

Are Liberal Studies teachers ready to prepare human rights respecting students? : A portrait of teachers' attitudes towards human rights

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ABSTRACT As in most countries, human rights education (HRE) in Hong Kong has never been high on the educational agenda. In 2009, a compulsory subject, Liberal Studies (LS), which could be used as a platform for HRE, was introduced. The Hong Kong Institute of Education launched a research and development project which, as one of its objectives, studied LS teachers' attitudes towards human rights and Rule of Law. This article first provides a brief overview of HRE. Then, the potential of HRE in LS will be discussed, followed by an introduction of the research project. Subsequently, the research design and findings will be presented. The findings reveal that there is a large gap between teachers' understandings of human rights and international human rights standards. Since LS teachers' attitudes are crucial for effective HRE, the findings are quite striking. The paper ends with recommendations for further research, policy formulations and teacher preparation.

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Introduction

Despite attempts by the United Nations (UN) to promote human rights education (HRE) as a tool to cultivate a culture that respects human rights, HRE in Hong Kong has never been high on the school educational agenda (Chong, Kwok & Law, 2010). As part of the extensive education reforms that took place in secondary schools in 2009, a compulsory subject, Liberal Studies (LS), was introduced into the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum. Though human rights are not explicitly mentioned, some areas in the curriculum are closely related to human rights and could be used as a platform for HRE (Leung, 2008; Leung & Yuen, 2009). However, as a novel and interdisciplinary area, most teachers are recruited from different subject backgrounds and not adequately trained. Therefore, under the sponsorship of the Hong Kong government's Quality Education Fund (QEF), a research and development project, entitled *Basic Law Education Project: Education for Human Rights and the Rule of Law* was launched by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) to (1) study LS teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards human rights and the Rule of Law - using a survey and (2) equip teachers in eight schools with the necessary knowledge and pedagogies to implement HRE.

The present article discusses key findings from the survey. It will first provide a brief overview of HRE internationally and locally to set the context. Then, the potential of HRE in LS will be discussed, followed by the introduction of the Basic Law Education Project. Subsequently, the research design and survey findings will be presented. The paper will end with some recommendations for further research, policy and teachers' preparation for HRE.

Human rights and human rights education

Literally, human rights refer to the universal and indivisible rights an individual has simply by being a human, regardless of nation, race, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, age and any other status. The founding texts of modern human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 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 concepts of universality and indivisibility have always been disputed, using arguments relating to the principle of particularity, such as Asian Values. The essence of the argument

is that the applicability of human rights is determined by particular cultural, historical, social and political contexts (De Bary, 1998; Tang, 2009). Nonetheless, the Vienna Declaration and Program for Action of the UN in 1993 (Loh, 1995) re-confirmed the ideas of universality and indivisibility of human rights. This paper shares the views confirmed by the Vienna Declaration, with an understanding that when the human rights codified in the conventions and declarations are translated into specific contexts, thin conceptions of human rights are translated into thick conceptions. Hence, the political morality of the specific context should be taken into consideration (Chan, 2000). However, even when human rights limitations are justified in the name of a specific political moralities, the principles of necessity and proportionality are crucial and essential (Ryngaert, 2009). Otherwise, the application of specific political morality may limit human rights to such an extent that the aims of the human rights are rendered irrelevant (Chan, 1997).

The cultivation of a universal culture that respects and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms recognizes the importance of education to combat different forms of discrimination, human rights abuses, and promotes peaceful co-existence, equality and justice. The UN declared a Decade for Human Rights (UNDHR 1995-2004) in 1994 and endorsed a World Program for Human Rights Education – Plan of Action for the First Phase (2005-09) (WPHRE) in 2005. The Second Phase commenced in January 2010 and will continue until December 2014 (UNESCO, 2006).

School-based human rights education and teachers

Despite efforts by the UN, it is unclear how successful the promotion of HRE has been. While Ramire, Suarez, and Meyer (2007) have argued that HRE has spread rapidly in recent decades, Print et al. (2008) counter-argue that UNDHR and WPHRE have only been marginally successful, due mainly to the inherent weakness of the UN as well as its failure to engage member states in institutionalising HRE in school. Osler & Starkey (2010a) contend that even when HRE is implemented in schools, most programmes fail to address the issue of government accountability, the gap between ideal human rights and human rights in the real world, as well as HRE as a transformative agent. They further argue that in many cases, HRE in policy documents and school is just a mechanism for managing student behaviour, encouraging compliance rather than standing up for justice. In general, civic education, including HRE, is often given 'low status' in schools and is usually integrated into existing subjects (Osler, 2008). This infusion model of curriculum arrangement demands that teachers have an in-depth understanding of human rights and are capable of integrating human rights into other subject areas.

