

The Asian Dialogue on Human Rights Education

Educators from Japan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, South Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand met on 27–29 January 2001 in Osaka City to discuss the experiences of government education agencies, schools, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in human rights education in schools. The meeting, “Asian Dialogue on Human Rights Education,” was organized by the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS OSAKA).

The dialogue, as explained by Yoshio Kawashima, director of HURIGHTS OSAKA, had two objectives:

- Promote human rights in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Increase awareness about human rights among the Japanese.

He further explained:

HURIGHTS OSAKA has been engaging educators in South, Southeast and Northeast Asia in a dialogue on human rights education during the last four years [to] understand experiences in the field and create relationships... among groups [for] mutual support...

We learned about our commonalities as well as differences in perceptions of the meaning of human rights education. We do not think that a consensus will be obtained on this point, but we expect that a continuing effort to develop the idea of human rights education will happen.

The dialogue is designed to attain the following objectives:

- Discuss experiences in human rights education in schools.
- Develop a common framework to understand the concept of human rights education in schools.

- Create links between educators in Japan and their counterparts in other countries in the region.
- Discuss activities that promote the institutionalization of human rights education in schools in Asia.

The discussions answered the following questions:

- How should human rights education—its concept, approaches, and methodologies—be defined? How is this definition related to education on development, multiculturalism, values, etc.?
- How can international human rights standards be taught at the primary- and secondary-school levels or at specific age levels?
- How can human rights education be integrated into school curriculums?
- What constitutes a good human rights curriculum?
- What training program for teachers and others should be adopted?
- How can human rights education be institutionalized—that is, included in the formal education system with appropriate administrative support?

The participants were divided into three small discussion groups, which presented

their reports at plenary sessions at the end of each day.

Dialogue Results

The results of the discussions are presented under three main headings: definition of human rights education, development of curriculum on human rights, and institutionalization of human rights education in schools.

Definition of human rights education

Human rights education is essential to envisioning a society that protects human rights and encourages coexistence among people of different racial, religious, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Human rights education generally

- prepares students to become adults who respect human rights;
- guides students in living a humane and dignified life;
- encourages them to act on their problems;
- empowers them (especially those belonging to minority groups¹ or having disabilities) to engage in self-reflection and self-transformation to change their environment (such as the relationship between students and teachers) and to resolve conflicts.

Human rights education helps students develop their sense of justice and fairness and promotes the concept of citizenship (that is, students are individuals with active roles in society). Human rights education, therefore, is not limited to expanding knowledge but also aims to change behavior and develop skills. Human rights education is linked to the education reform movement, which advocates replacing the preoccupation with examinations with a concern for total human development. Human rights education is not separate from the human rights movement (or its predecessor in South Korea—the democracy movement).

Human rights education includes the following:

- social analysis;
- the concept of rights and responsibilities;
- how to act on human rights issues;
- law;
- economic and cultural relations;
- the concept of the nation; and
- societal institutions.

Helping students understand their own realities is a significant starting point for human rights education but it may also be the most difficult part of it.

How can students understand the universal character of human rights when they are bound by restrictive social, cultural, religious and political structures? While an understanding of human rights may begin with an understanding of one's immediate realities, this can lead to an understanding only of the importance of the issues faced by the person, and a rejection of the importance of issues of other people. This problem is raised this way: How can I understand other people's human rights issues when I think my own issues are always above them? This is not what human rights education is all about.

United Nations human rights standards should be included in human rights education. Students should know that human rights are meant for all. Human rights education should be based on, but extend beyond, learning core values such as self-esteem, respect for others, and the importance of diversity. Human rights education should also take up the question of how to treat violators.

Human rights education cuts across education on values, multicultural, development, and peace, among other programs. Tennoji Junior High School in Japan, for example, has a development education program to repair and distribute wheelchairs to poor communities in other countries. The students discovered that the wheelchairs are not given to all who needed

them and, therefore, devised ways to prevent such discrimination. The program, therefore, evolved into human rights education.

Human rights education employs process-oriented or participatory learning methodologies appropriate for interactive activities within and outside the school, using stories of suffering, speeches of outstanding personalities, and other materials to help students understand social problems and relate these problems to their lives.

