Human Rights Education
Finding a Proper Niche in the Curriculum

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Introduction

History can be viewed as a series of conflicts and disputes or, from a different perspective, it can be viewed as a series of problem-solving challenges and achievements. If we focus on the former, we are likely to feel very discouraged about the future of mankind as we seem to have reached a stage where solution-through-combat has become no solution; at best the "balance of power" approach leads to short-term respites in an unending process of strikes and retaliations based on ethnocentric pride, and at worst each conflict becomes a more deadly solution for all concerned. However, if we look at the series of treaties, agreements and contracts that have ultimately evolved from attempts to avoid conflict, or from conflict resolution over time, we see wider and wider unities, more complex societies with greater levels of participatory citizenship as the historical trend. This may give us hope for the future of humanity. It should also give us a great appreciation for one of the crowning achievements of mankind in the last century, the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the first truly global agreement which identifies the fundamental principles and goals of just and peaceful social interactions affecting every man, woman and child on this planet. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and its related conventions represent the foundations of globally based law. Although rooted in codes of conduct and social responsibility that have evolved over thousands of years, more than 50 years after its introduction in 1948, its potential influence is but slowly blossoming toward maturity because, among other things, we have not yet built up a "critical mass" of citizens knowledgeable enough about the agreements to see that these rights are fully put into practice. Many of those who are in most need of the protection of their rights, cannot read. Among those who can read, few are fully aware of the essential nature of the document, its provisions, and its connection to the improvement and development of their personal and social well being. Thus there is a call for human rights education.

Background and Aims of Human Rights Education

According to background information provided in a report to the General Assembly of the United Nations (7 September, 2000) by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights questions, "including alternative approaches for improving the effective employment of human rights and fundamental freedoms," "The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 discussed at length the importance of human rights education, considering that human rights education, 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."(1) In a resolution on 23 December, 1994, the General Assembly proclaimed a United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education to run from 1995 to 2004. They reemphasized the provisions of all international human rights instruments including the Universal Declara-

tion of Human Rights regarding the "obligations of States to undertake human rights education, training and public information programmes." (States, in this sense means the member nations of the United Nations, who all are signatories to the UDHR.)(2) In the same resolution they affirmed that human rights education should "involve more than the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies. It also affirmed that human rights education contributes to the development of dignity within the diversity of cultures and societies and that in order to realize their full human potential—civil, cultural, economic, political and social, "each woman, man and child...must be aware of all their human rights."(3)

The Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education drawn up by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights defined human rights education as "...efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through imparting of knowledge and skills and moulding attitudes which are directed to:

a) the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

b) the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;

c) the promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, and indigenous groups;

d) the enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society;

e) the furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

"During the Decade all nations are expected to extend the scope and reach of their human rights education efforts."(4)

The plans for action defined tasks to be carried out at international, national and local levels by governments, research and training institutes, non-governmental organizations as well as interested individuals through both formal and non-formal education. The role of the UNHCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) as well as that of UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) for implementing and monitoring activities were mandated. At all levels, the need for conducting baseline studies, and needs assessments were to support the development, implementation and evaluation of plans.

Human Rights Education in Asia

Action plans for the Decade of Human Rights Education were to be organized region by region. In the Asia-Pacific Region, the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, located in Osaka City (known as HURIGHTS OSAKA) managed to open its doors after over ten years of organizational groundwork in December, 1994, just on the eve of the Decade for Human Rights Education, supported by Osaka City and Prefectural governments, various NGOs, other organizations and individuals. HURIGHTS OSAKA set to work on the tasks of reviewing trends in human rights education, shared experiences and materials about human rights education in schools, discussed areas that require further improvement, proposing concrete measures for promoting the teaching of human rights in schools, and they reviewed the basic linkages between cultural values and human rights throughout Asia and the Pacific. (5) In 1998, they held the Asian Workshops on Human Rights Education in Schools and published a report entitled Human Rights Education in Asian Schools : Achievements, Problems and Prospects. (6)