In recognizing the crucial role of teachers in ‘bringing alive the spirit of human rights (Unesco, 2003, p.3)’, teacher attitudes, such as a commitment to human rights and social justice, competence in cultivating critical thinking, and transformative skills are highly emphasized (Best, 1991; Osler & Starkey, 2010a; Pandey, 2007). Jennings (2006, p.289) argues that teachers should “understand human rights issues, serve as models of human rights advocacy, urge students to act in accordance with human rights principles, facilitate environments that reflect human rights principles and create experiences for students to act in accordance with the promotion of human rights”. However, competent teachers are rare (Gerber, 2008; Osaka, 1998).

A brief portrait of human rights and human rights education in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan society where fourteen international conventions on human rights took place before 1997 under British colonial rule. After the return of sovereignty to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1997, commitment to the conventions remained unchanged. Though Hong Kong’s human rights record is generally satisfactory when compared to most Asian countries, various forms of prejudice and discrimination, for example related to age, gender, race, national origin, disability, religion and sexual orientation exist among the general public, reflecting a weak human rights culture. Some recent cases include discrimination against foreign domestic helpers (Takungpao, 2011/10/16) regarding their right of abode in Hong Kong and discrimination towards new immigrants from Mainland China (Mingpao, 2011/10/21). The sincerity of the government in upholding international human rights standards is in doubt and HRE is poorly implemented at the moment (Chong, Kwok & Law, 2010; Leung, 2007). For example, the HKSAR government continuously refuses to establish an independent Human Rights Commission that would lead work to protect and promote human rights, as strongly requested by the UNCHR and NGOs. Consequently, policies and activities relating to human rights are not centralized, and are ineffectively coordinated by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB). Furthermore, the government disbanded the Human Rights Education Working Group under the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) in December 2007, in favour of national education (Chong, Kwok & Law, 2010).

At the school level, the development of civics education, where HRE is a focus, can be divided into four stages (Leung & Yuen, 2009). In the first stage (before 1984), HRE did not exist. In Stage 2 (1984 – 1997), HRE was formally introduced into the school curriculum through the *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* in 1996 (Curriculum Development Council, 1996). During the third stage, from 1997–2008, HRE was again marginalized and became an afterthought. Educational reforms in

secondary schools, implemented in 2009, marked the fourth stage of development relating to civics education in school. Liberal Studies (LS) is a newly introduced mandatory subject for secondary grades four to six (aged 15-18), which aims to enable students to understand the contemporary world and its pluralistic nature by helping them to make connections among different disciplines, examining issues from a variety of perspectives and constructing personal knowledge of immediate relevance to themselves in today's world (CDC, 2007). In this new subject, though human rights are not explicitly mentioned, some of the aims and topics in the modules have a close relationship with human rights. For example, in the theme 'Quality of life', there are questions addressing how quality of life can be measured economically, socially, culturally, politically and environmentally, where 'rights-based' concepts derived from international human rights documents can be adopted as standards of reference (CDC, 2007, p.27). Leung (2008) has argued that with teachers competent in HRE, LS could become a platform for HRE, though it still remains 'action poor'. At the moment, it is too early to judge whether LS is sufficient as a vehicle for HRE and research is much needed. But how well LS teachers are prepared, in terms of their attitudes and competences, remains a key issue, in particular when there is no systematic programme on HRE in any teacher education institutes in HK and most student teachers seldom come across anything about human rights in their teacher education programmes (Osler & Starkey, 1996; Leung, 2008).

A project on Education for Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Teachers, who teach LS, in particular human rights, face many challenges, including insufficient knowledge, difficulties in maintaining student interest, tailor-making of school-based curriculum, adopting issue-based approaches, assessment and the concern about the misuse of human rights concepts (Leung, Yuen & Chong, 2011; Lo, 2010). In view of these difficulties, a two-year (June 2009 to July 2011) 'Basic Law Education Project' was launched by the HKIED to support teachers. The project team members included experts in law, human rights, HRE and citizenship education. A group of local and international experts were invited to be consultants. The Project was composed of three parts. The first part was school-based action research, involving eight secondary schools. The second part entailed setting up a web-based resource centre. The third part involved administering a survey to study LS teachers' attitudes towards, and knowledge of, Rule of Law and human rights.

Research Design

Using a survey instrument, structured questionnaires with four-point Likert scales addressed LS teacher attitudes towards human rights and the Rule of Law. The

response categories ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Though advanced statistical methods, such as factor analysis, were performed for data analysis purposes, only relevant descriptive statistics of the survey findings are reported in this paper to address the following research question, ‘What are LS teachers’ attitudes towards human rights and the Rule of Law?’