Students should be allowed to discover the meaning of human rights through activities and to express their feelings.

Examples based on local cultures (including religion) are used to explain that human rights principles are neither new nor contradictory to traditional ideas. Educators in Japan, however, do not use this approach.²

Human rights education will not prosper unless a host of obstacles is addressed. Teachers need to realize that some of their practices may violate human rights and to correct their wrong perception of human rights or human rights education.

One solution is teacher training. “Teachers teach while students learn, but they grow together”—a traditional saying in Taiwan—captures the idea that human rights education is as much for teachers as it is for the students.

Teacher training should have the following aspects:

- *Goal.* Increase the sensitivity of teachers to human rights.
- *Methodology.* Use participatory methods such as small group discussions, encourage self-reflection among teachers, and develop their critical thinking.
- *Content.* Provide basic guidelines on human rights education programs and stress the importance of incorporating universal values as their foundation.
- *Post-training activities.* Provide skills in developing teaching materials and evaluation systems, and in changing attitudes,

and include follow-up training and weekly review sessions.

Teacher training can help teachers understand that they are not expected to have the answers to all the questions but that they themselves may have questions, which can be answered through the process that they and the students simultaneously undergo. Teacher training should also cover training of trainers. Involving NGOs in the training courses will help develop trust between NGO workers and the teachers.

Human rights principles should be reflected in the rules and regulations and the overall environment of the schools. Corporal punishment, for example, adversely affects human rights education programs. The role of schools in molding students into good citizens is an increasingly important issue as more and more crimes are committed by students and young people. Students under pressure from the examination-oriented education system may develop intolerance of others and become bullies. Human rights education should address these issues.

Parents must realize that human rights education is important if it is to have an impact at home. Their support is important in maintaining human rights education in schools. NGOs, nonprofit organizations, and the community can also help promote human rights education.

Developing the curriculum

Regional experience suggests that human rights should be taught as appropriate to students’ levels, with a curriculum that starts with understanding human rights-related values and progresses to understanding human rights concepts.

Through games students can learn values such as cooperation, tolerance, peace, unity, freedom, equality, social justice, respect for

others, democracy, nondiscrimination, and lack of prejudice. As the regular curriculum already includes values, teachers' loads will not increase.

Human rights issues should be understood at the personal, societal, national, and international levels, depending on the students' ages, as suggested by one group:

<i>Primary level</i>	<i>Secondary level</i>
<p><i>Years 1–3 (6–9 years old)</i></p> <p>Discussion on surroundings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple human rights concepts • Simple materials (picture books, illustrated booklets, songs, poems, etc.) 	<p><i>Years 7 and up (13 years old and above)</i></p> <p>Discussion on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – school issues relating to students; – relationships; – community, national, regional, and global issues
<p><i>Years 4–6 (10–12 years old)</i></p> <p>Discussion on simple human rights issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special human rights principles (gender, child rights) • Videos, posters, poems, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights instruments (including the UN system) • Human rights concepts in traditions, culture, and religion • Posters, newspaper clippings, competitions, drama, websites

Another group presented the following:

<i>Level of focus</i>	<i>School grade</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>
Individual, small group	Years 1–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules • Helping others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning international human rights standards by rethinking daily-life experiences (such as the right to play) 	
Society	Years 3–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem • Ideal world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning international human rights standards by considering students' rights in school and society (such as right to leisure) • Freedom • Diversity • Justice • Fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Social movements
	Years 5–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own prejudice or discriminatory attitudes 		
The nation and the world	Years 7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universality of human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights issues around the world • Global issues • International efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights documents

International human rights standards are already part of a number of programs in Asia. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and Convention on the Rights of the Child have been translated in several countries.

The teaching of international human rights standards is important because it

- conveys the idea that all human beings are equal and, therefore, share a common set of standards (absence of a shared common concept may lead to an inward-looking attitude);
- conveys the idea that human rights should be protected everywhere; and
- emphasizes membership in the international community.

