

School based human rights education: Case studies in Hong Kong secondary schools

Yan Wing LEUNG, Timothy Wai Wa YUEN and Yiu Kwong CHONG

(ywleung@ied.edu.hk)

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Abstract

In an era of rapid globalization, space and time are seriously compressed. People from different nations, cultures, religions, and other backgrounds have become much more interconnected and interdependent. Since people are rapidly intermingling, what values should be considered as standards and norms in regulating this situation, so that people of different backgrounds can relate peacefully to each other with mutual respect? United Nations (UN) human rights standards could be considered as sets of shared global norms and values in a search for global ethics. As a consequence, the UN has been eager to promote human rights education (HRE), aiming at the cultivation of a human rights culture. This paper reports on two case studies of school based curriculum development of HRE in two Hong Kong secondary schools. We also recommend some research directions important for the implementation of HRE in schools. It is hoped the paper can provide some insight into the development of quality HRE in schools.

Keywords: Human rights education, law related education, civic education, global ethics, school based curriculum project

Introduction

In an era of rapid globalization, space and time are seriously compressed. People from different nations, cultures, religions, and other backgrounds are becoming much more interconnected and interdependent. Gradually, the idea of a multi-level citizen - global, national, regional and local - is replacing the concept that an individual is simply a member of a national community. In this complex contemporary context, what values need to be considered as standards and norms in regulating this situation, so that people of different backgrounds can relate peacefully to each other with mutual respect? The United Nations (UN) human rights standards are generally considered to be the prototype of a set of shared global norms and values by those in search of global ethics (Osler & Starkey, 1996). This paper first reviews the promotion of HRE at the UN level,

followed by a description of the development of HRE in Hong Kong to set a context. Then it reports on case studies of school based HRE curriculum development in two Hong Kong secondary schools. Lastly, it recommends some research directions important for the implementation of HRE in schools.

Human rights and human rights education

Literally, human rights refer to the universal and indivisible rights an individual has simply by being human, regardless of nation, race, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, age and any other status. The idea of human rights, as currently formulated, is a recent initiative dating from the 1940s. The founding text of modern human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), are known collectively as the International Bill of Human Rights and encompass a wide range of personal, legal, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, which are all equally important and integrated parts of human rights. However, the concept of the universality and indivisibility of human rights has always been challenged by arguments for the principle of particularity, which holds that human rights should be determined by the particular cultural, historical, social and political contexts, for example Asian values. Nevertheless, regardless of such arguments, the Vienna Declaration and Program for Action of the UN in 1993 re-confirmed the idea of universality and indivisibility.

Recognizing the importance of education in the implementation of human rights and in order to combat different forms of discrimination, racism, violence, abuse of human rights, and to promote peaceful co-existence, equality, and justice, the UN actively promotes HRE, aimed at the cultivation of a universal culture that respects and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms through various human rights documents. The UN declared a Decade for Human Rights (UNDHR 1995-2004) in 1994 and endorsed the World Program for Human Rights Education – Plan of Action for the First Phase (2005-09) (WPHRE) to continue with the unfinished tasks of UNDHR in 2005. The Second Phase commenced in January 2010 and will continue until December 2014. However, despite these efforts, the success of the promotion of HRE by UN has been questioned. While Ramire, Suarez, and Meyer (2007) argue that discourse about HRE has spread rapidly at the world level in recent decades, Print et al. (2008) argued that UNDHR and WPHRE have only been marginally successful, due mainly to the inherent weakness of the organization as well as the UN's failure to engage member states in institutionalising HRE in school systems to secure its importance. Civic education in general, including HRE, is often given 'low status', primarily because it is not valued in the job market. HRE remains a minor activity in schools in most countries

and is usually infused into existing subjects. This infusion mode of curriculum arrangement demands that teachers have an in-depth understanding of human rights for successful teaching. However, teachers with in depth understanding are rare (Gerber, 2008; Osaka, 1998; Pombejr, 1998).

Human rights education in Hong Kong

As a cosmopolitan city, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has committed to fifteen international conventions on human rights and passed associated local legislation, such as the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap. 383) and various other anti-discrimination Ordinances. Educating Hong Kong citizens to understand the conventions and the local legislation is essential for their implementation. Moreover, there is a need for Hong Kong to be vigilant about discrimination relating to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and the abuse of powers of law enforcement agencies because of a weak human rights culture caused by decades of neglect of HRE.