Survey instrument

The five Factors (A-E) relating to attitudes towards human rights were developed primarily on the basis of two instruments, the Human Rights Questionnaire (HRQ) by Diaz-Veizades et al. (1995), and Attitudes towards Human Rights Inventory (ATHRI) by Narvaez, Thoma and Getz (2006). The items within the factors were based on the two instruments as well as other literature, such as McFarland, S. and Mathews, M. (2005), Clemence, Devos and Doise (2001), Crowson (2008), Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (2002), and Oxfam and Amnesty International HK (1996). The items were developed by the team members with the advice of consultants and were re-written to suit the Hong Kong context. They included both general items (e.g. the government should provide citizens with an adequate standard of living) and case-specific items (e.g. the government should provide Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to new arrivals who reside in Hong Kong for less than seven years). A few items may contain rights which might not be classified as basic human rights and are more controversial, such as a woman’s right to abortion. Relevant items which could not be categorized under any of the five factors were listed under Factor F.

Finally, six factors with a total of 53 items, namely, Factor A (Social Security), Factor B (Civilian Constraints), Factor C (Personal Liberties), Factor D (Equality), Factor E (Privacy) and Factor F (Human Rights Education and Other Relevant Concepts) were included in the questionnaire. Though the Rule of Law is part of human rights, the items were categorized separately to form a single Factor G to explore to what extent Hong Kong LS teachers respect the Rule of Law. The overall structure of the questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 about here

Pilot test and collection of data

After 6 pilot tests were conducted, the self-administered questionnaires were mailed to all secondary schools offering LS in May 2010, a total of 460 schools. Assuming 5 LS teachers in each school, the total population amounted to approximately 2,300.

Questionnaires were sent 3 more times to the schools followed by phone calls. In total, 791 completed questionnaires had been received by 30 October 2010. Assuming the total population was 2,300, the response rate was 34.4%, which is quite acceptable. A total of 252 schools, amounting to 54.78% of the school population, participated in the survey.

Reliability of the instrument

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was performed to measure the internal consistency of the factors. Items which were not closely related to others in the same factor were deleted. After deleting the items, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients showed that the factors are highly or adequately reliable: A (.727), B (.880), C (.738), D (.611), E (.810), F (.832), and G (.722) as were the overall attitudes towards Human Rights (.907).

Findings

Significant findings are displayed and discussed below. The minimums, maximums, standard deviations, and mean scores of all the factors are shown in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 about here

Generally speaking, the participants held positive attitudes towards human rights, with an overall mean score of 2.92 (out of a maximum of '4') for *Attitudes towards Human Rights*. The mean scores on all the factors were higher than 2.5. The lowest was Privacy (2.54), and the highest was Personal Liberties (3.32). However, the detailed analysis reveals that the mean scores were not encouraging since most of the items were related to core and basic human rights values, which demand stringent standards. The items on the factors will be discussed in the following sections, together with the deleted items, marked *.

INSERT TABLE 3 about here

Table 3 reveals that the overall score for the factor Social Welfare was 2.98. A large majority of the respondents were in favour of providing social welfare to the general public. In particular, protecting the disadvantaged (item 3, 96.1%) and vulnerable groups (item 1, 93%) were strongly supported. This support dropped when the statement related to providing a decent standard of living, e.g. by providing more expensive medical services to help those needing it (item 4, 79.6%). Even lower was the support for providing social welfare to new immigrants (item 6, 41.6%).

INSERT TABLE 4 about here

Attitudes towards Personal Liberty were quite positive (overall score of 3.32). The items contained in Personal Liberties are usually considered to be fundamental human rights and are highly valued as core values in Hong Kong. Most respondents supported the right to physical integrity (item 19, 85.6%), religious freedom (item 21, 97.3%), academic freedom (item 22, 81.3%), the right to establish ties with foreign political organizations (item 23, 95%), and the ability to criticize the government (item 24, 96.9%). However, when faced with more controversial items, the percentage dropped. For example, only 64.5% supported the right to euthanasia for terminally ill patients (item 18), 66.7% supported a woman's right to abortion (item 20) and 61.8% supported providing legal assistance to illegal immigrants who had committed crimes in Hong Kong (item 25).

INSERT TABLE 5 about here

Civilian Constraints refers to the rejection of Personal Liberties, meaning the restriction on Personal Liberties by the authorities. Usually the items in Personal Liberties are basic civil rights, while the items in Civilian Constraints are civil rights in context. The support for restricting these fundamental human rights ranged from 19.2 % on item 15 to 55.7% on item 9. Items 9 and 12 related to the right of schools to limit the rights of children. Given that most of the items can be categorized as fundamental human rights, the support for limiting such basic human rights seemed rather high, although the majority tended to disagree or strongly disagree with such restrictions.