Regarding the significance of human rights education in schools, this report makes special note of the relationship between human rights education in classrooms and school-community dynamics. It was noted that students who graduate from schools "invariably occupy influential positions in government, business and other institutions in society. The level of their human rights consciousness directly affects human rights realization as well as suppression. They therefore need to be given attention just as the human rights education programs directed to the communities of the poor and the disadvantaged who are most vulnerable to human rights violations." They also noted that "in the context of human rights education in the formal education system, the school is, or should be, relevant to the community."(7) However, it was noted that among the problems of developing adequate and relevant human rights programs in schools is the resistance to promoting ideas of human rights in schools traditionally bound in competitive, authoritarian or elitist oriented education systems. Educators themselves have to review their approaches to and beliefs about education so that the meta-messages they give their students suggest that their "development as human beings...is not simply determined by their ability to get the highest grade in science and mathematics, or to be able to memorize facts and figures, but their critical thinking, their ability to relate to the community, and their holistic personality and broad-mindedness, among other traits."(8)

The report noted that while human rights education programs have been growing in schools since the 1990s, they exist in less than half of the countries in the Asian region. Where they do exist, the numbers ranged from one program in one school in Pakistan to "a widespread program in various schools as in Japan." Even where programs exist, they are often incomplete in content and do not cover all levels of education. However, the report gives no exact statistics on the basic question of where human rights programs exist or are developing. The report does note the absence of political will that hinders the full implementation of programs which results from a lack of knowledge of human rights by government personnel (and educators, I might add) and lack of recognition of problems in schools by the government. In addition, it mentions that motivation of teachers is weak, materials as well as teachers trained to teach human rights in short supply, and "human rights education occupies a very low position in the priorities of the school because it is not included in the examination to get to higher level studies."(9)

The HURIGHTS report is helpful in pointing out a number of areas of action for improvement. These include recommendations to review the syllabi of schools using a human rights perspective and incorporation of human rights in school curricula at all levels. They point out that process and experience-oriented methodologies which support understanding relationships with other people (bringing balance to knowledge or fact-based teaching methods) are needed, and advise that new approaches to human rights education be explored. Human rights concepts need to be brought down to ordinary language levels so that students can connect them to their own experiences and understanding of social interactions. Documentation and assessment of human rights education programs was suggested.

Suggested contents of programs include the development of the concept of human rights, and responsibilities of individuals in society and in the world (citizenship), the issues of human rights violations and struggles to achieve full protection and promotion of rights. Skills that need to be developed through education programs include dialogue, facilitation, communication, and other human relations skills. Methodologies might include such activities as discussion, simulation, role

play, case studies, and other participatory learning approaches. Evaluation approaches should include long term as well as short term effects, and mix quantitative and qualitative systems.

Returning to the Report of the UNHCHR on the mid-term global evaluation of the progress made towards the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), it was noted that only 4 of 60 governments in the Asian region responded to the questionnaires sent by the UNHCHR. "There are no adequate reports so far on the extent of implementation of the existing national plans of action or of any human rights programme by Governments in the region."(10) Although they mentioned that discussions of human rights are integrated into such existing subjects as social studies, geography, history, language or subjects on life experience, they noted that "Information about existing national plans of action and model plans of action is needed."(11) In addition, they note that this integration occurs at some levels, "mostly primary and secondary" but that mandates for human rights education are "mostly absent from the university level."(12)

In the section on "Overall recommendations," this report noted that "value-oriented human rights education alone is insufficient. Human rights education should make reference to human rights instruments (UDHR and related conventions) and mechanisms of protection and to procedures for ensuring accountability."(13) They also encouraged creative participatory teaching methods introduced in a holistic framework, addressing a broad range of issues in relevant and sustainable educational curricula.(14) Again, they note the need for evaluation and studies of long-term impact, in order to understand which approaches work best and why, incorporating the development of indicators to evaluate qualitative impact.(15)

Human Rights Education in the English Conversation Curriculum at YPU

In the following section a personal account will be offered of the development and evaluation of a program for human rights education within some of the English conversation courses taught to second year students at Yamaguchi Prefectural University. (English Conversation is one of the mandatory courses for second-year students. Classes are divided among 6 teachers. Two of the teachers use the "global issues" curriculum of which this unit on Human Rights is a part.) Rationale for choosing to include these topics in the language program will be included in the discussion. The description of the content and teaching methods is followed by a report of data (both qualitative and quantitative) obtained from a recent survey of students concerning their general knowledge and exposure to human rights and particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The relevance of English conversation as a subject for study in the university curriculum is, in this author's understanding, related to helping students to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that they will need to become effective global citizens. With adequate communication skills in English (as a global language) they may be able to participate fully in the emerging and on-going planetary dialogue regarding the present and future course of human society. For this reason, although the vocabulary level of human rights seems at first glance to be difficult, the inclusion of issues related to human rights, with practical exercises designed to build critical thinking skills as well as their ability to convey information and their own opinions has seemed appropriate and even essential to the future of the students. As was pointed out in the above information, university students often become the leaders of society and governments of the

future. Indeed, they must at least have a "conversant" knowledge of the subject of human rights, be familiar with its language (at least in simplified form) and be aware of the mechanisms of authority by which rights can be promoted, carried out and protected.