The development of civic education in Hong Kong has taken place in four stages chronologically (Leung, 2008). HRE was formally introduced into the school curriculum in stage two of this development, known as '*1984-1997: The Politicization of the Intended Curriculum*', the period just before the return of HK's sovereignty to the PRC in 1996. However, HRE was excluded from the mainstream school curriculum again in stage three, known as '*1997 Onwards: Re-depoliticization of Civic Education and Official Affirmation of Nationalistic Education*', the period immediately after the return of sovereignty to PRC (Leung, 2007, 2008). The current education reform, the fourth stage, '*2009 onward: Civic education through Liberal Studies*', began in September, 2009. In this stage, a new compulsory subject *Liberal Studies* (LS), into which civic education and HRE can be integrated, was introduced to senior secondary students. However, for integration to be successful, it is necessary to have teachers who are very knowledgeable in human rights. This is still rare. Moreover, the HRE embedded in LS is a form of 'action-poor HRE', which may not be sufficient to cultivate a universal human rights culture (Leung, 2008). Regardless of what was proposed in policy documents, the implementation of HRE in schools remains poor (Fok, 2001). To explore implementation issues, and with the aim of suggesting possible improvements to HRE in HK, a case study of HRE in two secondary schools under a law related education (LRE) project is presented.

Human rights education in a law related education project

The meanings and models of HRE

Definitions of HRE are very diverse in the literature and there are many types of education similar to HRE, such as peace education, multicultural education, law

related education and watered-down versions of HRE (Gerber, 2008; Pitsula, 2008; Tibbitts, 2002). Gerber (2008) proposed three essential criteria for HRE. First, HRE must promote respect for all human rights according to universal and indivisible international standards and must be empowering. Second, it must promote respect for others, be they people of similar or different cultures and act as an antidote to racism, intolerance and discrimination of all forms. Lastly, HRE must encourage values relating to peace, tolerance, equality, and justice. Tibbitts (2002) emphasized the necessity for the inclusion of international and local human rights laws as standards and international and local mechanisms for actions. Osler (2008) focused on governmental accountability as a distinct feature. All these emphases are important to ensure a good quality HRE program. Unfortunately, the presence of watered-down versions may give the impression that HRE has been adequately addressed, when in fact it has not (Pitsula, 2008). The discussion of HRE in Hong Kong by Fok (2001) is an example. In this paper, human rights education is defined as education that helps to shape a culture of respecting and protecting human rights, according to international human rights standards. That is, to cultivate citizens who not only live in accordance with the principles of human rights but also are willing to take actions to protect their own and other citizens' human rights when those rights are being violated (Leung & Lau, 1999; Magendzo, 2005; Nazzari, McAdams, & Roy 2005).

Tibbitts (2002) proposes three models of HRE, 1) 'values and awareness model', 2) 'accountability model', and 3) 'transformational model'. The 'values and awareness model' applies to schools or the general public and is the model most relevant to this project. The 'accountability model' targets people who are already involved in working towards guaranteeing human rights through their professions, such as lawyers, civil servants, journalists, social workers working with vulnerable groups, etc. The 'transformational model' aims at training activists for change, especially vulnerable groups and those who have experienced HR abuse.

Values and awareness mode

This model is the type adopted mainly by schools and is understood to some extent by the general public. It aims at raising awareness. As school based HRE, it is usually integrated into existing subjects or disciplines, e.g. civic education, law related education, and social studies. It mainly focuses on human rights values and knowledge, e.g. history, documents, mechanisms, and issues. It also emphasizes cognitive and communication skills. Critical thinking skills are sometimes included but seldom go as far as attempting to develop a critical human rights consciousness. There is little concern for action skills and action for change. Pedagogically, either passive 'chalk and talk' or participatory learning may be adopted. But even among teachers who use active pedagogies, their

focus is usually on arousing interest, not on cultivating action oriented and competent activists. Fostering leadership and personal empowerment are not common. However, unless a program is well planned, extends beyond the classroom and beyond standard school hours, and active pedagogies are adopted, a truly quality outcome remains in doubt.