INSERT TABLE 6 about here

The mean score for equality was 3.01, implying that the respondents generally respected equal rights for people from different backgrounds. They also supported equal voting rights (item 33, 89.7%). As for minority rights, the support rates were mixed, as reflected by high support for items 29 (87.2%), 31 (90.0%), and 35 (85.3%) but limited support for items 30, (69.5%), 32, (62.5%) and 34 (69.6%), in particular when there is direct impact on them.

INSERT TABLE 7 about here

With respect to privacy, the mean score was just 2.54 and only 5 items had a mean higher than 2.5. Many respondents were willing to forgo privacy to combat crime. There was also limited support for children's privacy rights.

INSERT TABLE 8 about here

Though these 13 items were categorized separately under the Rule of Law, they are understood as part of civil rights. Rule of Law has always been seen as one of the most important and firmly held core values of Hong Kong. However, though support was high for civil disobedience against laws that infringe upon human rights (items 65, 75%; 66, 96.3%), other findings were mixed. It appeared that there was little regard for some essential elements associated with the Rule of Law. For the three items (items 56, 57 and 60) that assessed the current situation regarding Rule of Law in Hong Kong, the mean scores were all lower than 2.5, implying that respondents had little trust in the fairness of the Hong Kong legal system .

INSERT TABLE 9 about here

In general, support for HRE was high, as reflected in high support rates of 97.7% and 93.8% for items 45 and 47. The high rejection rates (79.5% and 88.8%) for items 49 and 50 are helpful in promoting HRE. However, having a lack of sufficient knowledge (item 48, 56.1%), concerns that HRE can threaten discipline (item 46, 24.9%) and misconceptions about rights and responsibilities (item 52, 46.8%; item 53, 46.2%) can hinder the development of HRE.

Discussion

As teachers are the gate keepers to successful HRE implementation, the findings revealing general support for human rights and the Rule of Law are encouraging. It is also heartening to see that most of the respondents recognized the importance of promoting HRE in education (items 45, 47). Their rejection of the statement that human rights leads to social unrest (item 49), and human rights is a Western product (item 50) is also worth mentioning. However, gaps, contradictions and tensions were revealed between the respondents' understandings of human rights and the standards embedded in UN declarations and conventions, which may pose a threat to the development of HRE. In the following discussion, we shall focus on 'knowledge and misconceptions of HRE', 'understandings of the Rule of Law,' 'harmony, law and

order, human rights', 'children's rights', 'discrimination against minorities' and 'reasons for contradictions'.

Knowledge and misconceptions about HRE

Only slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they thought that their knowledge of human rights was adequate for teaching human rights (item 48, 56.1%), which echoes the findings by Ruane et al (2010). There were also misconceptions regarding the relationship between responsibility and rights (items 52, 53), believing that students and citizens must first fulfill their responsibilities, before enjoying their human rights. This runs counter to the fundamental belief that human beings should enjoy human rights simply because they are human, regardless of whether a person has fulfilled his/her responsibilities (UDHR, Article 1). This contradiction, particularly relating to children's rights, is not uncommon. Education for children's rights, with undue attention to responsibilities, has been referred to as "miseducation about children's rights" (Howe & Covell, 2010). Such beliefs may have led to a fear that HRE could pose a threat to school discipline (item 46). This echoes the findings of Leung, Yuen & Chong (2011), Reilly & Niens (2005) and Ruane et al (2010). The generally positive attitudes, together with the misconceptions, seem to suggest that although LS teachers had a certain understanding of the importance and meaning of human rights and value human rights in principle, they had reservations in upholding human rights in real life situations, especially when they perceived human rights as threatening to their interests. This resonates with McFarland and Mathews' (2005) claim that Americans strongly endorsed human rights in principle, but their commitment, as revealed by an investment of national resources and a willingness to take risks on behalf of others, is weak.

Understandings of the Rule of Law

As a cosmopolitan city, Hong Kong is known for its deep respect for the Rule of Law. The findings revealed, however, that many LS teachers did not support the core, fundamental principles associated with the Rule of Law. For example, they had mixed feelings about the independence of the judiciary, procedural justice, and the presumption of innocence. As many as 30.2% opposed item 54, which stated that only unethical behavior that is forbidden by law should be prosecuted. A relatively high percentage was unwilling (though a minority) to support the independence of the judiciary (items 55, 58 and 59) (UDHR, Article 10) and the basic human rights of criminal suspects (items 61 and 62) (UDHR, Article 11). There was also weak support for the basic idea of 'presumption of innocence until found guilty' (item 64) (UDHR, Article 11).

