Human Rights Education in Schools: The Curriculum Development and Teachers Training Program in Taiwan

Mei-Ying Tang
Professor
Taipei Municipal Teachers College

Abstract

The attempt of this paper is to review the experience of curriculum development and teachers training program on human rights education, though it has not been widely advocated or implemented in Taiwanese schools. In this sense, following questions will be discussed: How has human rights education in schools been institutionalized in Taiwan? What constitutes human rights education curriculum in schools? What kind of knowledge should schoolteachers know about the implementation of human rights education? What teachers training program should be adopted? How do we make schools sensitive to human rights issues? I first discuss the background of the human rights education and then the current curriculum on human rights. I focus on the shared experiences in the workshop. Finally, I cite problems and concerns in order to make improvements in the future. It is hoped that the experience of curriculum development and teachers training program on human rights education could make reference to a wide range of implementing human rights education.
Human Rights Education in Schools: The Curriculum Development and Teachers Training Program in Taiwan

Through the history of Taiwanese society, people acquired rights by confronting injustice and inhumanity. After martial law was abolished in 1987, the idea of human rights emerged stronger than ever and since then Taiwan has become more democratic and liberal. Overall, the human rights situation in Taiwan has made great progress for the past decade. However, many still see the idea of human rights as the cultural heritage—even cultural imposition—of Western societies and thus irrelevant to Taiwanese society. It is not unusual for human rights advocates confront the complicated issue of cultural relativism and the so-called “Asian values” argument and constantly face the hostility of the conservative forces that emphasize on placing social order above protection for the individual. Especially when the society is chaotic and a mood of insecurity prevails on the island, the attempt to use strict controls and the increased power of the executive authorities will become popular and reasonable. The public will appeal for the myth of “severe punishments under strict laws” in order to re-establish social order when security deteriorates, the juvenile crime climbs, and other social problems break out.

From this we can see the special character of Taiwan’s human rights problems and difficulties that are well worth our attention. It also reveals that there is no guarantee from human rights violations even in a democratic and free society unless people have the consciousness of human rights, which naturally leads them to respect for others and protect their own rights with all efforts. Many human rights workers and organizations have endeavored to continuously monitor the government policies that violated basic principles of human rights and they have assisted those neglected and suppressed groups of victims for years. Although the argument of cultural relativism still prevails, human rights increasingly seen as universal has been promoted and propagated by many non-government organizations working for the advocacy and improvement of human rights conditions. As Taiwan makes progress in political and economic domains, it is still unsatisfactory in human rights conditions, falling considerably short of international standards. This leads advocates to realize the crucial importance of human rights education. There should be an educational effort that is commensurate with the actual needs of human rights protection.

Educational Reform in Response to the Protection of Human Rights

Influenced by a rising tide for international educational reform, and disappointing with the inadequacies of the educational system, a coalition of
educational advocacy groups entitled “410 Alliance for Educational Reform” held a major march and rally in Taipei on April 10, 1994 to promote a satisfactory educational environment for the young. The alliance pressed for the realization of the ideals of equal opportunity of education, urged the legislation of “Education Basic Law”, which puts emphasis on people’s right to education, parents’ right to choose the kind of education and teacher’s right to professional autonomy. Among the clearest results of this campaign activity included public awareness of educational reform and the increasing concern on human rights, especially on the position of children’ rights. From the coalition of non-government organizations to public demands on the government to respond to calls for educational reform, the educational reform movement has gradually built a foundation within the ranks of Taiwan social movement as a whole.

In response to public concern on a long-range plan for educational reform, the Ministry’s Educational Reform Action Program was approved by the Executive Yuan on May 14th, 1998. This five-year program was allocated a total of NT$157 billion starting from 1999 in order to carry out the following projects: consolidation of elementary education, making pre-school education widely accessible, consolidating existing systems for teacher training and continuing education, creating dynamic and quality technological and vocational education, achieving excellence within higher education, encouraging lifelong education and information education, promoting family education, improving education for disabled students, enhancing education for aboriginal students, providing accessibility to the paths for education, re-establishing counseling systems, and advancing education research and funding. Moreover, the Ministry of Education has formally included human rights education as part of the important current issues of curricula guidelines for elementary and junior high schools, which will be implemented in next September.

