

Human Rights and Peace Education to Strengthen Tri-People Relations in Southern Philippines

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The ending of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in February 1986 changed the political landscape of the country. Not only were so-called democratic processes, political structures and mechanisms (like free elections, independent legislature) and free mass media re-established, civil and political rights and freedoms were likewise restored.

Learning from the unforgettable experiences of the Filipino people during the dark years of the martial law period, then President Corazon C. Aquino led the nation in the call that “never again” would it allow the restoration of dictatorial rule in the country that was marred by massive and gross human rights violations. Thus, barely four months after the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, President Aquino issued on 4 July 1986 *Executive Order No. 27: Education to Maximize Respect for Human Rights* (EO 27) mandating the integration of human rights into the curriculums of all levels of educational and training institutions in the country. The executive fiat also authorized the development and publication of materials and textbooks to popularize human rights concepts and principles in schools and colleges.

The issuance of EO 27 was among the initial measures taken during the post-martial law period to raise people’s knowledge and understanding of human rights, and stress their importance in everyday life. For the student and youth sectors, the inclusion of human rights in the school curriculums at various levels was

reinforced by the related initiatives of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), a national human rights institution created by the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

The then Department of Education, Culture and Sports [now Department of Education (DepEd)] and CHR adopted a Joint Declaration of Understanding in 1992 and signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 1996 to develop educational materials on the integration of human rights education into the primary and secondary school curriculums (CHR, Education and Research Office). This collaboration included the development of human rights teaching exemplars or modules, and human rights education facilitators’ manual, or teaching aids for teacher trainers.

However, despite these positive steps toward mainstreaming human rights education into the primary and secondary school curriculums, much remains to be accomplished in view of the current state of human rights education in the Philippine public school system. After more than a decade since EO 27, most public schools have not yet integrated human rights and peace

education into their curriculums. Several factors are responsible for this weakness, namely:

- Lackluster attitude, if not lack of awareness, of public school officials and teachers on the State's obligation to popularize human rights and peace education
- Lack of knowledge and skills among public school teachers in incorporating human rights and peace education into the curriculum and in employing participatory and creative pedagogies, and
- Lack of resources within the government to produce human rights and peace education teaching materials.

While both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government have embarked on human rights education programs, much work has to be done to strengthen the capabilities of educators who constitute an important pillar in the educational system. Cognizant of the problems and needs to effectively integrate human rights and peace education into the school curriculums, the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) embarked on a teacher-training project on the integration of human rights and peace education into the public secondary school curriculums. PhilRights, an NGO actively involved in human rights research, education and training activities among various sectors of Philippine society since 1991, viewed the project as a contribution to the efforts of civil society groups in popularizing human rights and peace concepts, principles and approaches, starting with the formal school system. It also envisioned the project as an effort to establish understanding and harmonize relationships between the indigenous peoples, the Christians and Muslims (so-called tri-people) of Mindanao particularly in those areas that historically have been the sites of conflict.

PhilRights Teacher Training Project

With funding support from the United

States Institute for Peace (USIP) for the 2005-2006 period, the PhilRights initiative underscored the important role of formal education in advocating peace and human rights, particularly the promotion of values of respect, non-discrimination, and social and community involvement among young people. It was intended to contribute to existing human rights and peace education efforts by developing creative and innovative pedagogies, which could be utilized by secondary school teachers.

The project was particularly significant in Mindanao (the second biggest island of the Philippines) where it was implemented on account of the tri-people character of its population. The island is the home of Muslims (Maguindanaon, Taosug, Iranun and Maranao), indigenous groups (B'laan, Manobo, Bagobo and Teduray), and Christian settlers. The indigenous groups are referred to as *Lumads*.

Mindanao, particularly in areas dominated by Islamized population, has a long history of struggle against various forms of discrimination, deprivation, and economic exploitation of its rich natural resources. The conflict between Christian and Muslim groups has evolved into a prolonged armed confrontation that left the *Lumads* caught in-between. The *Lumads* have been exploited and oppressed by Christian government officials, warlords and big landlords.