The LRE project

The LRE project discussed here is a pilot, exploratory research and development (R and D) project of school based civic education for human rights and rule of law, launched for the first time by the Centre for Citizenship Education, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, for the period September 2006 to December 2007. The project team adopted the view that rule of law is a part of civil rights in the UDHR and is a legalistic measure to protect human rights. One of the objectives of the Plan of Action (2005-2007) of the World Program for Human Rights Education is to enable all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law. Therefore, LRE is considered part of HRE in a broad sense and consequently, since HRE is a sensitive issue in some Hong Kong schools, the name LRE was used for the project. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the teachers involved understood that this was a HRE project using the name of LRE. The project team was composed of three academic colleagues with expertise in civic education, one academic colleague with a law and human rights background, and one research assistant. The purpose of the project was to foster the knowledge, skills, and values which are essential for students to function effectively in a pluralistic, democratic society based on human rights and the rule of law.

Being an R and D project, it had both a developmental and a research component. The developmental component included teacher training in both subject content and pedagogies, providing feedback to the teachers in their teaching preparation and post-lesson observations. The research component involved an evaluative study of the project. The authors were both the developers and the researchers. This paper focuses on the research component. The research questions were as follows:

1. Why did the teachers want to implement HRE in their schools?
2. What problems did the teachers encounter and how were they addressed?
3. What was the impact of the project on student attitudes towards and understanding of human rights and the rule of law?

Research design

Sampling

Three secondary schools were chosen through purposive sampling, since very few schools are interested in HRE in HK. An active local NGO (Non-governmental organization) in civic and human rights education directed the research team to the schools, having teachers who were interested and active in HRE. However, only two schools, A and B, are discussed here since the third only participated for a very short period of time and little data were collected. Both schools incorporated the project into their secondary 2 (students aged about 14) Integrated Humanity (IH) subject.

School A

School A was a co-educational (with both male and female students), subsidized, secondary school. Human rights and the rule of law were two core elements in the IH curriculum. Each core element lasted for approximately a month, with 3 lessons per week, while each lesson lasted for 55 minutes. The key concepts taught included the meaning, nature and protection of human rights, equal opportunities, the nature of law, functions of law, separation of powers, structure of the Hong Kong judicial system and the relation between human rights and law. Pedagogies adopted include chalk and talk, issue based approaches, group discussion, and experiential learning.

Two secondary 2 IH teachers, Mary¹ and Susan, voluntarily participated in the project due to their interest in HRE. All the students in the five classes of secondary 2 students (aged 13 to 15), a total of hundred and ninety five students, participated in the survey and three classes of students participated in focus group interviews and class observations. Six students, showing different levels of interest in the project, from each class were interviewed so as to cover a wide range of students.

School B

School B was also a co-educational, subsidized, secondary school. Similar to school A, human rights and the rule of law were two core elements in the IH curriculum. There were eleven double-lessons, with each single lesson lasting for thirty-five minutes. Similar concepts to school A were taught, with the addition of children's rights. Similar pedagogies were also adopted.

Four teachers who taught secondary 2 IH participated in the project: Paul, Ian, Ryan, and Peter. All students in the five classes of secondary 2 students, a total of one hundred and ninety five, participated in the surveys. Two classes, one of higher and one of lower academic performance, also participated in class observations and focus group interviews. Seven to eight students from each of the two classes were selected for the interviews. To enhance validity, students with different levels of interest in the project from each class were interviewed.

Collection of data

Several methods were used for triangulation. The literature review and the research questions played a role in the researchers' design of the questionnaire, the interview guidelines and observation checklist.

Interviews and class observations

In addition to documenting the general backgrounds of the teachers, such as demographics and level of education, they were interviewed individually before and after the project to explore implementation issues and impacts, according to the interview guidelines (Appendix 1). Three and two student focus group interviews were conducted after the completion of the project for schools A and B, respectively, to assess the impact on them, according to the students' interview guidelines (Appendix 2). Class observations were also conducted to: a) evaluate the effectiveness of teaching; b) identify the problems in teaching and ways of addressing the issues; and c) assess the impacts of the teaching on the students, according to the observation checklist (Appendix 3). Field notes were taken. In addition, the teachers were also interviewed and given feedback regarding their teaching content and pedagogies according to the observation checklist, after each class observation. A total of seven and six after-class teacher interviews were conducted for schools A and B as well. All interviews were conducted in the dialect of the participants, taped, and transcribed verbatim.

Semi-structured interview guides were used for interviews. The interview guides for teachers focused on the purpose of HRE, implementation needs, difficulties encountered, their understandings of and attitude towards human rights and rule of law, their perceived impacts on students and their self-reflection. The guide for students contained questions regarding the impact of the lessons on their understanding and attitude. The interviewees were probed for further information in the process.