The Curriculum Development of Human Rights Education

Review of the existing curriculum

Before martial law was abolished, few people were concerned about human rights education. Since the advocacy of educational reform has made great contributions to deregulation and decentralization, the Ministry of Education allowed local government and schools having more power on the decisions of education affairs, thus encouraging school reform toward a more open environment and a child-centered, participatory pedagogy. There is no single subject called human rights education in the current curricula in either elementary or junior high schools. However, the concept of rights and obligations can be still found in many school
courses, such as, social studies, citizenship education and moral education. Some hidden curriculum and extracurricular activities also touch on the themes of self-esteem and respect for human dignity, which include the spirits of human rights. Since most people are not accustomed to using "rights" language in their daily speech, teachers will thus put more emphasis on obligations, duties and social welfare over individual rights when teaching human-rights-related subjects such as social studies. Teachers and school administrators think students are too young to claim their rights and that teaching them their rights will make them "disobedient," "threaten authority and cause chaos." From the review of present school activities, it reveals that the authoritative attitude of adults towards the young and the misunderstanding of human rights are the main obstacles to the implementation of human rights education in schools.

**Promoting human rights education in schools**

As the United Nations General Assembly proclaiming the Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), it is obvious that human rights education is perceived as central to the UN’s human rights mission. The importance of human rights education is significant and is recognized by all nations. The objective of the UN Decade for Human rights Education is: “Globally disseminating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The Preamble of the Declaration notes: “…all nations…shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms…”

Further, the Universal Declaration’s article 26(2) gives a clear normative direction as to the States’ obligation to human rights education:

*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

Influenced by the worldwide support for the UN Decade for Human Rights Education and the pressure from the educational reform advocacy, education authorities realize the importance of human rights education and support initiatives in schools. As educational and curricular reforms are on the rise, more school activities cover important issues such as environment survival, minority, sexual discrimination and child abuse. Although these activities do not make up the whole of human rights education, they do relate current issues to human rights. Nevertheless, human rights promotion in schools still lags behind the democratic progress of Taiwanese society. In addition to the inadequacy of human rights education, most teachers are lacking in
human rights consciousness, knowledge, teaching skills and materials to advocate and implement human rights education more practical and systematic.

In 1996, my colleagues and I explored the possibility of implementing human rights education in schools and started to develop curricula for students from pre-school to university. We proposed a research project for human rights education that has been sponsored by the National Science Council for three years. Our team, seen as a pioneer, had four subgroups covering research topics for pre-school, primary school, secondary school and university levels. At the first stage, we reviewed related literature and human rights conditions, discussed "Asian values" and current school situation. Then we shaped the research framework for each group. At the university level, the focus is on the basic survey on undergraduates’ opinions and concepts of human rights. The other groups emphasize on curriculum development and teaching materials. When the research team being formed, we expected to go beyond the research findings: we wanted to advocate and implement human rights programs in schools. In addition, we see the necessity of recruiting teachers for curriculum development and the significance of teacher training program.

It was the right timing for our plan because the mayor of Taipei City (who is the President now) has just announced 1997-1998 as the "Year of Human Rights" to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Though it was a politically sensitive move, it eased the growth and development of human rights education efforts. Our proposal for curriculum development and teacher training on human rights education were hence supported and funded by the Bureau of Education of Taipei. Human rights education is thus promoted not only by academics but also by local authorities and the people in the field.

Since human rights education receiving more attention in schools, the issues related to human rights have profound implications to many subjects, extracurricular activities and the hidden curriculum. As stated above, the implementation of human rights education becomes a major theme in educational reform. The concept of human rights will be integrated into one part of the national curriculum of social studies, seen as one strand of the whole thread, which hopefully help students making connections between knowledge and daily life. As part of the important current issues, both globally and locally, human rights education has also been included in the national curricula guidelines and will be integrated and implemented in all domains of study in 2001. Above is a brief description of how human rights education in schools has been promoted and institutionalized in Taiwan.

**Curriculum Guideline on Human Rights Education**

Although the teaching of human rights is important, it can be argued that
specifying human rights education as a course is unnecessary because it should not be implemented merely as a subject. Instead, it should lead to an understanding of and sympathy for the concepts of justice, equality, dignity, rights and democracy. Such understanding should include both affective and cognitive domains. Thus, schools should provide all kinds of opportunities for students to experience affective support for learning and to express their feelings through drama, art, music, creative writing and other media (Council of Europe, 1985).