Many Japanese, however, view international human rights standards as foreign and irrelevant for a number of reasons: the difficulty of understanding international human rights instruments due to their legal language; lack of application to daily life; lack of international pressure to apply the standards; and lack of interest among lawyers as the standards cannot be used in local courts. Although many

Japanese travel abroad, they consider international human rights standards dispensable. Thais abroad, however, find that international human rights standards protect them.

The following are important in integrating human rights into the curriculum:

- Clarification of constitutional support for human rights education. This helps teachers justify teaching human rights.
- Use of constitutional provisions. Many constitutional rights can be used to help students understand human rights and appreciate international human rights standards. However, some constitutional rights may differ from international human rights standards or are too limited to cover human rights principles.

The integration approach is used to teach international human rights standards. In Mongolia human rights principles are taught as part of a number of subjects, from social studies to mathematics and science. In other countries, human rights are taught in special subjects or in extracurricular activities.

Dowa education³ is part of homeroom activities, separate from the main subjects, which are meant to help students pass university entrance exams and are deemed too heavy to accommodate integration of Dowa issues. In the last two years, however, schools in Osaka began to consider teaching human rights in a new subject of the main curriculum, integrated learning. The human rights content of Dowa education should be reviewed for this new subject.

The authors of history books should also be critiqued and problems of minorities included in textbooks.

Institutionalizing human rights education in schools

The participants focused mainly on identifying institutions involved, existing legal support for human rights education, and programs

developed. A few country experiences are presented below.

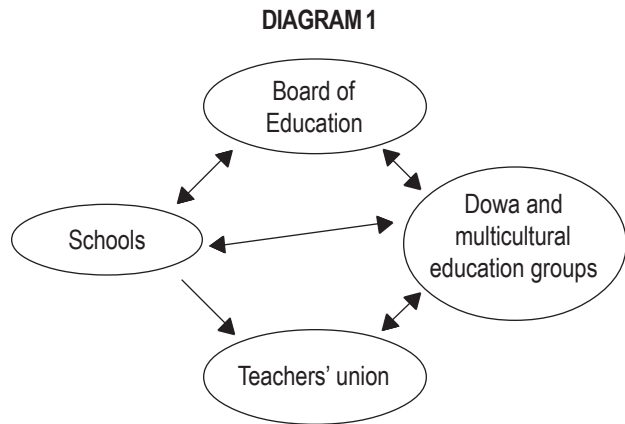
Dowa education and multicultural education (Osaka, Japan)

Dowa education is based on a 1965 government policy to eliminate discrimination against the *Burakumin* (outcasts). In 1966 the Osaka city government adopted a plan to promote Dowa education in all city schools. In 2000 a national law made human rights education a government responsibility.

The Osaka City Board of Education supported the creation of the Dowa Education Research Group, an organization of teachers, which develops teaching materials, conducts research, develops student activities, and liaises with the education board. The group works directly with the schools.

A similar structure exists for the city's multicultural education program, which mainly supports non-Japanese students. A teachers' union, separate from Dowa education and multicultural education research groups, also provides support to the schools. The Board of Education helps create an appropriate school environment for human rights education.

Diagram 1 illustrates the relationship among these institutions.



A similar structure exists at the prefectural level. While NGO human rights programs for

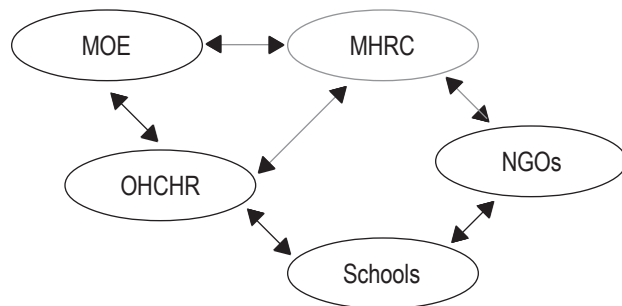
children exist, they are not implemented in schools.

Mongolia

The human rights education programs in schools are supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE), several NGOs, and the field office of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is expected that the future national human rights institution will also support the programs. A law is being drafted to create this institution. The NGOs provide teacher training and implement school activities.

Diagram 2 illustrates the relationship among these institutions.