The absence of peace in the Islamized parts of Mindanao has worsened Christian-Muslim relations that already suffer from suspicion and animosity.

Given such a situation, the project was envisioned as a cultural tool to help alleviate the antagonistic perceptions and attitudes of Muslims, Christians and *Lumads* toward each other. By popularizing human rights and peace education through the formal school system, relationships between the tri-people population of Mindanao might change and improve.

The international community during the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 recognized "that human rights, training and public information were essential for

the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace” (Article 78, Vienna Declaration and Program of Action). Moreover, the United Nations (UN) underscored the value of human rights and peace education as “an instrument for conflict prevention and the prevention of human rights violations, as well as a contribution to peaceful post-conflict transformation and consolidation, and is thus a key factor for achieving human security” (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000).

In this context, the PhilRights’ project aimed to realize the following specific objectives:

1. To develop a teacher training module on the infusion of human rights and peace education in the formal education curriculum of public secondary schools, and
2. To enhance the capability of public secondary school teachers to implement the designed modules.

The project aimed to benefit secondary school teachers in two provinces in Mindanao. The provinces of North Cotabato and Maguindanao were purposively chosen because of the following reasons:

1. They have been historically the sites of armed conflict between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and
2. They have a substantial presence of the tri-people population.

The teacher participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Basic knowledge on human rights and peace concepts
2. With at least two years teaching experience in a public school setting
3. Familiarity with the religious and cultural dynamics in his/her community, and
4. Capability and commitment to develop and implement pedagogies on human rights and peace.

Project activities

The project was implemented in several phases; namely:

a. Initial phase

At the initial phase of the project, PhilRights held consultation meetings with NGOs in Metro Manila and Mindanao. This resulted in getting the Institute for Peace and Development Studies (IPDS) of the Southern Christian College in Midsayap, Cotabato province, and the offices of the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Region 12 as project partners.

The PhilRights project team visited four public secondary schools in the provinces of North Cotabato and Maguindanao, and met with the principals and teachers to introduce the project. The project team also held meetings with NGOs in the region (e.g., Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Notre Dame University Peace Institute, Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) and the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies) and received their support for the project.

Several regional government offices were involved in the project such as the Office of Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC) in Cotabato City, the Bureau of Secondary Education, Department of Education in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Division, and Department of Education – Region 12 Division. At the national level, the project team consulted with officials of the Department of Education central office.

b. Module Development

The training modules were developed using materials from local NGOs, the offices of the Department of Education, and human rights organizations. They were revised four times

to integrate the suggestions and improvements from each of the trainings held.

c. Teacher Training

The draft teacher training modules were tested with a group of twelve teachers from five public secondary schools in Metro Manila. The module testing was assisted by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers of the Philippines (ACT-Philippines¹), a nationwide NGO composed of public school teachers. The experiences and feedbacks generated from the test activity were incorporated in the training modules used in training two batches of trainees composed of teachers and school administrators/principals from the provinces of Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

The first batch of trainees consisted of forty-seven teachers and school administrators representing fourteen public secondary schools in the Province of Maguindanao, while the second batch consisted of thirty-five teachers and administrators coming from twenty-three public secondary schools in North Cotabato.

The two trainings were held on 18-22 August 2005 (first batch) and 25-30 November 2005 (second batch) respectively. Each batch received a five-day training held in lively and participatory manner utilizing creative pedagogies such as lecture-discussions, role-play, problem-tree construction, dance and song group dynamics, poem composition, local and indigenous ice-breakers/games, etc. Participants provided feedback and comments at the end of each training day.

Although the participants of the two trainings represented the tri-people population, the dominance of the Muslim and Christian teacher-trainees was highly observable.

