

Human Rights Education in Schools – Project Implementation

LORETO DAY SCHOOL SEALDAH

The Loreto School-Sealdah joined the project of Peoples Watch/Institute of Human Rights Education on developing a coordinated human rights curriculum in schools all over West Bengal, India.

The project has the following specific objectives:

- To establish and form active network with the School Education Department, Government of West Bengal to work together in introducing human rights education in schools
- To train and enhance the capacity of teachers to develop innovative and best methodologies in imparting the module on human rights to students and in preparing them for the three-year Human Rights Program with knowledge, attitude and skills regarding rights and values
- To have regular classes in human rights that will develop the students' full capacity to face the reality of the outside world, and to make the students imbibe a culture of human rights
- To activate students' groups in secondary schools to understand and tackle social problems
- To organize public awareness and consultations with different actors and collaborate with other agencies in the city of Kolkata to push the issue of including human rights education in the school curriculum.

Progress made

After a series of meetings, the Commissioner of School Education (Mr. A.S. Biswasa) in West Bengal agreed to collaborate in the project. Several schools were selected, with the help of the District Inspectors of Education, for the project in four districts:

- Kolkata – twenty one schools
- North 24 Parganas – twelve schools
- South 24 Parganas – ten schools
- Howrah Hoogly – two schools.

By November 2006, the selected schools were composed of six government schools, twenty-two government-sponsored schools and twenty-two government-aided-cum-private schools.

Program structures

An eight-member State Curriculum Committee, comprising of teachers from the schools, was formed to assist the implementation of the program. The Committee adapted *Human Rights Education – An Introduction Module-1* to the context of West Bengal with reference

from the Value Education Books (*We are the World*) and the teaching methodology provided in *The Basic Plan–Individual Work–Group Work – Feedback–Analysis and Decision to Change*. The Committee planned to print and distribute to schools three thousand copies of the English module and five thousand five hundred copies of the Bengali-version of the module.

A seven-member State Resource Team was formed to train and enhance the teachers' skills in building innovative and best methodologies in imparting the module of human rights to the students and to prepare them for the three-year human rights program with knowledge, attitude and skills regarding rights and values. Two members of the Team attended a national training of trainers at the Center for Social Justice - Ahmedabad.

A State Advisory Committee was also formed and met on 24 November 2006 to assist in the advocacy with the government on human rights education in schools and to improve the quality of the program with its inputs and valuable suggestions. The State Advisory Committee comprises of eleven members of eminent personalities in the Education Department, Juvenile Justice Board, Child Welfare Commission, and the Judiciary. The members of the Committee suggested the following:

- Inclusion of more schools in the coming school year (2007-2008)
- Expansion of the program to more schools in the district as suggested by a member who is also the Education Officer in the area
- Incorporation of training on human rights education in the teacher training programs in Bachelor of Education course and teacher training courses in training colleges
- Involvement of the State Minister in-charge of secondary education
- Inclusion of human rights classes as value education classes.

Seminar-cum-orientation program

Loreto School-Sealdah held the state-level introductory seminar-cum-headmasters orientation program on 18 July 2006. This was the first tentative step in the effort to have a human rights syllabus in all West Bengal schools. The seminar had the following objectives:

- To introduce the need for human rights education in schools
- To bring together likeminded stakeholders who would network with Loreto School-Sealdah in introducing human rights education in the school curriculum
- To introduce the *Methodology of Teaching – Basic Plan* to the Headmasters along with classroom demonstration.

The program was a full day event with showing of videos, open house discussions and teaching demonstration. It was a testament to the desire of educators in West Bengal to promote human rights in schools.

During the opening ceremonies, the Minister in charge of the Department of Law and the Judiciary, Government of West Bengal (Mr. Rabilal Maitra) spoke of the importance of making the people become aware of their human rights, declared his objective of making it happen (particularly for the students) and thus appealed to everyone to provide suggestions on how it can be done.