When I began to develop the units related to human rights in the late 1980s as a part-time teacher at the university (then Yamaguchi Women's University), I myself had not read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the simple reason that I had never seen a copy. It was no easy matter in those pre-internet days in Japan to obtain one. When I did track down a copy, I was astounded to find how elegantly simple it is! (16) There are just 10 short paragraphs in the preamble, followed by 30 short articles, some no more than a line or two long. The entire document can easily fit on the front and back of a B-4 size paper. The preamble expresses in simple terms why and how authors and signers came to agree upon the list of human rights. The 30 articles express succinctly the overarching principles which, when applied, can disentangle some of the most deep-rooted problems that have traditionally plagued human society—social, legal, political, economic and cultural.

Regarding the importance of drawing attention to such principles, the Universal House of Justice (the international consultative body which administers the global Baha'i community) notes in a statement entitled, The Promise of World Peace, "There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them."(17) Making direct mention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the conventions which more fully delineate the means to achieving them, the Universal House of Justice affirms, "all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the spectre of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations."(17) Yet how can the principles be identified and courageously enforced if people are not informed of them? The task of educators is to inform students of principles and aid them to put them to good use.

I began to share the document in its entirety with students, working systematically on the key words and concepts, the students (and I, myself) expressed delight and surprise at some of the "rights" that are often, for one reason or another, rarely mentioned or are neglected. The right to rest and leisure, the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to privacy are often mentioned by the students as ones that they had not realized before. When I first began using this document, few students said they had ever heard of it, let alone read it. As the data below reveals, the number of students who have been exposed to human rights and the UHDR in general form has increased to between 60 and 70%. But at present no more than 6% of students at this university report that they have studied human rights in detail (even in Japanese) before encountering the information in this English class, and 7% say they have never heard of it.

Since this is a new vocabulary for them and often new information even in their own language, it is an excellent challenge to build the concepts bilingually. In fact, experience using

content-based language learning approaches shows that by building the vocabulary expressions in both languages at once, the chances of retaining the connection between the two languages may even be higher. So I have come to distribute the UDHR both in English and Japanese during the first week of the four-week unit.

In order to build a "baseline" of knowledge and impressions, I ask students to complete the sentence, "When I think of Human Rights I think of_____" with just a word or a few words. A number of students draw a blank. But there are far fewer now than in previous years. The shared knowledge gives us a starting place building on their previous knowledge.

The work of studying the articles and finding simplified vocabulary to describe each of the articles is divided among students working in pairs or small groups. Each group is responsible for teaching one or two of the articles to all the others. Examples and violations of the various rights are provided from local and international current events in another exercise. The students begin right away to connect the principles in each of the articles to given examples and to identify violations through discussing some of the materials with each other and through doing some as individually assigned homework. An attempt is made to balance the sources of information such that the students realize that although no country has a perfect human rights record, each country is working on it and has some strengths to share as well as areas which call for improvement. During the course of study the students are presented samples of reports on various human rights issues as models for their own reports.

The students are then asked to select a particular right they would like to study in detail. They are asked to study the issues and identify one or more particular problem related to them. They must seek out facts, identify principles and rights or freedoms that need to be applied. They are then asked to make some suggestions for bringing about solutions to the problems.

Most students work in small teams on a joint presentation. Some prefer to work alone. All are asked to make some sort of visual aid to support their oral presentation. It may be in the form of a poster, or a fact sheet, or some form of dramatization of the problem. Some students choose to give the report in an interview format, others as panel discussions, dramas, or speeches. As they prepare they are offered as much support as they need to edit grammar or select appropriate expressions. They are given coaching on oral presentation skills. However, most of the work is done on their own in or outside of class.

The final day of the unit, the students present their own research on human rights topics of interest to them at "The Human Rights Show". They are evaluated on their oral presentation skills in English as well as the content of their presentation. Following the presentation, they are given a vocabulary matching quiz in order to determine how well they have retained the key words and phrases and how well they match examples to the related principles.