The training consisted of the following ten modules/lessons:

Module 1: Preliminaries - Ice-breakers, Introductions, Expectations Check, Overview of the Training

Module 2: Visioning - Exercises that set the tone for the activities and discussions on human rights and peace

Module 3: Situationer - An overview of the trends and situations on issues and themes concerning human rights and peace at the global, national and local contexts

Module 4: Understanding Human Rights – Discussions on human rights, its principles and fundamental concepts, specific sets of rights (civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; religious rights; indigenous people's rights); human rights violations and remedies

Modules 5: Understanding Conflict – Discussion on definitions, forms, causes and effects of conflict in general and the Mindanao conflict and gender-based violence in particular

Module 6: Understanding Peace – Discussion on perspectives and approaches to peace and conflict strategies for conflict resolution, conflict management

Module 7: Locating Human Rights and Peace in Secondary Education (curriculum, school environment/space, extra-curricular activities, community)

Module 8: Integration – Discussion on thematic and integrated approaches in teaching and learning

Module 9: Sample Integration Modules on Various Subjects

Module 10: Practicum – Drafting and execution of lesson plans.

Each session/topic in the module involved activities such as singing, dancing, physical movements, and visual aids that encouraged creativity, free expression and interaction. Participants also shared their own teaching methods. There were also inputs and lectures from resource persons and discussions were further enriched by the participants' own views, knowledge and insights. The main points were synthesized in the discussion of each topic.

There were resource speakers in the training in addition to the main facilitators from the PhilRights' project team. The resource speakers discussed a number of topics such as: Human Rights Concepts and the Various Human Rights Instruments, Concepts and Theories on Conflict and Peace, Historical Roots of Conflict in Mindanao, Locating Human Rights and Peace in the Secondary Education Curriculum, and Theories and Methods on Human Rights and Peace Integration.

Evening sessions consisted of cultural presentations prepared and performed by the participants themselves. Participants were grouped according to their ethnicity (*Lumad*, Moro, migrant settler). Their presentations and performances illustrated their respective customs and traditions. These evening sessions were intended to provide expressions for cultural exchange as well as to foster camaraderie among the participants.

The last two days of the training were devoted to understanding the concept of the integration approach, developing lesson plans and preparing for the practicum. Teacher-participants, who were grouped according to subjects they taught in their respective schools, held team or collective teaching using the lesson plans they developed with the students of pre-selected schools. Through the practicum, the teacher-participants applied integration techniques. They said that the practicum made them realize that human rights and peace education integration into the secondary school curriculums was not difficult to do. This signified a change in their views and attitudes regarding the human rights and peace education integration. At the start of the trainings, many teacher-participants expressed reservations about the entire training exercise. They thought human rights and peace education integration would be an additional burden on their responsibilities as teachers and that it would require much of their teaching time. Others also had the idea that human rights and peace should be taught only in *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) and Values

Education subjects. They were not yet able to imagine how human rights and peace could be taught in other subjects like Mathematics, Biology, and Physics.

However, as the training progressed using participatory methodologies and discussions on the various concepts and topics, the teacher-participants were enlightened on the importance of incorporating human rights and peace into their subjects. They became aware and appreciative of the various ways and techniques on how human rights and peace could be integrated into their teaching. At the end of the training, many teacher-participants gave positive feedback on the training as they expressed how the training provided them with knowledge and skills of becoming more effective teachers and helping them establish better relations with their co-teachers and students.

On content, the teacher-participants were clarified on the concepts of human rights. For instance, the prevailing view was that human rights simply referred to each person's natural rights. The trainors emphasized that human rights were legal entitlements based on international and domestic laws. It had to be stressed that human rights were legally based on agreements or treaties signed by various States that consequently acquire the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the rights in these legal instruments. The trainors saw it appropriate to highlight these concepts in order to point out that human rights violations are acts of States, not private entities and private individuals, against their citizens. Especially in the context of war where even innocent people were affected, it was important that the State's position and role vis-à-vis human rights were clarified.

At the end of the training, initial plans were drawn up. The participants committed to submitting progress reports and participating in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and the Teachers' Colloquium. There were also ideas on how they could maintain their network for further exchange of ideas to improve their teaching methods. They also signified that they would

take steps to get the support of their peers and supervisors on human rights and peace education integration.

d. Focused Group Discussions

As a follow-up to the trainings, eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, four FGDs in each project site for a select group of teacher-trainees, and another four for secondary school students of the teachers who integrated human rights and peace in the subjects they taught.