Survey

Pre- and post-project questionnaire surveys were conducted to assess the impact on students. Questionnaires were distributed during class time, at the beginning and the end of the project. The number of valid questionnaires collected was 195 for both schools. The questionnaire was composed of a mix of 4-point Likert scale items (strongly agree, 1 point; agree, 2 points; disagree, 3 points; strongly disagree, 4 points), open-ended questions and multiple choice questions. Four themes were included in the questionnaire for both schools: 1) 'attitude towards human rights', 2) 'knowledge of human rights', 3) 'attitude towards rule of law', and 4) 'knowledge of rule of law'. Questions about children's rights were for school B only. The themes were chosen because one of the aims of the project,

agreed upon by teachers and researchers, was to evaluate the impact of the project on student knowledge of, and attitudes towards, human rights and the rule of law as reflected in the questionnaires."

Data analysis

The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative data. Because of the short project time span, both types of data were analysed at the same time. For quantitative data, SPSS version 17 was used to generate descriptive and inferential statistical results.

In analyzing the qualitative data, the researchers adopted a method that shared some of the attributes Glaser and Strauss (1967) described as 'constant comparative method'. Each interview transcript was compared with another transcript, one incident with another incident, one category with another so as to look for emerging patterns. The aim of the researchers was to generate theories rather than to validate certain hypotheses. Though peer debriefing was not used in the analysis, the researchers shared the qualitative data they collected and made decisions together on such matters as coding, categories, and data saturation, etc. This helped to avoid excessive subjectivity in inference.

The qualitative data were used to explain/elaborate the points made in this article. On the other hand, the quantitative data helped to augment and triangulate the researchers' claim regarding the impacts of HRE on student attitudes.

Findings and discussion

In the following discussion, we shall address the following key research questions:

- What motivated the teachers to implement HRE in their schools?
- What problems did the teachers encounter and how were they addressed?
- What was the impact of the project on student attitudes towards, and understanding of, human rights and rule of law?

Aims of School Based HRE

It seems that the most important aim revealed by the teachers was to enhance the civic awareness, knowledge, attitudes and competence of the students. Teacher Paul said:

Can the project enhance the students' view and their awareness of social issues? If only they could gain such a perspective, we have achieved what we want.

Teacher Ian voiced a similar desire:

I wish them to be more open-minded and have an enhanced awareness of society.

Teacher Susan emphasized the development of a particular mindset and application:

I wish that their mindset can become liberal and apply the relevant knowledge to their daily living.

Teacher Mary argued for critical citizens:

There is no awareness of human rights and plenty of rules in the school disciplinary system, making students submissive. I wish the Program could make them liberal, rational and critical, helping them to understand their own rights and to respect other people's rights.

All these aims fit well with Tibbitts's Values and Awareness model (2002) of raising students' awareness. Evidence showing critical awareness of human rights issues was also identified, though limited.

Difficulties encountered

The most commonly encountered difficulties were insufficient knowledge among teachers, difficulties in maintaining student interest, difficulties in creating tailor-made school based curriculum, difficulties in assessment, and concerns about the misuse of human rights concepts.

Insufficient knowledge of the teachers

Very few teachers were trained in human rights and law. Those who had a strong background in the social or political sciences found self study or attending short in-service training courses helpful for understanding basic concepts but not helpful for understanding legalistic aspects. They expressed that they could not give elaborate, concrete and prompt responses when questioned, that they often had to rely heavily on common sense in dealing with legalistic elements, and admitted they may even have conveyed wrong messages occasionally. All these comments reflected feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

I am not trained in related disciplines and have little understanding of human rights and rule of law. So whenever I was asked difficult questions by students, I could not reply adequately. I feel lacking in

confidence. I wish to understand, besides the need to obey the law, the essential aspects of the rule of law (Susan).

I can only reply based on common sense and if a concrete legal view is needed, I just cannot handle it. (Mary)

We do not have the necessary training and I feel insufficient as we have to start from scratch. (Paul)

In a student focus group interview, Students D and E from school B identified similar problems.

The teacher asked us to discuss and write down our views on the board but she did not comment. Though the points on the board were confusing, we were asked to copy them. I mentioned that one of the points was illogical. The teacher responded 'You are right. This point is wrong.' I wonder how much she understood what was written on the board. It seems that she was unaware there was a mistake.