The findings seem to suggest that a relatively high proportion of LS teachers' understandings of the core and essential ideas associated with Rule of Law were weak and they tended to adhere to 'regulation by law' instead of 'limitation from law' and 'justice through law' (Tai, 2010). This seems incompatible with the values underlying the Hong Kong legal system.

Harmony, law and order, human rights

In order to prevent human rights abuses at the hands of the authorities, according to the idea of 'the limit of limitation' (Lockwood, Finn & Jubinsky, 1985), the power of the government to impose restrictions on fundamental human rights should be limited. Though local political morality and realities could be taken into account when setting such constraints, these constraints have to fulfill certain criteria, e.g. threatening state security, the public order etc. and have to be proportionate to the specific context. The findings revealed that though general attitudes towards personal liberties were positive, as reflected in the overall mean scores on the factors Personal Liberty (3.32), Privacy (2.54) and Civilian Constraints (2.91), a considerable number of respondents were ready to accept restrictions or sacrifice civil rights to benefit state security and law and order without sufficient justification. While 97.3% of the respondents supported 'the right to manifest one's religion or belief in public' (item 21), the percentage that supported 'the banning of Falun Gong¹ related activities' (item 13), without any criteria, was surprising high at 25.7%. There was also a noticeable lack of full support for civil liberties when crime prevention was at stake. Many were willing to sacrifice their right to privacy (item 43). This readiness to sacrifice civil liberties to maintain social order was confirmed by the 55.3% who rejected the statement 'when there are conflicts between the two, personal liberties are more important than social stability' (item 63). A possible reason for this finding is that a significant proportion of the respondents might lack an understanding of the idea of 'limit of limitation', or they may have a deep-rooted belief in harmony and order over human rights, which has been regarded as a characteristic of Chinese Confucian culture (Lee, 2008). Given these mindsets of the teachers, HRE could easily be distorted into what Osler and Starkey (2010a) have referred to as simply a mechanism to manage student behaviour, encouraging compliance.

Children's rights

Children's rights are even more neglected than adult rights. The three Ps, right to protection, right to provision and right to participation, which are protected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), refer to children's rights (Hammarberg, 1990; Osler & Starkey, 2010b). Underlying the rights to protection and provision is

the assumption that a child is a subject to be protected and provided for, while the right to participation refers to the child being an autonomous being, capable of self-determination. These two assumptions can sometimes conflict with each other. The findings show that while there was considerable support for the government to provide security to children (item 1, 93.1%) (CRC, Article 27), many were less supportive of various other rights. Only 44.3% agreed that children should be protected against corporal punishment at the hands of their parents (item 9), which violates a child's right to physical integrity (CRC, Articles 19 and 37). While 97.1% agreed that citizens should have the right to their own religion or belief (item 21), as many as 42.3% supported mandatory student participation in school religious activities (item 12), denying a child's right to his or her own religion (CRC, Article 14). Many also did not support a child's right to privacy (CRC, Article 16) when it came to: parental monitoring of emails (item 36); compulsory blood tests for drugs (item 38) and the mandatory use of the blood test data by the government (item 39); compulsory recording of student finger prints (item 41); and the installation of security cameras in classrooms (item 42) for management and crime detection purposes. Though not all of these items are directly related to participation rights, they all share the essential value of treating a child as an autonomous being. It appears that compliance to rules and order was deemed more important than freedom and rights.

Discrimination against minorities

The idea that 'the government should provide an adequate standard of living to citizens' was strongly supported by the respondents (item 2, 88.8%). The high mean score for equality (3.01) also implies that in general the respondents respected the equal rights of people from different backgrounds. But issues relating to minority rights generated mixed results. Large majorities of participants supported the idea that 'homosexual teachers can also be competent teachers' (item 29, 87.2%), that the government should provide non-Cantonese speakers with interpretation (item 31, 90.0%), and that those with disabilities should be subsidized to continue their studies after the age of 18 (item 35, 85.3%). However, fewer respondents supported providing Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to new immigrants who had resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years (item 6, 41.6%), giving equal rights to ethnic minorities to rent flats (item 30; 69.5%), give illegal immigrant children the same right to study as local children (item 32, 62.5%) and provide legal assistance to illegal immigrants who had committed crimes in Hong Kong (item 25, 61.8%). One reason for such responses could be that the provision of rights to minorities was seen as going against their interests. This could explain why only 69.6% were willing to allow the establishment of a rehabilitation centre for former mentally ill persons near their

home (item 34). This pattern of responses seemed to indicate that people were willing to support human rights if they remained abstract and general, but not if they felt they had something concrete to lose (such as security). These findings seemed to highlight that understandings of citizenship rights were much narrower than the concept of human rights. Hence, it was deemed acceptable to deny certain minority groups various basic human rights and treat them as second class citizens.