The FGDs validated the implementation of human rights and peace education integration plans of the teacher-participants and substantively discussed evaluation points. The discussions reviewed the experiences in integrating human rights and peace education in learning situations within subjects and in school activities; the effects of the integration on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of individual students and teachers in and out of the school – particularly on how the integration has contributed to achieving peace; and enabling and disabling factors in the integration of human rights and peace education into the curriculum.

The FGDs revealed that teachers were able to incorporate human rights like the right to life, right to health, etc. and peace in subjects like Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health (MAPEH), Science, Values Education, *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) and Economics. A whole range of subject matters or topics was covered and linked to the concepts of human rights and peace. These included topics on the Second World War, Exploration and Conquest, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Consumerism, Entrepreneurship, Sports and Dances, Ecosystem and Pollution. Teachers integrated human rights and peace education into the school curriculum by discussing human rights and peace in relation to topics in the subjects as well as to everyday life and issues.

For example, in emphasizing teamwork among the students, the class discussed dis-

crimination and ways to eliminate racism, ageism, and sexism. Also, in a Science class, the teacher integrated human rights and peace in her discussion of the relationship of animals (i.e., mutualism and predation) by posing the question: What are the characteristics of a predator that are possessed by humans? This led to a discussion of oppression and violations of human rights.

Aside from these, there were also topics in *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) that directly dealt with human rights and peace. The topics included the Bill of Rights, Consumer Rights, Civil Rights and People's Freedoms and history of conflict among nations.

In terms of effect of the integration approach on the students, the FGD participants reported a higher level of respect among students who have undergone classes that discussed human rights and peace. There was greater awareness of the rights of others regardless of their ethnicity and identity.

The FGD participants reported that students who used to mock the Teduray (an indigenous tribe in Mindanao) students have changed their negative attitude. This happened to a group of students who usually made fun of a Teduray student by mimicking the way she spoke. A member of the group who sat in a class where human rights and peace was discussed reprimanded her friends and reminded them that everyone was equal in rights and they should respect the rights of others. The FGD participants claimed that since the integration classes started, discrimination against the Tedurays was lessened and that the Teduray students have been given the chance to mingle and speak out their minds.

The FGD participants also reported that the students, in general, have become more confident in sharing their ideas after learning their rights and experiencing encouragement to participate in class activities.

As to the conditions that facilitated the integration of human rights and peace education into the curriculum, the FGD participants

cited the existence of conflict in their area that affected their schools, and the fact that students could relate to human rights and peace. The tri-people population of the schools also made it easier for students to understand the concepts and principles of human rights and peace.

Another enabling factor was the presence of teachers who participated in the human rights and peace integration training, and who employed additional knowledge on human rights and peace, and skills in using the integration approach.

The support of other stakeholders such as the municipal mayor as well as DepEd officials and school principals was also important. In another case, the existence of a voluntary organization that helped students do activities on community development was cited as another enabling factor. The organization itself promoted peace and human rights as a medium for cooperation and unity among members of the community.

In terms of disabling factors, the FGD participants identified the following: poor learning competence of some students, lack of school facilities, parents' traditional upbringing of their children, time constraints for teachers who also engage in various tasks aside from teaching, additional work of preparing lesson plans, lack of support from school principals, presence of gangs, teachers who are not aware of the human rights and peace education integration approach.

e. Collection of Progress Reports

Aside from the FGDs, the teacher-trainees were asked to submit progress reports to monitor developments in the application of what they have learned during the training and to share their experiences, lessons learned and insights on the integration of human rights and peace education in their schools.

Out of the total eighty-two teacher-trainees, about thirty percent complied with the submission of the progress reports, an indication of the seriousness and commitment of the

teachers to human rights and peace education integration.

The progress report focused on 1) factors and conditions that facilitated the teaching of human rights and peace in their subjects; 2) lessons learned and insights on the experience; 3) difficulties and problems encountered; 4) ways in which human rights and peace education integration could be strengthened and improved, and 5) necessary support from DepEd.