Perhaps the teacher was attempting to remain neutral, treating all views as equally valid. But her insufficient knowledge might have weakened her judgment regarding the validity of the views expressed. During class observation, the project team also identified mistakes in subject content made by teachers in both schools. Although this phenomenon may not be specific to HRE, it is most probably a key difficulty.

Difficulties maintaining student interest

According to Teacher Ryan, it is not difficult to motivate students when it comes to HRE, however it is difficult to sustain their interest.

I think they are interested but their interest fades as the difficulty level of the topic increases.

Similarly Teachers Paul and Ian commented:

If the ideas are simple and easily understood, they are interested. But whenever we touched on something abstract and conceptual, they felt bored and lost attention.

Student F from school A confirmed what the teachers had expressed:

I feel very bored as there is so much information to memorize, such as the UDHR.

The teachers of school B identified two factors contributing to loss of interest: when the information becomes technical or legalistic and when the classroom

atmosphere becomes very teacher centered. Students G and J from school A stated:

We feel more interested if we can discuss or debate issues. But because there is little time, the teacher just keeps on talking, making us feel very bored. After all, the issues are controversial and we want to express our views.

Their classmate H supported their views by saying that when they discuss specific situations such as whether citizens should be allowed to ride without a helmet when driving a motorcycle - if the drivers are already wearing a religious scarf - they get interested, can understand the concept better, and memorize the content more effectively. However, though an issues-based approach is useful in creating and sustaining interest for some students, Student G had reservations:

I am not uninterested. But we do not have sufficient time for discussion and could not come to any consensus at the end of every lesson. There is never follow up in the next lesson. Hence, it seems that we have learned little concretely. Perhaps, teachers should teach directly instead of allowing discussion, which usually produces confusing messages and becomes a waste of time.

These opinions illustrate the problem of adopting issues-based teaching for difficult issues and concepts for students with a weak academic background, given time constraints. Discussion may become superficial and confusing. Since such students are looking for concrete answers, they may feel frustrated with the discussion. Hence, teachers are forced to revert to chalk and talk, resulting in a boring classroom atmosphere.

Besides the issue-based approach, experiential learning, such as visiting a court and field work, is useful for creating more interesting and effective learning but much preparation and resources are needed. Teacher Susan explained:

The students are happy when the judge talks with them. Their perception of judges has changed - the judges are humanized. They ask questions about the court. They feel much closer to the law. However, it drains resources.

To retain student interest, the data certainly indicated that it is necessary to minimize memorization of technical and legalistic content, especially for junior level students (ages 12 to 15). Instead, cases or issues relevant to their daily experience and experiential learning should be adopted to stimulate debate and discussion, to arouse and sustain their interest. All these pedagogical necessities for successful implementation echo what Tibbitts (2002) has argued, namely well planned programs with extended school hours and active pedagogies.

Difficulties in tailor- made school based curriculum associated with the project

The teachers participating in the study tailor made their school HRE curriculum by preparing lesson plans and educational activities according to the needs of the students and their own expertise. The most commonly echoed difficulty was lack of time, along with having insufficient knowledge. Much time was needed for preparation. As it is a low status subject, and most teachers also taught several other subjects, they could not pay much attention to the teaching of IH.

In preparing lessons, another common difficulty was choosing real life issues for illustrating concepts which were not too complicated for students. Sometimes, real life issues involved complex events and a variety of people. It could be that it simply took too much time to clarify details. On the other hand, when simplified versions of cases were used, teachers were challenged to illustrate the concepts adequately. A wish to overcome such a difficulty was expressed by Teacher Ryan:

The most concrete help that the project could offer is to provide us with issues at a level that students could understand and help us to link to the concepts.

Another difficulty identified by students was that some issues were often rife with concepts and ideas that had not yet been taught. Hence, students often lacked sufficient foundation to comprehend them. Both students I and F commented that:

When we learn the UDHR, we just focus on a few items. Then we move on to discuss discrimination. I wonder whether we truly understand the issue of discrimination adequately given our limited understanding of UDHR.

It seems that many difficulties center around effective use of an issue-based approach. Problem areas relating to in-depth learning of concepts focusing on complicated issues during a limited time to students with insufficient background. The problem is further exacerbated by insufficient training of teachers, especially regarding the legalistic domain.