The Executive Director of People's Watch (Mr. Henri Tiphagne) explained the historical development of the human rights education program, which started when a group of teachers being trained by the organization asked about the relevance of human rights to their classes. He explained that human rights form part of the school curriculum as an integral and helpful part of children's development. This view answers the suspicion of parents about any additional matter including human rights being taught to their children regarding their direct academic relevance. He also cited the example of a child as a force for change with the experience of a

boy who had to brave three times the scolding and physical abuse by an old woman in order to prevent her from committing female infanticide. He emphasized that human rights education should not merely impart knowledge and skills, but also impart the urge to use them.

The Chairperson of the Institute of Human Rights Education (V. Vasanti Devi, PhD) spoke about human rights education as a force to combat the increasingly self-centered education children receive, and to create a generation with a deep awareness of human dignity. She said that Loreto School-Sealdah is doing this not by teaching children human rights but by giving them time to think about the issues and then by reaching their own decisions fulfill their own potential. She also said that the urge to fight for human rights would develop naturally alongside the correct kind of human rights education.

The final speaker, the Director of the Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal, spoke about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the basic rights to survival, protection, development and participation. He likewise acknowledged the difficult nature of human rights education.

An audio-visual session started with the showing of a video on the life of Kali, one of the children involved in Loreto School-Sealdah's Rainbow Program. The video showed the embedment of human rights into the program that enabled the dignity and spirit of one of its participants to flourish.

The video showing was followed by a talk of Sr. M. Cyril about the human rights syllabus of Loreto Sealdah. She explained human rights education as training children to reach out beyond themselves for one moment and to see the rest of the world. She slowly discussed each of the stages of a value education class explaining first what each stage meant and required of the teacher, and then described its effect and spirit. She described the teacher's main task of picking up on good and bad thought patterns and getting the children themselves to explore the reasoning and effects behind them, once again highlighting

the important role the children themselves must play in receiving this education.

The talk of Sr. M. Cyril was followed by a powerpoint presentation on the process by which human rights education encourages the growth of a compassionate human spirit. Human rights education must be a long term program, preferably starting when the child is old enough to comprehend basic abstract concepts and ending in Class 10 or 12. It should always take place in an organized participatory framework, encouraging the child to develop skills to think for themselves in a structured manner, and to amass personal knowledge and stock of information.

A module demonstration involving forty five Class 6 students of Loreto School-Sealdah was undertaken to highlight the methods of teaching human rights and allow the participants to witness how students react to a chapter (Needs and Desires) in the *Human Rights Education – An Introduction Module-1*. The students demonstrated the four phases of the teaching process:

- a. Individual work – the students engaged in silent reading of two passages on needs and desires, considering the concepts of need and desire. They were then given certain questions to think about the passages in silence. The room was quiet while the students worked away forming their own opinions;
- b. Group work – the students formed six small groups and discussed the difference between need and desire. They were asked to think of people who were denied basic needs. They then prepared to do a role play to present their discussions.
- c. Feedback – due to time constraint only two groups could do the role play. One group highlighted the needs of the beggars, another group focused on abused wife.
- d. Analysis - the teachers asked questions at the end of each role play to encourage the students to explain the reasons behind their respective stories in the role play, and also asked the rest of the students to comment on the bigger issues behind each play.

One student made a comment, in relation to the play on abused wife, that her (wife's) suffering could be linked to Sita (a woman in ancient Indian literature) who does not protest the bad treatment she receives, and the insistence of Indian culture that young women emulate her. The role play presented two points: the beginning of formation of opinion on rights by the students of Class 6; and the questioning of an accepted doctrine in society which oppresses some rights that the students have learned.

Fifty-six Headmasters from government-sponsored and government-aided schools attended the workshop. They appreciated the event, and said that the internalization of human rights through human rights education would allow students to understand rights-based issues and act when they came across human rights violations. They pledged their involvement in the program, and promised to send their teachers for training. They also agreed to develop through a consultative process a school syllabus on human rights fitted to the context of West Bengal.