Partly due to the authorities’ fear of too many rights for students, the school curriculum puts more stress on the notion of responsibilities and obligations than the individual rights. And partly because of the culture of competitive examinations, the cognitive domain has been stressed as the essential part of all subjects. Up to the present, the human-rights-related curriculum and activities have not yet offered enough opportunities for students to enjoy human rights in real life. To some extent, teachers and students understand and accept the values of human dignity, especially when related to respect for the old and protection of the weak. However, there is a need to broaden the students’ experience and link those traditions with the idea of human rights. It is necessary to clarify the meaning of human rights and to base the culture of human rights on the values of human dignity.

Over the last fifty years, the United Nations has provided the world with a body of law and normative principles that can be looked upon as authoritative as to the meaning of human rights. This effort culminated into the foundation of human rights education and should be included in the curriculum. Legal documents and universal statements on human rights, and the theory and history of human rights must be emphasized in the school curriculum. Nevertheless, human rights concepts must not only be taught, but also practiced and applied in the school and community. Through daily practice, the culture of human rights will take root and become part of our life.

For the past years, our research team, through group discussions and class observations, has explored a number of issues related to the implementation of human rights education at different grade levels. We have examined the issues of human rights education, its purpose, content and principles of implementation. We hope that teachers will come to understand the assumptions and implications of human rights and thus resolve their own doubts regarding the implementation of human rights education.

Using our research findings and other countries’ experiences, we are exerting great efforts to develop curriculum and encourage teachers employing leaflets, comics, worksheets, storybooks and even video as teaching resources. The research is based on the premise that real learning will naturally occur when there is a combination of
the cognitive, the affective and the active. The human rights education curriculum is designed by two components, the culture and the content, but will eventually be integrated into a whole combining thinking, feeling and doing together.

We seek to promote a set of core values derived from the fundamental central value of human dignity. Human rights education is a process of cultivation by which students learn and practice the core values of human rights. This is what we call the culture of human rights. Through case studies of daily-life conflicts and group activities of sharing and cooperation, students will experience and explore the meaning of democracy, social justice and respect for human rights. The culture of human rights is cultivated by an ongoing process in daily life that challenges and reconstructs values and beliefs. It is important for students to learn a set of values that will help them identify problems such as racism, sexism and other denials of the values that comprise and sustain human dignity.

The other part of the human rights education curriculum, the content, includes the history of human rights, legal documents and statements on human rights, and basic human rights theory. The intention is not to train students to become experts, but rather to enable them to develop and think about and act on their relationships with others. The content of human rights is not only concerned with knowledge of the great documents and theory of human rights but also with everyday life in and outside the school. It is essential to relate the abstract statements in legal instruments to children's school life so that they will better understand their own and others' rights. It is therefore essential to provide a school environment respectful of human rights and to allow students to learn, practice and apply human rights principles in the school setting. After all, action is an important element in human rights education and it makes human rights more meaningful to students.

In sum, the framework of the curriculum includes the culture and content of human rights, which has been adopted as the national curriculum guideline on human rights education. Teaching about human rights is only a part of what we have to do. We also have to teach against human rights violates and teach for the creation of a world in which all human beings are treated with justice and dignity. In order to develop appropriate materials and activities, the teachers themselves must have a concrete idea of human rights. We therefore develop training programs for teachers along with the curriculum development as the first step to implement human rights education.

The Experience of Teachers Training Program

*The Workshop for Teachers*
Since effective human rights education requires committed and skilled teachers, it is crucial to make them sensitive to and capable of dealing with human rights issues in daily life, especially in the school setting. Teacher training should thus strive for this goal or at least develop an awareness of human rights issues and the knowledge of universal standards. The workshop is designed to achieve this goal by creating a supportive group and a sense of teamwork among teachers. It is hoped that the teachers will develop professionally and devote themselves to human rights education through this ongoing process. Teachers are responsible for transmitting values, which are essential for teaching human rights, they need to be in a position to help their students support pluralist democracy and human rights, enjoy cultural diversity and be conscious of their responsibilities to the planet and all those who live on it. This implies that they themselves should share these values. After the workshop, participants, recruited on voluntary basis, will hopefully develop the shared values and reflect on the theory and practice of human rights. In fact, our goal of including human rights curricula in schools and training teachers is closely related to the ideals of citizenship education that stresses on developing both awareness and advocacy.