Reasons for Contradictions

The results show that there were many items which generated only tepid support from the respondents. Some items contain rights which are not basic human rights and are more controversial, such as abortion rights (item 20) and euthanasia rights (item 18). Such rights do not necessarily imply contradictions. Certain items do not reveal contradictions at a general level but do in specific contexts, because it may infringe their interests (McFarland and Mathews, 2005). There are other cases where human rights were endorsed in principle, but not in specific circumstances, due to local values and beliefs such as endorsing religious freedom for adults but not for children. This could be due to the sense that children are not full, autonomous individuals. This issue of particularities relating to specific contexts could erode the endorsement of human rights in principle if not addressed. For example, Lee (2008) has argued that because of the influence of Confucian cultural traditions, people in Hong Kong value relationships, harmony and order over rights concerns and that they are ready to sacrifice human rights for such harmony and order.

Conclusion

In this paper, we started by asking whether Liberal Studies teachers in Hong Kong are ready to help prepare their students, through HRE, to live alongside others in a multicultural context?' Our initial reply is 'they are starting to get ready but there is still a long way to go'. Our study paints a picture that is not encouraging but is also not unexpected. Hong Kong's human rights record is generally better than one would find in most Asian countries, but the human rights culture among the general public is weak due to decades of serious neglect of HRE, and the lack of sincerity of the government to uphold international human rights standards (Chong, Kwok & Law, 2010). The survey results reflect the attitudes we find in the community at large.

Since our research utilized survey methodology, it only scratched the surface of the underlying reasons for the lack of total commitment to human rights values that we discovered among LS teachers. It would be necessary to compliment this study with in-depth interviews and case studies to gain a deeper understanding of the reality in

Hong Kong today, especially the tensions between particularities associated with local cultures and the universalistic dimensions of human rights. The interface between particularities associated with local cultures and human rights universalities sheds light on the tensions between the ‘Fundamentalist Approach’ and the ‘Ecumenical Approach’. The first argues that there are universal values and moral principles that grant human rights to all reasonable persons, while the second encourages different cultures to justify human rights from their own perspectives in the hope that there exists an “overlapping consensus” regarding the norms of human rights that can emerge from self-searching exercises as well as inter-cultural dialogue (Chan, 1999; Donnelly, 2007; Sabel & Gerstenberg, 2010). After all, cultures are not static, but function in a living web of values, customs and beliefs, capable of self regeneration.

More concretely, with respect to the attitudes of the LS teachers in our study, who are supposed to be responsible for cultivating a culture that respects human rights, we can conclude that the findings are somewhat alarming. There is sufficient evidence here to call for urgent measures at the policy, teacher education and school levels to remedy the situation. First, with reference to the various UN recommendations, the government should develop a comprehensive HRE policy to be backed up with sufficient resources comparable to what has been done with respect to national education. Curriculum guidelines and teaching resources should be developed with the help of HRE experts. In recognizing the crucial role of teachers in ‘bringing alive the spirit of human rights (Unesco, 2003, p.3) and the encouraging outcomes of programmes targeting initial and in-service teacher educators (Ruane et al, 2010), systematic pre-service and in-service training in HRE and the Rule of Law in teacher education, in general, and LS in particular, needs to be strengthened. Since HRE deems to be socially transformative in nature, and in order to address the “action poor” nature of LS discussed, pedagogies with a transformative character should be emphasized, in addition to communicating relevant knowledge. NGOs and lawyers working in the human rights field should be involved so that human rights ideals can be realized. Action research conducted in partnership between teacher education institutes and schools is one way forward. It is clear that in contexts like Hong Kong urgent and concerted efforts are needed to cultivate a culture that respects and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms that can serve to confront different forms of discrimination, the abuse of human rights and the promotion of peaceful co-existence, equality and justice.

Endnotes:

- (1) Falun Gong is a system of beliefs and practices which include qigong, Buddhism and Taoist traditions. It has been declared a heretical organization by the Chinese government.

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TABLES

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

Section	Variables	Subscales	Item Number
I	Attitudes towards Human Rights	Social Security (A)	1-8
		Civilian Constraints (B)	9-17
		Personal Liberties (C)	18-25
		Equality (D)	26-35
		Privacy (E)	36-44
		Human Rights Education and Other Relevant Concepts (F)	45-53
	Attitudes towards Rule of Law	(G)	54-66
II	Knowledge of Basic Law, Human Rights and Rule of Law		67-83
III	Demographic factors		84-92

Items No. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 26, 28, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58, 59, 61 and 62 are reverse questions