Following are the summary of responses under each category:

- I. Reasons and/or factors cited by the teacher-trainees for the easy integration of human rights and peace in their subjects:
 - Direct connection of human rights and peace to subject matters discussed in subjects such as *Araling Panlipunan*, Filipino, and Values Education
 - For other subjects, relationship of human rights and peace to everyday life as well as the realities in the community. Human rights violations and the absence of peace were real experiences in the communities where the students live.
 - Awareness of students on the conditions that reinforce the stereotypical images of Muslims, *Lumads* and Christian settlers as well as the apparent deprivation and disempowerment of various groups
 - Existence of textbooks and reference materials that enable teachers to gain more knowledge on human rights and peace, and equip them to apply the human rights and peace education integration approach in the classroom.
- II. Lessons learned and insights:
 - The application of creative methodologies such as use of action songs make the students become interested in the subject matter
 - Enriched understanding of human rights and peace among teachers and their

practice in daily life are important

- While revision of lesson plans initially posed difficulty in teaching human rights and peace in the subjects, it is overcome when teachers notice the positive effects of teaching human rights and peace on the attitude of students towards learning as well as their behavior towards their schoolmates (more participative in class and show more respect towards classmates).

III. Difficulties encountered :

- Being “neophytes” in terms of teaching human rights and peace, the teachers found it hard to manage big classes as well as discuss in-depth the issues related to human rights and peace
- In subjects other than *Araling Panlipunan* (e.g., Mathematics and Science), the introduction of human rights and peace elicited more questions on social issues than the content of the subjects
- Integration of human rights and peace into the subject tended to prolong the class discussion and delayed the discussion of other subject matters/topics in the curriculum
- Non-participation of some students
- Lack of reference materials on human rights and peace
- Lack of facilities.

IV. Recommendations:

- Develop a manual or guidebook for teachers containing lesson plans that they can apply in the classrooms
- Provide more trainings and seminars, and forums on human rights and peace
- Develop the teachers’ commitment to pursue human rights and peace education integration into the curriculum.

V. Support needed from the DepEd:

- Provide more training on the integration

of human rights and peace education into the school curriculum

- Adopt the human rights and peace education integration approach not only in Social Studies but also in other subjects
- Provide reference materials such as books, pamphlets and brochures on human rights and peace
- Conduct inter-school activities that encourage students and teachers to learn more about human rights and peace.

f. Educators’ Conference/Colloquium

An Educators’ Conference/Colloquium was held on 22-23 May 2005 at the Southern Christian College, North Cotabato as the culminating activity of the teacher-training project. With the theme, “*Karapatan at Kapayapaan sa Aming Paaralan: Paghababi ng Karanasan*” (Human Rights and Peace in Our Schools: Weaving our Experiences), the conference was attended by fourteen teachers and school administrators from the participating schools in Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

The conference aimed:

- 1) To provide a venue for sharing and exchange of experiences in integrating human rights and peace education in various areas of the school curriculum
- 2) To assess the effects/impact of the trainings on Human Rights and Peace Integration
- 3) To gather feedback on the Training of Trainers Guidebook/Manual, and
- 4) To generate ideas on how to move forward.

Through workshops, the participants discussed the lessons learned and insights on integration of human rights and peace education into the school curriculum. Workshop 1 focused on questions regarding “discoveries” on their subject matter as well as human rights and peace, the impact on their students in terms of the learning of the subjects as well as their rela-

tion with their teachers and fellow students.

Workshop 2 focused on questions regarding good examples of effective links between and among the subjects, peace and human rights and feedback on how to improve the training manual.

Workshop 3 tackled effective methodologies/approaches/techniques in teaching human rights and peace within the subjects. Workshops 4 and 5 concentrated on the teachers' recommendations based on their experience in terms of teacher training and education as well as support from school administrators and Department of Education officials.