The purpose of conveying the methodology and content of the human rights unit in this second year English conversation course is in response to the widespread call for sharing of materials and experiences in human rights education in schools. For a more complete account of the course, its rationale and content, refer to Higgins, 1994 (18), and 2000 (19). In response to the call for more thorough research and evaluation of programs for human rights education, a beginning was made with the following informal survey.

A Survey on Human Rights Education among Yamaguchi Prefectural Students

Prior to making this survey, the issue of the place of human rights education in the university curriculum had been raised informally in discussions among faculty members at Yamaguchi Prefectural University. Questions raised about whether or at what point students study about human rights in their educational experience revealed various ideas on the topic. Some of the faculty said they believe that all students are taught about human rights thoroughly in junior or senior high school classes. Other faculty members doubted that the topic was introduced at all until the university level. When asked where in the university curriculum an introduction to the declaration of Human Rights was made, no definitive answers were given. It is likely to be embedded in the International Cultures courses, but the information is unclear.

In order to get a more detailed understanding of the students' knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one hundred (100) second-year students attending Yamaguchi Prefectural University (Faculty of International Studies, Social Welfare and Environmental Sciences Departments) were given a survey (written both in Japanese and English) about their knowledge of it during the first term prior to a four-week unit on the United Nations and Human Rights to be held in their English Conversation classes during the second term. The survey focussed on whether and to what extent they had learned about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its origin, its spread, and which rights they felt were well-protected as well as which rights they felt needed more attention, and how convinced they were of their own depth of understanding of the human rights declaration.

The survey showed that 60% of the students had heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but had not seen it or read it themselves. Thirty-three percent had learned about it previously, including 3 who had studied it in elementary school, 21 who mentioned learning about it in junior high school and 19 in high school. These figures, of course, include a few students who had been fortunate enough to have been introduced to human rights at all levels of their education. Seven reported that they had already studied about it in university. Only six students reported that they had read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in detail, while seven students reported that they had never heard of it.

Of those 6 students (6% of the respondents) who reported that they had read it in detail, four said they read it in high school, and two in junior high school. However, none of these students were able to answer all three factual questions accurately. The three fact questions included, "What is the source of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?" Eighty-two percent of all students correctly identified that it was the United Nations. Four percent thought it came from the United States government, one thought it came from the European Union, one said it came from a non-governmental organization, one from international scholars, one from religion, and two did not answer.

The second question asked, "When was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights written and introduced?" Fifty-six percent of the students correctly answered "1948." However, 5% responded that it was written in 1776, 12% responded that it was written in 1863, and 17% answered that it was written and introduced in 1984.

The third fact question concerned the number of member nations of the United Nations who have approved of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Only fourteen of the 100 students were able to correctly answer that 100% of the member nations of the UN have signed their

approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Fifty-four thought 75% approved, 13 thought 50% approved and five of them thought that only 25% of the countries approved.

The students were then asked to note three human rights or freedoms which were well respected and three which they felt there was need of more effort to achieve in Japan (or their own country in the case of foreign students). (A list of basic rights taken from the human rights declaration was provided.) The most agreed-upon examples of "well-respected" rights included the right to equal treatment before the law (noted by 77%), second was the right to life, liberty and security of person (51%), third, the right to education (46%), followed by the freedom of religion (27%), and freedom to marry (15%). Regarding the rights that need more attention, 37% of the students mentioned the right to equal pay for equal work. Twenty percent mentioned the right to fair employment conditions, and 15% of the students mentioned other rights such as the right to privacy, right to marry, right to rest and leisure, and right to an adequate standard of living as needing more attention.

Finally, the students were asked to evaluate how well they felt that they understood human rights and the responsibilities that each person has to protect them. Twenty-two percent of the students said they felt they understood pretty well, while 18% answered that they were not sure. Half of the students stated that they did not understand well, and another 8% said "not at all". Two did not answer, and no one said that they understood very well.