Difficulties in assessment

In the interviews, teachers talked a great deal about teaching but did not have much to say about assessment. Their current practice involved the use of traditional pen and paper assessments, but a commonly shared concern was how to evaluate students more appropriately:

In teaching human rights and the rule of law, we focus on the teaching process. How should we evaluate them? Should we use traditional

means or a more argumentative type of evaluation, especially for the younger students? (Susan)

It seems that the teachers were not satisfied with their current practice of assessment for HRE but were not sure what the alternatives were.

Concern about the misuse of human rights concepts

Teachers expressed concern that students, especially younger students, after learning about human rights, might abuse human rights concepts for other purposes.

I am afraid that the students will go to two extremes. When they do not truly understand human rights, they remain ignorant and easily manipulated. But when they learn about human rights, they, in the name of protecting human rights, will keep on pushing selfish concerns – a focus on their own rights but in a distorted way. This has to be balanced. They must know what human rights are and what the limits are. (Ian)

Another teacher stated:

We are facing the dilemma that some school rules might be unreasonable, but at the same time we have to teach them to obey the rules. If they are older, we can teach them to reason and they are mature enough to understand things in a balanced way. But for the younger ones, they can become angry young people since they are not sufficiently mature to understand that there are limits. I suggest that we should avoid using issues in our teaching that are sensitive and too close to their own lives. Instead we should choose more remote issues, such as, human rights issues in foreign places so that students will not become so agitated. (Ryan)

In sum, the teachers seemed to face dilemmas. On one hand, they knew it was necessary to teach human rights but, on the other hand, they were concerned that students might employ human rights arguments for their own interests, for example, to protest school rules.

Impacts on students' attitude towards human rights and rule of law

Quantitative evidence

As discussed, the questionnaire was a mix of 4-point Likert scale questions, open-ended questions and multiple choice questions. To measure the impact of the project on student attitudes towards human rights and the rule of law,

independent sample T-tests (two-tailed) were used to compare pre-project and post-project mean scores of the Likert scale questions. Table 1 gives the results of some of the Likert scale questions, which can be used to illustrate impact.

Table 1 reveals that the students in schools A and B demonstrated a significant change between pre- and post-project means regarding several items, including items 9, 12, 14.² In addition, students in school A also demonstrated significant differences regarding items 11, 5, 26, 30,³ while those in school B regarding items 6, 10, 13, 15.⁴ These findings imply that, in general, students became more respectful towards human rights and the rule of law after the project. All students responded more favorably towards the right to education (9), basic standard of living (12) and freedom of expression (14). For school B, after the project, there was also a significant increase in support for freedom of thought, as reflected by support for “everyone has the freedom to change his own faith and belief” (15). In addition, more students opposed the view that “the government has the power to detain people with different political views for the sake of social order” (13). Moreover, more students disagreed that promoting human rights and human rights education would damage teachers’ prestige (6). In school A, it seemed that the students were more ‘radical’. In addition to supporting the freedom of speech of minorities (5), they showed increased acceptance of ‘civil disobedience’. There was also a significant increase in students agreeing with the views that “it is a positive act when people demonstrate peacefully against an unjust law.(26)” and “it has a positive impact when people refuse to abide by a law which infringes on human rights” (30). The reason for this difference between schools A and B is worthy of future research.

Qualitative evidence

Some qualitative data also revealed positive impacts. Some students expressed that they had started to develop concerns for human rights issues:

When I am having dinner with my family and hear about human rights abuses on TV, I will talk with them about the human rights we learned about in class. (Student M, School A)

Now we are learning about human rights and the rule of law. I have become more alert to whether human rights abuses are taking place (Student B, School B).

One student voiced strong feelings about the situation in China. He argued that preventing citizens from lodging petitions in Beijing goes against their human rights.

If people go to Beijing to appeal against their unjust treatment, they are always stopped by the police. Is this an infringement of their human rights? (Student K, School A)

Discrimination is another issue that concerns them:

I am impressed by the discussion about discrimination, knowing that some people are discriminated against because they belong to a minority. I agree with legislation that protects them against discrimination so that they can live with others in society (Student N, School A).

After learning about discrimination, I became more aware about the lack of facilities that help disabled people in public places. (Student M, School A)

A few students expressed concerns about human rights in school.

Our school prohibits students from bringing religious symbols to school. This goes against our freedom of religion (Student A, School A).

Sometimes we find that school rules are unreasonable and go against our human rights, e.g. we must produce letters from parents before we can bring cell phones (Student C, School B).

