

Human Rights Friendly Ethos in Schools: A Hong Kong Case Study

Timothy Yuen*, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.

Yan Wing Leung, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.

Yan Lam Lo, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.

Abstract

In 2009-11, the researchers were engaged in the Basic Law Education (BLE) Project financed by the Quality Education Fund of the HKSAR Government. The project aimed at providing Liberal Studies teachers curricular and pedagogical support in the teaching of the Hong Kong Basic Law, human rights and law-related concepts. As part of the project, the human rights friendly ethos of the participating schools was studied. The research methodology comprised both a questionnaire survey, using the Indicators and Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools, and in-depth focus group interviews with groups of students and teachers who had participated in the survey. Human rights education is an important part of civic education in the 21st century and it can best be supported by a human rights friendly school ethos. This paper makes use of the research findings from the study and explores, with the help of a case study, why and how a school can promote a human right friendly school ethos and the complications that may arise. The paper can be of reference value to researchers and civic educators who are interested in human right education. It can also be of help to school leaders and teachers who are trying to develop a human right respecting school environment which is now universally required.

Keywords: Human rights, human rights friendly school ethos, democratic participation, Hong Kong

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Timothy Yuen, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 10 Lo Ping Road, New Territories, Hong Kong. Email: tyuen@ied.edu.hk.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Meaning of Human Right Friendly School Ethos

Amnesty International (2012) pointed out that human rights education (HRE) involves (1) education about human rights, (2) education through human rights and (3) education in human rights. Education in human rights is particularly important in the school life of students as it is the practices and experiences of human rights in all aspects of daily school life that empower students to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others (Covell, Howe, and McNeil, 2010; Howe, 2005; Howe and Covell, 2009; Tibbitts, 2002). UNICEF (2007) proposed a similar idea that a successful implementation of UNCRC in schools should include the right to quality education, which includes a broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum, rights-based learning and assessment and a child-friendly, safe and healthy environment; and the right to respect in the learning environment, which includes respect for identity, participation rights and integrity. The belief that what is taught about citizenship and human rights must be practiced and experienced in schools; or else the perceived contradiction may lead to cynicism, alienation and apathy, was well shared by scholars (Osler and Starkey, 2010; Raby, 2005; Ruddock and Flutter, 2000; Schimmel, 2003). In fact, the discrepancies between what is taught and practiced may be one of the contributing factors to the failure of many civic education and human rights education programmes (Osler and Starkey, 2005). Schools upholding the idea of “education in human rights” are also called human rights friendly schools, schools adopting human rights friendly school ethos or human rights respecting school. In this sense, schools adopting human rights friendly school ethos can be considered as critical vehicles for effective HRE. Cunningham (1991) argued that though a school ‘ethos’ is the intangible ‘soul’ of the schools, resulting from the combined actions of all members of the school community, there are ways of encouraging a human rights friendly school ethos by carefully planned actions in accordance with human rights and children’s rights principles and values. Similarly, Amnesty International (2012) described a human rights friendly school as a school that embraces human rights as core operating and organizing principles. It is a school community where human rights are learned, taught, practiced, respected, protected and promoted. It is a place in which all are included and encouraged to take part, regardless of status or role, where cultural diversity is celebrated. In short, a human rights friendly school ensures that human rights values and principles are at the heart of the learning experience and present in all major areas of school life; it is a school that is “friendly” to human rights.

In order to operationalize the concept of human rights friendly schools, different instruments have been developed. For example, Amnesty International developed the Ten Global Principles for Human Rights Friendly School (2009, 2012) and the Education

Department of the National University of Politics, Taiwan, under the commission of the Ministry of Education of Taiwan developed the Indicators and Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools (Fong, 1993). The Ten Global Principles by Amnesty International and the Indicators and Evaluative Checklist by Ministry of Education of Taiwan are quite similar to each other. The Taiwan Checklist comprises nine areas (Fong, 1993):

1. A secure school environment

It includes safety of facilities, hygiene, safety precautions, efficient response to emergencies, provision of health care services, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.20) which states that "a human rights friendly school protects all members of the school community by making safety and security a shared responsibility".