The Workshop Program

The idea of the teachers training workshop supported by the Taipei Bureau of Education was initiated in December 1997. Before the workshop starting, there was a seminar on human rights education held by the education authorities in January 1998. It was an official introduction of human rights education to schoolteachers and, to some extent, it was provocative of controversy. As a result, we recruited about 30 primary and secondary schoolteachers on a voluntary basis or upon recommendation of school principals. We respect teacher’s willingness of participation because the workshop will not succeed if participants are forced to attend. It is assumed that human rights education include not only knowledge but also feeling and action. Through this process, teachers will experience the culture of human rights for themselves and thus learn to respect students’ choices.

This workshop including eight sessions has two targets. One is to acknowledge the concept of human rights and the implementation of human rights education, and the other is to develop teaching materials and resources. Based on the national curriculum guideline, the program is designed for schoolteachers to acquire the content knowledge and experience the culture of human rights. It is to provide teachers with legal knowledge about human rights and an opportunity to explore appropriate materials and methodologies for effective teaching and learning. Participants usually met every second Friday afternoon during the second term of the school year in 1998. The outline of the program is as follows.
Program of the workshop on human rights education

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13 March</td>
<td>Introduction to the development of human rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>The concept of human rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17 April</td>
<td>The idea of human rights under the Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24 April</td>
<td>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>8 May</td>
<td>Human rights in Taiwan today</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>22 May</td>
<td>Health, lifestyles and human rights</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5 June</td>
<td>Projects and plans for HRE curriculum development</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 June</td>
<td>The development of teaching materials and resources</td>
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<td>Sharing time</td>
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In order to achieve the workshop purposes, the program of each session was constructed by three phases. In the first phase, it is aimed at providing both security and challenge to ensure the active participation of teachers. The second phase includes study and experience. The final stage leaves participants with principles, with which they can explore human rights issues in schools and which give them the basis to develop their own plans. In fact, inquiry, study and experience have been stressed in every session. The workshop is structured to promote as much personal interaction as possible in order is to create a sense of teamwork among colleagues from different schools. Most of the time is used for discussion and sharing rather than formal meetings so that teachers can exchange information and experience at both cognitive and affective levels. Each participant is assigned to a group with an experienced leader. The groups are small, with no more than eight members, and are intended to provide a friendly and supportive atmosphere in which participants can share their own experiences and also raise questions or concerns about human rights issues or the workshop itself. Each member is treated with respect and individual dignity is always a concern.

The first three sessions of the workshop provide basic information on human rights theory, especially in relation to the Constitution. The following two sessions expose participants to the basic international and national documents on human rights. In the final three sessions, participants review the offered curricula and extract those ideas that will enable them to develop similar learning experiences in the schools. The program is run democratically and participants have maximum control over the tasks, especially curriculum development for schools. However, as program leaders, we are responsible for devising and sequencing the activities and setting the framework of curriculum on human rights education. We adopt an approach that includes participant-led activities, and small-group discussions permitting maximum...
participation and encouraging cooperation, toleration, decision-making and commitment. Through the program, we tend to articulate and stress our belief that education for human rights and democracy cannot take place where there is no democracy or respect for the human rights of both students and teachers.

In summary, our structure of the workshop provides a framework within which all have access to information and the opportunity to participate in activities. It will help teachers to clarify, interpret and apply this information while implementing human rights education in schools. Teachers share and benefit from each other’s personal and professional experience. They also make direct contributions to human rights education through the curriculum development project.

**Summer Workshop**

As stated above, the 1998 workshop had two purposes, neither of which were easy to achieve in a short time. To some extent, teachers have accepted the idea of human rights and are ready to apply it in the school setting. However, the teaching materials and resources developed by the participants need to be refined before being published and distributed to every school in Taipei. We thus set up the summer workshop for the teachers who enjoyed the last workshop and are willing to contribute to the development of curricula. The summer workshop is task-oriented and has six intensive sessions. Although less than 15 persons voluntarily took part last term, they were quite productive and creative in developing materials. They examined existing textbooks related to the themes of human rights and also incorporate human rights concepts into different school subjects at various grade levels.

Divided into four working groups, these volunteers met every Friday morning from 10 July to 14 August. One group, stressing the content of human rights education, will simplify and translate international documents, mainly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that students can easily understand them. The group will also write stories about persons and events important in the history of human rights, especially in the Taiwanese context. Three groups, one of secondary school teachers and the other two of primary school teachers, focus on the cultivation of the human rights culture in curricula. They will develop materials and activities from case studies drawn by their observations of students' experience in schools related to the idea and values of human dignity. The assumption of the curriculum development is that the culture and the content of human rights can be learned through personal experiences and interactions with others. All the groups will then identify the knowledge, attitudes
and activities required to structure learning about democracy, justice and equality, responsibility and human dignity.