Teacher Paul pointed out that student awareness of human rights had increased:

They have become more sensitive to human rights issues. A student discussed with me that there are places in school without an elevator. Is this discrimination against people with a disability? He is able to relate what had learned to a real life situation.

It is fair to say that there was evidence of a positive impact on student attitudes towards human rights and the rule of law. However, some teachers expressed reservations. Teacher Mary commented:

When faced with the conflict between the public interest and private rights, they still tended to side with the public interest more, saying that we have no choice. What I worry about is that they will give up too quickly and not defend their own rights. This is exactly how we get 'submissive citizens'.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that the project had a positive impact on the students, raising their awareness about the rule of law and human rights, though it remains uncertain how effective the impact was and for how long it can be sustained. Perhaps future research can provide insight into this matter.

Conclusion

Since the project relates to a case study of two schools, using purposive sampling, the findings are not intended to be generalized. The absence of a control group fails to rule out the possibility that the change in students is due to reasons other than the project intervention. However, some of the findings do shed light on issues related to HRE.

The findings in our two schools echo what Print et al. (2008) have argued that HRE programs in schools tend to be marginal and not properly institutionalized. Admittedly, the HRE Programs in the two schools are closest to the Values and Awareness Model (Tibbitts, 2002) aiming at enhancing student awareness of human rights, but the time made available for the program is short and very content based, although there is some emphasis on the cultivation of values and thinking skills, even critical thinking. However, the cultivation of critical thinking is limited to the application of human rights concepts to the analysis of human rights issues. This is far from developing a critical human rights consciousness, in particular the awareness of an individual's role in the protection and promotion of human rights. Moreover, action skills are neglected. Though issues based pedagogy, which is useful in raising human rights awareness, is adopted, chalk and talk remains the dominant strategy. Experiential learning is used for enhancing interest but not for action. The extended hours suggested have not been adopted. However, even given these limitations, evidence of a positive impact was identified. Student awareness and an understanding of human rights and rule of law were strengthened, though in depth understanding was not explicitly evident. How the programs can be improved so that the impact on students can be sustained and strengthened is a key question for further research.

Several concrete problems hindering the development of HRE have been identified here. A key one is the subject knowledge of teachers. Strengthening teacher education through both pre-service and in-service programs is absolutely essential. The use of community and professional resources needs to be explored, such as collaboration with the legal profession through law societies or school alumni with a legal background. The study also reveals that since most teachers have insufficient knowledge, they rely heavily on textbooks. Therefore, improving the quality of textbooks is another issue worthy of further research.

Both issue based learning and experiential learning have been shown to be effective in arousing student interest. However, identifying issues with a suitable amount of complexity to match the maturity of students begs further research. This is also the case with respect to the in-depth teaching of issues, rather than simply glancing at them briefly. The effective use of critical reflection

in the consolidation of learning from experience is another important issue to be examined more closely.

Perhaps teacher concern about the misuse of human rights by students, after exposure to HRE, is the most significant barrier. This anxiety goes beyond insufficient or mis-understanding of human rights concepts to a deep rooted attachment to the traditional understanding of power relationships in schools. The fear is that student recognition of their human rights may lead to a challenge of the hierarchical power relationship in schools, where teacher authority may be threatened, resulting in a sense of insecurity. Much more work is needed to overcome this most important obstacle to the cultivation of a human rights school ethos.

The road to HRE is long and winding. This small scale project, at least, has identified some evidence of a positive impact and some important research areas that may be useful in formulating a future research agenda for the improvement of HRE in schools for the cultivation of a human rights culture.

Endnotes:

1. Pseudonyms.
2. The t and P values for items 9, 12 and 14 are: 9 ($t(326)=2.061$, $P=.040$), 12 ($t(336)=2.729$, $P=.007$), 14 ($t(312)=-2.062$, $P=.040$).
3. The t and P values for items 11, 5, 26 and 30 are: 11 ($t(338)=2.768$, $P=.006$), 5 ($t(224)=4.408$, $P=.000$), 26 ($t(300)=-2.921$, $P=.004$), 30 ($t(243)=2.314$, $P=.0021$),
4. The t and P values for items 6, 10, 13 and 15 are: 6 ($t(241)=-4.727$, $P=.000$), 10 ($t(338)=2.989$, $P=.003$), 13 ($t(318)=-2.282$, $P=.023$), 15 ($t(349)=3.514$, $P=.000$).

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