iwate Prefecture Teachers’ Union Membership Diary

The Iwate Prefecture Teachers’ Union, a JTU chapter in Iwate prefecture, made a union membership diary in 2021 to guide its members on human rights.

The union membership diary contains provisions of the Constitution of Japan, the Education Basic Act (provisions of the law as enacted in 1947, not the amended one), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The union membership diary has chapters that explain the teachers’ rights. Below are the outlines of each chapter.

Chapter 1. What is the Special Measures Law on Salaries of Public School Educational Workers which has provided us a fixed allowance for a long time?

In 1960s, the members of JTU filed suits to demand overtime work allowance and won the cases. The Ministry of Education adopted rules which stipulated four conditions for overtime work and fixed the amount of allowance based on the real over-time work of teachers. The four conditions were: learning outside the school, school trip, staff meeting of teachers and emergencies. A teacher who overworks for any other reason is regarded to have acted as volunteer. The Iwate Teachers’ Prefectural Union objected to this rule and demanded to repeal the law.

Chapter 2. That might be harassment!

Power, sexual and maternity harassments exist. It is necessary to learn about them and try not to be an assaulter. If you suffer from harassment, please consult with peers and the union.

Chapter 3. Rights of educators

This chapter explains the rights provided in the Constitution of Japan, Labor Basic Law, and the Ordinances of Iwate Prefecture that include complaint procedure, regulations on working hours, paid leave, sick leave, overtime work, the rights to professional development, special leaves, and maternity and childcare leave. For non-regular educators, the details on their rights are very specific in these ordinances.

Public Activities

JTU has also held activities for children and the general public. On 3 April 2019, JTU celebrated the Global Action Week for Education by joining with other educational stakeholders the “Festival of Learning.” The festival offered various learning activities for children. 1,800 children joined the celebration.

JTU prepared quiz and game on the rights of the child. The participants played the game, learned what rights they have and realized the meaning of “My Education, My Rights.”

This kind of activity is in line with JTU’s strong move to make the right to inclusive, equitable, quality and free public education a reality.

Concluding Note

Many social issues surround today’s children in Japan: poverty, child abuse, children with non-Japanese roots, SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) and others. JTU holistically responds to these issues and engages the children, parents, politicians and citizens in a social dialogue to achieve its political goal of building an inclusive society for the children’s well-being.

Endnotes

- 1 Quoted from *The History of JTU*, Japan Teachers Union, 1981.
- 2 Interview of Mr. Yuzuru Nakamura, Secretary General, JTU, www.jtu-net.or.jp/english/about-jtu/.
- 3 Interview of Mr. Yuzuru Nakamura, *ibid.*
- 4 *A Post-War Spirit*, Hitotsubashi Shobo, 1983.
- 5 Visit the website of Maruki Gallery and its Hiroshima Panels, <https://maruki-gallery.jp/en/>.
- 6 The full document, in Japanese language, is available at www.jtu-net.or.jp/wp/wp-content/themes/jtu/doc/booklet.pdf.

7 “The word Buraku means a village or a hamlet in Japanese language. Since feudal age, people in some communities in Japan had been classified as outcasts, outside the social hierarchy, which was closely related to the caste system. These communities became known as Buraku communities. Even in the modern age, people living in, or from Buraku communities, or are descendants of such people may be regarded as Buraku people by ordinary people and may suffer from discrimination, exclusion, etc., especially in marriage and employment.” Quoted from Jefferson R. Plantilla and Kazuhiro Kawamoto, “Remembering the Past: Henomatsu Community,” *FOCUS Asia-Pacific*, issue 97, September 2019, page 7, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2019/09/remembering-the-past-henomatsu-community.html#1.

8 The texts in the list are edited versions of the English translation of the discussion of issues in the Guidance.

9 Text from “The 70th National Conference on Educational Research,” Japan Teachers Union, 4 February 2021, www.jtu-net.or.jp/english/blog/the-70th-national-conference-on-educational-research/.