The summer workshop program is continually being revised and developed to meet the needs of participants and to accomplish the target of the curriculum development. As a result, teachers will apply what they learned from the workshop to their professional work through research and reflection. In fact, the impact of the workshop is greatly increased when teachers have made contributions to the development of curriculum and accumulation of teaching materials.

**Intensive program**

From previous experience of teachers training, it is confirmed that effective human rights education requires the combination of theory and practice, cognitive and affective dimensions. This is important in the education not only of children but of adults. In 1999, following the erection of Human Rights Monument in Green Ireland, a workshop with one-day course was held by Human Rights Education Foundation on November 12 as a starting line of implementing human rights education in the whole country. Then a series of three-day intensive workshop for schoolteachers has begun which stress the challenges and teaching approaches about human rights according to national curriculum. Up to present, the intensive workshop sponsored by Human Rights Education Foundation and education authorities has been held in Taipei, Kaushong and ChinMeng. The program following similar framework of previous workshop consists of a mixture of key-note lectures, from a number of respected experts in human rights issues or human rights campaigning, and active workshop sessions particularly for developing teaching materials. Participants acquire basic knowledge and understanding and consider how they may most effectively combine what they learn with appropriate pedagogical skills and translate it into classroom practice for their student or other teachers.

**Reflections and Insights**

Although there have been various courses in teachers training program, we always offer a curriculum framework and rationale, resource listings, and sample lesson materials to facilitate human rights education in elementary and secondary schools. It is intended to be suggestive rather than definitive. It is hoped that schoolteachers will contribute to the further development of human rights education by adaptations of existing materials and inventive use of the appropriate resources, and especially by developing their own materials.

In the workshop, we intend to integrate into the curriculum framework cognitive, affective and active domains. The structure of the workshop is important, as is the
quality of human rights education practice in schools. However, the workshop is unique in that we make the human rights element explicit in the conduct and process of the workshop. The workshop also leaves teachers plenty of time to express their ideas and feelings and then develop their own teaching materials. According to a survey after the workshop, teachers responded that they had become more aware of and sensitive to human rights issues in and outside school. They said they would reflect on and criticize teaching methods, school curricula and environments that oppress students' rights. Of course, some participants still have doubts about implementing human rights education programs, but they appreciate the chance to attend the workshop. Generally speaking, teachers are willing to explore human rights education further. The feedback from workshop participants encourages us to keep exploring the appropriate model for pre-service and in-service teacher education, respectively.

**Problems and Concerns in Implementing HRE Program**

Human rights education is not merely a teaching subject but also a value-based cultivation process. It should be integrated into other studies and provide an environment of justice, equality and human dignity. At present, many activities and school subjects are related to civics and moral education, but few are concerned with human rights education. Lots of work have to be done, such as curriculum development, teachers training, school improvement and even the reform of education system. We intend to set up the workshop for teachers, whose dual purposes are teacher training and curriculum development, as the first step to advocate and implement human rights education.

In spite of the sense of common purpose achieved, many questions remain. Cultural values, for example, have to be constantly clarified. There is still a debate on the issue of whether human rights are universal. Human rights education is normative field of study seeking to define and apply standards of justice to human affairs. The fundamental values of human rights are claimed to be universal; however, there is a need to clarify the conflict between cultural values and the core values of human rights. It is hoped that this process of clarification will develop through teaching and curriculum development. Nevertheless, it is essential to continuously study the development of human rights education and examine the impact of implementing human rights education on teachers and students.

Workshop participants also identify and discuss common problems, including the lack of time devoted to this area and its status in the integrated curriculum. Other common constraints are the lack of flexibility due to the schools' heavy
curriculum and academic orientation, especially at the junior high school level.

In general, workshop participants acknowledge that it is necessary to integrate the human rights education curriculum with related subjects and activities. However, the existing school curriculum is composed of many different subjects with their own concerns and course hours. It is thus not easy to implement human rights education without labeling a subject human rights education. Even employing an integrated approach, it is better to require that courses--such as citizenship education, moral/value education and relevant activities--allot a certain number of hours to human rights education.

The workshop experience tells us that the willing and enthusiastic teachers play the key role to effective human rights education. We also need a school environment that promotes human rights. How do we make schools sensitive to human rights issues? The question relates not only to the school environment but also to the hidden curriculum, which needs to be cautiously examined and borne in mind when developing the school curriculum on human rights.