Table 2 The minimums, maximums, mean scores and SDs of the scales					
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Attitudes towards Human Rights (A to F)	716	2.92	.327	1.84	3.93
Social Welfare (Factor A)	777	2.98	.410	1.43	4.00
Civilian Constraints (Factor B)	761	2.91	.601	1.00	4.00
Personal Liberties (Factor C)	776	3.32	.464	1.00	4.00
Equality (Factor D)	760	3.01	.366	1.75	4.00
Privacy (Factor E)	764	2.54	.480	1.00	4.00
Other relevant concepts (Factor F)	769	3.02	.493	1.75	4.00
Attitudes towards Rule of Law (Factor G)	757	2.85	.384	1.80	4.00

Social Welfare (Factor A)

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of items in Social Welfare

Item	N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Q1 The government should provide social protection to all children.	789	93.0	7.0	3.34	.629
Q2 The government should provide its citizens with an adequate standard of living.	788	88.8	11.2	3.15	.603
Q3 The government should provide security to people who lose their means for making a living due to circumstances beyond their control.	787	96.1	3.9	3.33	.561
Q4 The government has the responsibility to provide all citizens with adequate medical care; therefore extra fees for expensive medication should NOT be charged.	783	79.6	20.4	2.97	.656
Q5 The government should include internet charges in Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.	787	57.3	42.7	2.63	.761
Q6 The government should provide Comprehensive Social Welfare Assistance to new arrivals who reside in Hong Kong for less than seven years.	787	41.6	58.4	2.33	.801

Q7	The government should provide retirement security for all people.	789	87.8	12.2	3.09	.611
*Q8	The government should exempt all the elderly applying for Old Age Allowance (fruits grant) from income and assets tests.	788	78.3	21.7	3.05	.753

Personal Liberties (Factor C)

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of items in Personal Liberties

Item		N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Q21	Citizens should have the right to manifest their religion or belief in public	786	97.3	2.7	3.50	.583
Q22	Professors should have the right to teach any theory or belief in university	787	81.3	18.7	3.13	.727
Q23	Political organizations or bodies in Hong Kong should have the right to establish ties with foreign political organizations or bodies, if it would not harm national security or public order	782	95.0	5.0	3.29	.574
Q24	Citizens should have the right to publish articles criticizing the Chinese Government in the media	779	96.9	3.1	3.37	.584
Q18*	A terminally ill patient should have the right to euthanasia	781	64.5	35.5	2.70	.767
Q19*	Asylum seekers who would be tortured after returning to their home country should have the right to stay in the present country	784	85.6	14.4	2.96	.554
Q20*	Women should have the right to abortion	781	66.7	33.3	2.71	.726
Q25*	Illegal immigrants who commit crimes in Hong Kong should have the right to legal assistance	780	61.8	38.2	2.65	.740

Civilian Constraints (Factor B)

Table 5 Descriptive statistics of items in Civilian Constraints

Item		N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Q10	In times of crisis, the government should have the right to arrest those whose political views would affect social stability	782	41.7	58.3	2.75	.818
Q11	The government should have the right to deny those who would affect public security the right to vote	782	24.6	75.4	2.98	.767
Q13	The government should have the right to ban Falun Gong ¹ related activities	782	25.7	74.3	2.90	.756
Q14	For political considerations, the government should have the right to restrict citizens' freedom to enter or leave Hong Kong	786	27.0	73.0	2.99	.788
Q15	The government should have the right to stop a peaceful assembly if there is any level of physical confrontation	783	19.2	80.8	3.07	.737
Q16	The government should have the right to ban the publication of books and other materials which would be a threat to public interest	783	34.1	65.9	2.86	.817
Q17	The government should have the right to refuse to provide costly legal assistance to people for whom it is 100% certain that they are guilty	777	34.4	65.6	2.82	.832
Q9*	Children should have the right to be protected from corporal punishment by their parents	788	44.3	55.7	2.45	.753
Q12*	Schools with a religious identity should have the right to oblige students to participate in religious activities	784	42.3	57.7	2.68	.808

*Equality (Factor D)***Table 6 Descriptive statistics of items in Equality**

Item		N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Q27	Society should encourage women to consider traditionally male dominated occupations such as	779	78.6	21.4	2.93	.662

	airplane pilots and firemen					
Q29	Homosexual teachers can also be competent teachers, just like other teachers	781	87.2	12.8	3.13	.715
Q30	Proprietors should have the right to refuse to rent their flats to ethnic minorities	781	30.5	69.5	2.91	.808
Q31	The government should provide non-Cantonese speakers with interpretation when using public services	781	90.0	10.0	3.12	.592
Q32	The government should provide illegal immigrant children with the same right to study as local children	779	62.5	37.5	2.72	.784
Q33	The government should give more voting rights to people with higher economic and social status	780	10.3	89.7	3.43	.713
Q34	I agree with the establishment of a social rehabilitation centre for ex-mentally ill persons near my home	772	69.6	30.4	2.75	.664
Q35	The government should subsidize children with intellectual disabilities to continue their study after 18	777	85.3	14.7	3.06	.667
Q26*	Secondary schools should take the balancing of the number of male and female students as a principle when admitting students	781	45.1	54.9	2.56	.701
Q28*	The government should pass legislation to prevent homosexual couples from adopting children	782	54.6	45.4	2.38	.844