In a country with such divergent experience of the condition of life, a positive step was felt. By starting human rights education in their schools, the Headmasters will soon find themselves under pressure from their own students to tackle social problems. Schools with a human rights class will soon find they are becoming more and more involved with improving the community.

In this way, the success of the meeting and the interest of the gathered Headmasters bode well for a statewide school curriculum which includes human rights classes aimed at creating and maintaining social justice for all. This was only the first tentative step in what would be a long process of consultation and compromise. The fact that human rights education was accepted by the Headmasters gave all those who work for it the hope that a human rights syllabus would eventually play an integral role in all West Bengal schools.

Teacher training

Eighty-eight teachers from fifty schools were trained in a five-day training workshop held on 18-23 May 2007. The training dealt with the development of capacity to use innovative and best methodologies in imparting the human rights education module to students. The training helped motivate and train the teachers in the skills of teaching the module which has been developed in Tamil Nadu and adapted to the West Bengal context. The teachers worked on the development of human rights lesson plans using the first six chapters of the module.

Human rights classes

Human rights classes started in all the fifty schools under the program from September 2006 onward. Some teachers who were trained first finished three chapters of the Module by December 2006. Other teachers who were trained afterward started in November and finished one or two chapters by December 2006.

The state coordinator visited three schools (one school each in North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and Kolkata districts) that have started the human rights classes and received feedback from them.

Capacity building workshop

The state coordinator for the West Bengal program attended a capacity-building workshop on report writing and documentation. The three-day workshop equipped all the state coordinators of the programs in different states with reporting skills, and oriented on the content of, and need for, a good and quality program report. An in-depth understanding of The Logical Framework Analysis was one of the main learnings.

Review and planning meetings

The state coordinator attended two review and planning meetings to know in detail the process run by People's Watch, its organization in general, its reach-out programs, and also the program in the other ten states. The meeting reviewed the first eight months of experience in implementing the program in the different states. The review gave an insight on all the good work done in all the states, their challenges and constraints. The meeting included discussion of the problems encountered and finding solutions through the experiences in states whose programs have been proceeding in great momentum. The meeting ended with the preparation of national- and state-level plans for the following year (2007).

Program implementation results

The teacher-training workshop equipped the teachers with the best models of practice of human rights education and developed in them the skills of teaching the module. The methodology of imparting the lessons based on the *Basic Plan Plan – Individual Work – Group Work – Feedback – Analysis and Decision to Change* has been incorporated in all the lessons.

The methodology of the *Basic Plan* has enhanced and benefited not only the teachers but the students as well. This was seen in the active involvement of all the students in the classes. The students made sure that they did not miss out the human rights period.

The students were happy with the content and showed a great progress. Changes in their lives were visible in their attendance of human rights classes.

The inclusion of government schools led to the initiation of a value education class for human rights in the school curriculum. This is one step towards more consultations and meetings for development of school curriculum that makes children face the real new world.

Constraints and challenges

The implementation of the program faces a number of constraints and challenges. One major challenge refers to the school curriculum. The West Bengal government added two more required subjects – Environmental Studies (EVS) and Life Style Education. This gives hardly anytime for the students to learn about values and rights and develop them.

Because the timetable for the academic year 2006-2007 has already been set in March 2006, the addition of an extra class of human rights education was difficult. The Headmasters agreed in March 2007 to allot one class per week in the new academic session of 2007- 2008. Meanwhile the human rights classes are being done in the General Knowledge (GK) period or the Moral Science period.

Concluding note

Human rights education has to be seen as central to widening the students' capacity to deal with their brave new world, as training them to reach out beyond themselves for one moment and see the rest of the world. The teacher's main task includes picking up on good and bad thought patterns among students, getting them to explore the reasoning and effects behind them, and highlighting the important role they themselves must play in receiving this education. The village schools where often one class consists of one hundred fifty students to one teacher, and even one or two periods of human rights education will benefit not only the students but also their teachers. The approach should not only sensitize the students to human rights, but also allow them to internalize them. It is this internalization that is so central to the success of a human rights education program, as it is internalization that allows students to understand rights-based issues and act when they come across human rights violations.