Below is a summary of the results of the Teachers' Colloquium as well as the other project activities:

I. Highlights and Key Lessons

- Integrating Human Rights and Peace in teaching the subject(s) facilitates learning; making the subject(s) more relevant to the day-to-day life of the students
- Effective practice of Human Rights and Peace Education necessitates mastery of the subject(s) and in-depth understanding of the concepts of peace and human rights on the part of teachers
- Use of vernacular or local dialect/s in class discussions enables more students to participate
- The effectiveness of the integration approach also depends on the teaching strategy/strategies employed of the teachers
- Integrating human rights and peace education into the school curriculum requires a paradigm shift/renewal in terms of how teachers view their subjects, students, teaching strategies and themselves as persons.

II. Best Practices Focusing on Content

- Human rights and peace are inherently related to the social sciences. Integrating them into the *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) subject is easy
- Integrating human rights and peace in other

subject areas like Mathematics and Science is possible though not always explicit or obvious

- Integrating human rights and peace in subjects other than Social Sciences can be facilitated by using metaphors/symbolisms/parallelisms for topics related to human rights and peace
- Thinking-outside-the-box or expanding imagination and creativity facilitates the identification of connections between and among the subjects taught and human rights and peace
- There is a need to access various available resources on human rights and peace and even the subjects taught
- There is also a need to develop new resources that can aid in the integration of human rights and peace into the various subject areas
- There are different views regarding curricular reform
 - ▲ The current curriculum needs further tests regarding its effectiveness in integrating human rights and peace into the various subject areas
 - ▲ Human rights and peace can be emphasized by teaching them as units/topics in *Araling Panlipunan* (Social Studies) subject
 - ▲ Human rights and peace can be treated as a separate subject.

III. Pedagogical Discoveries/Insights on Strategies

- There is no singular formula in teaching human rights and peace in various subject areas
- There are many teaching strategies that can be used for this purpose
- The choice of strategy/strategies is critical and influenced by the context of the teacher, students, learning environment and surrounding conditions.

IV. Methodological Entry Points of Human

Rights and Peace Education Integration

- As an **ethical principle** of teaching and learning, i.e., teaching and learning in an environment where peace and respect for the human rights of all (students, teachers, non-academic staff, etc.) are the dominant norms
- As a **relational framework** to link lesson to everyday life
- As a **point for analysis, reflection and application** of the topic under study
- As a **selection guide** in choosing appropriate strategy
- As an **example** to illustrate points being discussed
- As a **context** to constantly ground theoretical learning to practical learning.

Conclusion

The project activities undertaken reinforced the importance of human rights and peace education integration into the school curriculum and the crucial role of teachers and school administrators in implementing it. The interest generated from the teachers as evidenced by their positive feedback on the way the trainings were handled was inspiring for PhilRights. The entire exercise made the participants and PhilRights realize that they can contribute to the promotion of a human rights culture not only in the schools but also in the community.

The project validated the view that the integration approach can be made possible at the secondary level and even in subjects outside the Social Sciences. Human rights and peace need not be compartmentalized as a subject matter. Integration can be made more interesting using various teaching methodologies and techniques that aid in the learning of the subject matter as well as human rights and peace.

The reported impact on the students and teachers was also stimulating to the extent that PhilRights plans to replicate the project activities in other conflict sites with tri-people popu-

lation. An advanced course focusing on child rights and more in-depth discussion of other human rights issues and standards will also be implemented once funding is secured.

At the same time, PhilRights will disseminate the Training of Trainers Guidebook titled “On Integrating Peace and Human Rights in Secondary Education: Towards Strengthening *Lumad*, Moro and Christian Settler Relations” to various schools, teachers and principals.

PhilRights will continue to lobby the DepEd to strengthen human rights and peace education integration into the public secondary school curriculum. A memorandum from the DepEd’s Division Superintendents supporting efforts promoting human rights and peace education integration can be secured for this purpose.

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Endnote

- ¹ ACT Philippines changed its name to Teachers and Employees Association for Change, Education Reforms and Solidarity (TEACHERS, Inc.) in mid-2007.