DIAGRAM 2



Indonesia

The 1945 Constitution and recently enacted laws are used as bases of human rights. In 1993 a presidential decree created the National Commission on Human Rights of Indonesia (Komnasham), which is mandated to promote human rights. In 1994 another law was passed supporting human rights education.

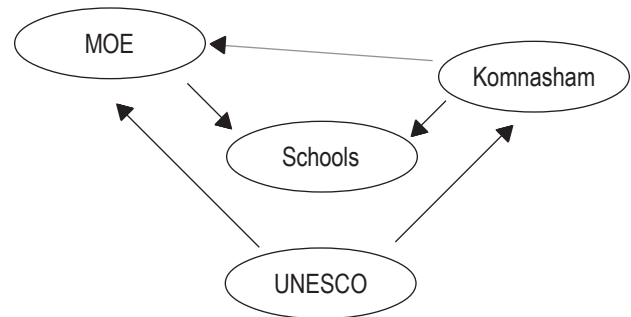
Moral education consisting of the study of *Pancasila* (the national ideology that promotes the five principles of belief in God, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice) is related to human rights education, as is religious education (study of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions).

The Ministry of Education (MOE), Komnasham, and UNESCO field office are

collaborating to develop a human rights education program. Teacher training and material development started in 1997. Projects to integrate human rights in various subjects are ongoing in two places.

Diagram 3 illustrates the relationship among these institutions.

DIAGRAM 3



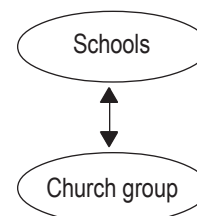
Bangladesh

Human rights are considered subordinate to Islamic values. The government has no human rights education program and is drafting a law to create a national human rights institution.

A church-based NGO is working with about 30 private schools on a human rights education program, which the NGO cannot name as such because human rights education is a sensitive issue and may offend the community. Human rights are taken up under the subject human development. The program is limited to private schools as the human rights education projects are not financially sustainable in view of stiff competition among NGOs and other groups for resources.

Diagram 4 illustrates the relationship among these institutions.

DIAGRAM 4

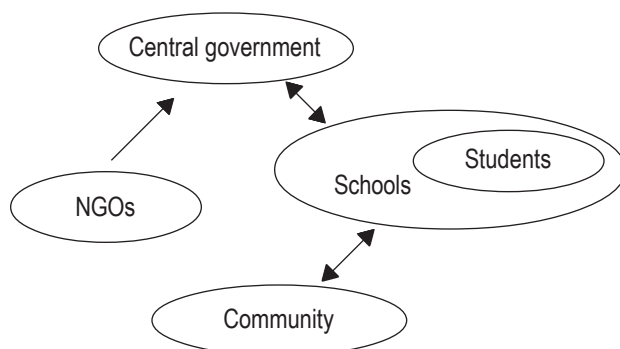


The NGO sees institutionalization of human rights education in schools as having the following components:

- *Policy.* The government should provide legal, policy, and financial support.
- *Structure.* Human rights education programs can be implemented through the critical collaboration among these institutions:
 - national human rights institution;
 - Ministry of Human Rights;
 - Ministry of Education (human rights education division);
 - NGOs;
 - community groups;
 - teachers' organizations;
 - academic institutions; and
 - media.
- *Program.* Supporting programs are needed for the
 - participation of volunteers in school activities,
 - promotion of the importance of human rights education,
 - evaluation of school activities,
 - creation of information centers on human rights practice, and
 - teacher-training activities.

A group presented the experiences in several countries through a single diagram (Diagram 5), which stresses the close relationship between the schools and community, the sup-

DIAGRAM 5



porting role of the central government, and the importance of making students the focus of the program.

The group suggested that the central government provide guidelines on human rights education in schools and enact an education reform law. NGOs can pressure the government to issue such guidelines.

The group discussed several issues relating to

- the programs' legal bases such as national constitutions and education laws,
- the concurrent role of central and local governments,
- the appropriate conditions for human rights education in schools (including elimination of corporal punishment).

The group also thought that the situation of teachers and their relationship with each other had to improve. Teachers should have time to talk to students and develop lesson plans. Teachers should also have a good salary and time to work out their own psychological and emotional problems. As an incentive, the renewal of teaching license of teachers can be based on their work in human rights education.