Privacy (Factor E)

Table 7 Descriptive statistics of items in Privacy

Item	N	% agree + strongly	% disagree + strongly	Mean	SD
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			agree	disagree		
Q36	To prevent children from going astray, parents should have the right to monitor their emails	777	34.6	65.4	2.77	.718
Q37	For criminal investigation purposes, law enforcement agencies should have the right to intercept our correspondence	777	52.0	48.0	2.59	.783
Q38	Schools should have the right to force students under the age of 18 to take drug tests if their parents consent	779	74.3	25.7	2.16	.749
Q39	To combat drug abuse, the government should have the right to require schools to hand over drug testing results to law enforcement agencies	781	64.3	35.7	2.30	.781
Q40	To enhance management, schools should have the right to ask for finger prints as identification when teachers enter and leave schools	780	27.9	72.1	2.92	.779
Q41	To enhance management, schools should have the right to ask for finger prints as identification when students enter and leave schools	780	30.0	70.0	2.90	.785
Q42	Schools should have the right to install security cameras in classrooms	780	41.7	58.3	2.73	.800
Q43	To enhance public order, the government should have the right to install security cameras in public areas	780	80.9	19.1	2.11	.641
Q44	If an employee applies for sick leave for more than five days per month, the employer should have the right to ask for all his/her medical records	778	61.4	38.6	2.35	.787

Attitudes towards Rule of Law (Factor G)

Table 8 Descriptive statistics of items in Attitudes towards the Rule of Law

Item	N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly	Mean	SD
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				disagree		
Q54	Unless explicitly prohibited by law, no one should be punished in court for unethical acts.	778	69.8	30.2	2.78	.707
Q55	To solve pressing social and political problems, the government should be able to interpret the law flexibly.	779	31.6	68.5	2.95	.807
Q58	Judges should consider public opinion when sitting in judgment.	778	47.5	52.6	2.58	.787
Q59	When judging important cases, judges should follow the opinions of the executives.	779	19.1	80.9	3.22	.794
Q61	In some special circumstances, such as combating Triad activities, the use of secret torture by the police to obtain evidence is acceptable.	776	35.3	64.7	2.77	.731
Q62	Courts can accept illegally collected evidence to convict people for whom it is 100% certain they are guilty.	774	36.0	63.9	2.74	.712
Q63	The purposes of the law are to protect personal liberties and social stability. When there are conflicts between the two, personal liberties are more important than social stability.	773	44.7	55.3	2.47	.699
Q64	Courts should err in acquitting rather than punishing.	776	74.2	25.7	2.86	.710
Q65	Citizens should have the right to refuse complying with laws which violate human rights.	774	75.0	25.0	2.88	.666
Q66	Citizens should have the right to peacefully protest against laws which violate human rights.	775	96.3	3.7	3.27	.556
Q56	The legal system in Hong Kong is not equally fair to everyone.	778	75.3	24.7	2.17	.688
Q57	The rich have advantages when it comes to litigation.	780	89.7	10.4	1.77	.663
Q60	As the middle class cannot benefit from the existing system for legal assistance, it violates the principle of equality.	776	69.8	30.2	2.21	.665

*HRE and Other Concepts (Factor F)***Table 9 Descriptive statistics of items in HRE and Other Concepts (Factor F)**

Item		N	% agree + strongly agree	% disagree + strongly disagree	Mean	SD
Q45	One purpose of education is to enhance student respect for human rights	783	97.7	2.3	3.43	.549
Q46	Promoting human rights education in schools would create a threat to discipline	782	24.9	75.1	2.89	.741
Q47	It is important to actively promote human rights education in schools	780	93.8	6.2	3.21	.565
Q48	My knowledge of human rights is adequate for teaching human rights	779	56.1	43.9	2.61	.672
Q49	Promoting human rights is one of the factors leading to social unrest	777	20.5	79.5	3.05	.734
Q50	Human Rights is a Western product. Only Western countries are suitable for promoting and developing human rights	779	11.2	88.8	3.26	.686
Q51	Economic growth is more important than protecting human rights	778	15.4	84.6	3.14	.718
Q52	Before enjoying their human rights, citizens must first fulfill their responsibilities	780	46.8	53.2	2.58	.881
Q53	Before enjoying their human rights, students must first fulfill their responsibilities	780	46.2	53.8	2.58	.880