

Introduction

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION remains an important educational initiative in Asia-Pacific. But it does not always appear as a singular program; rather as a component of educational programs and projects. There are educational programs that address specific issues and necessarily limit their human rights content to those relevant to their focuses. This is the case of programs on issues regarding children, migrant women, migrant workers, journalists, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender and non-governmental workers, as shown in the articles in this volume. In these programs and projects, specific human rights are taught/learned in the context of the people focused on. And these educational activities are not necessarily denominated as human rights education activities.

Human rights are learned in the children's use of their freedom to express themselves and enjoy their schooling without improper restrictions, in the women's effort to understand more deeply their situation and gain self-confidence, in the migrant workers' study of the legal system that can address their problems, in the training of journalists to increase their knowledge and skills, and in the study by non-governmental workers of the basic foundations of their work in terms of human rights and democracy.

At the international level, the United Nations' Global Citizenship Education project is a new initiative that presents human rights as essential component of the participation of people in helping address global issues. Global Citizenship Education is largely similar to the previous UN educational programs such as Education for International Understanding and Education for Sustainable Development in terms of human rights content. All of them are meant to enable people to appreciate the need to address global issues at different levels with human rights as one of the important components.

In this situation, has human rights education lost its place as a specific area of education since it has been subsumed under different "educations"?

There are valid reasons for subsuming human rights education into the different "educations" as much as there are reasons why human rights education as a standalone program seems to be given less support.

On the positive side, the "subsuming" of human rights education into other "educations" should be seen as means to ensure that human rights are considered in relation to various issues that these educational programs deal

with. There is reason to believe that the discussion of human rights in relation to these issues is an improvement of program content. Human rights are presented as integral part of the issues and relevant to the situations of the people involved. Human rights provide the bases for people taking action on the issues.

On the negative side, without sufficient presentation of human rights, these “educations” may sideline human rights content and stress other components. This can be seen in the recent initiative to introduce moral education, which would emphasize the responsibility of people toward society and would hardly mention the people’s human rights.

Nevertheless, there is no reason why these other “educations” should not be supported. Human rights education should be carried out in different forms and situations in order to make human rights relevant to the varied issues and situations faced by people.

The challenge lies in ensuring proper learning and teaching of human rights. There should be adherence to the international principles that define human rights. There cannot be “localized” versions of human rights perpetuated by selective understanding of human rights or in support of the perspective that human rights should be understood in relation to specific “contexts” (cultural, social, economic and political particularities).

However, presenting human rights in certain ways in order to adjust to restrictive political and social environments is not unwise. Human rights education has to be effective by having the flexibility to adjust to the situation of the people it is aimed at. In the same manner, educators handling the educational programs should have the leeway to find appropriate ways to present human rights in consideration of their circumstances. And ultimately, educators deserve whatever support they need to pursue human rights education.

The articles in this publication provide sufficient justification to support the growth of the different human rights education programs in many countries in Asia-Pacific. They provide us, similar to the other experiences published in the previous volumes of this publication, with concrete images on how human rights education should take place under different situations.

It is thus fitting that those who worked with HURIGHTS OSAKA in coming out with this 7th volume are given thanks and much appreciation. Their support is the reason why this publication has been printed continuously for seven years.