A brief follow-up survey of the same classes was made after the unit on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was completed. One hundred ten students were present on the day of the follow-up test and the survey. This time, 39 students reported that they had studied about human rights in junior high (5), high school (32), or university (2). But 70 students (64%) stated that they had not studied it before. When asked whether they felt the unit was useful to them, overall, 94.5% of the students reported positively. Twenty-four (22%) said they thought the lessons were "very useful". Fifty-five students (50%) reported that the lessons were "fairly useful". Twenty-five (23%) said they were "somewhat useful". Only four students reported that they were not so useful, one felt the lessons were "useless" and one did not answer. Of the Faculty of International Studies students, 100% of them reported that the lessons were useful. Of the Environmental Science students, 92.7% reported that the lessons were useful, while 92.3% of the Social Welfare students rated the lessons as useful.

Class/Evaluation of unit content:	very useful	fairly useful	somewhat useful	not so useful	useless
International (30)	9(30%)	17(57%)	4(13%)	0	0
Environmental Science (41)	7(17%)	19(46%)	12(29%)	2(5%)	1(2%)
Social Welfare (39)	8(21%)	19(49%)	9(23%)	2(5%)	1(3%)
TOTAL (110)	24(22%)	55(50%)	25(23%)	4(4%)	2(2%)

Over the past ten years that the unit on human rights has been included in the "global issues" English conversation course for second-year students, the students have often mentioned that it was the "most useful" or "most interesting" part of the course for them when they are asked to

write a final course evaluation. But no more formal follow-up has been done up to this point of the long-term impact.

In terms of the knowledge displayed, this term 90% of students had scores of over 80% on the vocabulary and concept matching tests. Many achieved the maximum 100%, while the lowest score on the test was 50%. All students were judged to have given satisfactory oral presentations that were informative and successfully displayed their abilities to convey facts, principles, critical ideas and opinions in English.

Discussion and Conclusion

The old adage that everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it, seems at times to apply to the challenge of human rights. Yet the United Nations, through its official agencies such as UNHCHR and UNESCO, has been urging the nations of the world to do something about it. The responsibilities of educators, particularly university educators, are paramount. Yet one of the very rights dear to universities —"academic freedom"— creates a bit of a hazy environment when it comes to meeting our responsibilities to provide students with an adequate foundation in the principles and mechanisms of human rights. We may agree that it should be done, and somebody ought to do it. However, there is as yet no clear agreement on where in the curriculum human rights education should be assigned. Some think that the primary and secondary schools are doing it, so there is no need for teaching the fundamentals at the university level. Yet, as is clear from the data, very few students have received what they, themselves, consider an adequate education on the topic. Where it is mentioned in the school curriculum, or embedded in course content, teachers often assume that a fundamental knowledge of human rights, their source and content, is understood by the students. This assumption, according to the data attained in this survey, is most often incorrect.

Considering the connection between respect for human rights and the emergence and development of a more just and peaceful world it would be well for university faculty to address the issues of human rights education in a more systematic way. This is not to suggest that we simply add another required course —"Human Rights 101"— although that is one possibility. Those responsible for collecting and disseminating data and recommendations for the UN Decade on Human Rights Education suggest that it is actually preferable to include references to human rights in many courses such as courses on cultures, geography, ethics in social welfare, and so on. Extra curricular activities also are a possible way to promote human rights understanding. But somewhere, for every student, there must be an introduction of the knowledge of the basic human rights instruments in their global context including the ways in which their influence is being made as changes emerge in our global and local social systems. Perhaps the language course, particularly English, is one appropriate niche for such introductory foundations. Certainly, the introduction of language concepts, and the practice of communication, and dialogue fits quite naturally into English communication courses at the college level. But the mandate of where in the curriculum it will appear may require a conscious decision of a duly appointed committee or the faculty at large. Although general course subject areas are set by curriculum committees, the actual content depends on each instructor. The more systematically our curriculum and courses work together, the more they support each other in content and skill development, the more effective they will be in attaining the goals we set for our graduates.

The goal of education in Japan as expressed by the Ministry of Education is to enable students to become "capable of contributing to a peaceful international society." (20) The English language web site of Yamaguchi Prefectural University publicizes our goal "to send our students out into the society with the ability to judge and act upon the problems faced in today's international society." (21) In order to connect these goals strongly to the goals of UNESCO to create a culture of peace, and to empower the students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they will need to work side by side with the citizens of all nations, we would do well to adopt more consciously the goals of the UN Decade of Human Rights Education within our curricular and extra-curricular activities, to introduce, strengthen, share, monitor and evaluate our endeavors related to human rights education.

(Special thanks to Steven Gardner, part-time instructor, who has taught the "global issues" English course to three classes each year, for his participation and help in the research project.)

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