The group also discussed the role of parents, the role of children (for example, in presenting issues to the government), and the use of information technology and media to promote human rights education and disseminate information.

The last group discussed the legal bases of the human rights education programs in some countries (such as the national constitution and education reform law in Thailand, the new human rights education law in Japan, and the draft law creating a national human rights institution in South Korea). The group stressed the importance of human rights laws in changing the thinking of teachers about human rights.

The group presented a list of obstacles to implementing human rights education programs:

- anxiety among parents;
- difficulty of changing the school culture;

- pressure on students caused by university entrance examination system;
- unfavorable condition of teachers;
- low government budget for education;
- perception of human rights education as an additional burden on teachers and students;
- lack of legal support;
- traditions and customs that conflict with human rights principles;
- lack of mutual understanding among governments, NGOs, and schools; and
- lack of common understanding of human rights among influential groups (political parties, etc.).

The following were identified as measures to overcome the obstacles:

- preservice training and/or university courses on human rights for teachers (to develop skills and motivation);
- development of a school culture based on human rights principles;
- community support (to help parents understand why human rights education is important for children and to mobilize people from the community as resource persons);
- development of effective teaching and learning methods for human rights education;
- enactment of laws or policies on human rights education;
- improvement of the learning environment to foster human rights education; and
- development of partnerships among government, schools, and NGOs.

Based on the three presentations, the institutionalization of human rights education in schools requires the following:

- support from national constitutions; education laws and policies; and human rights laws, policies, and guidelines;
- partnerships among NGOs, governments, schools, and teachers' organizations;

- inclusion of new partners such as national human rights institutions and academic centers;
- support from international institutions such as the UNESCO and OHCHR;
- strengthening of teacher training on human rights;
- support from the community;
- support for higher teachers' salaries, lighter teaching loads, and incentives (at the same time working to change the teachers' behavior and attitudes that conflict with human rights principles); and
- improvement of school conditions by, for example, eliminating corporal punishment.

A group raised the fear that institutionalizing human rights education would require the expansion of already large bureaucracies. The two other groups, however, saw institutionalization as various institutions involved in human rights education supporting each other and implementing laws, policies, and programs. So far, institutionalization has not resulted in the expansion of a bureaucracy but, rather, collaboration.

Experience does show, however, that there is a danger that human rights education may suffer from centralization (top-down structure), systematization (standardized approach that loses creative flexibility), and "formalization" (favoring form rather than content). Institutionalization should not turn human rights education in schools into just another regular school subject or activity bereft of societal significance.

Institutionalization, therefore, is not enlarging or creating bureaucracy but building relationships among the different players. Human rights education in schools is not the sole burden of one institution.

Inspired by the discussion during the dialogue, Savitri Suwansathit of Thailand composed a poem:

Human Rights Education
The sun shines softly,
Nine children play, one sits out.
How many are there?
Why? The field is wide and green
One more would not hurt the grass!
Nine children do not count well.

The dialogue ended with a synthesis on the group presentations. The director of HURIGHTS OSAKA, Yoshio Kawashima, thanked the participants.

Visits to education boards and schools

The non-Japanese participants visited the Osaka prefectural and city education boards and schools, met with education board secretariat officials, and discussed programs on human rights education.

The participants visited one primary school (Nishinari) and a secondary school (Kunijima),

observed their activities and classes, and met schoolteachers and officials.

Notes

1. Minority groups referred to cover the Burakumin, foreigners, and female students.

2. This may need validation from Japanese educators from other parts of Japan.

3. Dowa education is an “umbrella term covering all aspects of educational activities by the government and by the Buraku movement, to solve problems” caused by discrimination against Burakumin. From the perspective of the government, Dowa education means “improving educational opportunities through better facilities, more teachers, scholarships, etc.” For the Buraku movement, Dowa education “defines a set of educational strategies to attaining parity in education[al] achievement, community involvement and materials to inform about Buraku issues.” Notes, in *An Introduction to the Buraku Issue—Questions and Answers*, Suehiro Kitaguchi, translated by Alastair McLauchlan (Surrey: Japan Library, 1999), page viii.