2. A friendly school ethos

It includes mutual respect between teachers and students, teachers' appropriate manner when handling disciplinary issues, protection of students' privacy, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.18) that "a human rights friendly school where equality, non-discrimination, dignity and respect underpin all aspects of school life".

3. The uphold of students' study rights

It includes provision of quality education, full development of students' potential, adequate chances for students to express opinions, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.20) that "a human rights friendly school works to empower all students to reach their full potential through education, in particular students who are marginalized due to their gender, status or difference".

4. Equal and fair treatment

It includes non-discrimination, equal treatment, presumption of innocence, equal allocation of resources, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.18) that "a human rights friendly school where equality, non-discrimination, dignity and respect underpin all aspects of school life".

5. Protection of and appeal for rights

It includes the protection of students' rights, adequate channels for students to complain about any unfair or inappropriate treatment, etc.

6. Respect for diversity and differences
It includes respect for students' individual differences, diversity in assessment, special assistances offered to disadvantaged students. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.18) that "a human rights friendly school embraces inclusion in all aspects of school life".
7. Democratic participation and learning
It includes students' democratic participation in school affairs, establishment of autonomous student organizations, fair rules of procedure for all meetings, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.19) that "a human rights friendly school encourages all members of the school community to participate freely, actively and meaningfully in school life, including shaping school policies and practices".
8. The implementation of HRE
It includes provision of human rights related activities, conformity with human rights principles when designing various school rules, etc. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.20) that "a human rights friendly school integrates human rights into all aspects of teaching and the curriculum".
9. Teachers' Professional Autonomy
It includes teachers' professional autonomy, fair chances for teachers to pursue further education, adequate channels for teachers to express their opinions, etc.

One extra area was adopted in the final version of the questionnaire as declared by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan (2006):

10. Being loved, respected and blessed
It includes the feeling of being loved and valued. It corresponds with Amnesty International's principle (2012, P.18) that "a human rights friendly school where equality, non-discrimination, dignity and respect underpin all aspects of school life".

2.2 Factors Affecting Human Rights Friendly School Ethos

Many factors related to the cultivation of a human rights friendly school ethos have been identified. Democratic participation of students was identified by UNICEF UK (2013) as one of the crucial factors. UNICEF UK described the importance of democratic participation of students as "a thread through all aspects of school life" (2013) in which adults in schools

should ensure that students' views are heard and valued in decisions making which affect students. Lundy (2007) also emphasized the importance of students' voice in schools, which should come with space, audience and influence. From the students' perspective, their perceived values and the level of confidence in participation, sense of empowerment in the school, extent to which the school environment fosters participation practices, and an open climate for discussion in classrooms are also considered as important factors (Cunningham, 2000; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001). On the other hand, Inman and Burke (2002) identified the commitment to the goodness of children, while Radz (1984) and Trafford (2008) proposed a shared mutual respects and trusts among the members of the communities, including teachers, principals, students, parents etc in schools, as crucial factors.

2.3 The Importance of Building up Human Rights Friendly School Ethos in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan society where fourteen international conventions on human rights were extended to Hong Kong before 1997 under British colonial rule. Together with values such as rule of law and justice etc, human rights have long been valued by Hong Kong society and named as one of the "Hong Kong Core Values". Hong Kong's human rights record is generally satisfactory when compared to most Asian countries. However, regardless of the positive evidences, there are still drawbacks in the upholding of human rights and the presence of various forms of prejudice and discrimination related to age, gender, race, national origin, disability, religion and sexual orientation exist among the general public, reflecting a weak human rights culture (Chong, Kwok & Law, 2010). Leung (2007) argued that the road to human rights in Hong Kong is long and winding, because the promotion of HRE has never been high on the educational agenda, which creates difficulties in the cultivation of human rights culture.

Tai (1994) identified 'seven fears' of teachers in promoting human right culture in schools, namely 'fear of confusion', 'fear of losing authority', 'fear of troublesome', 'fear of too heavy workload', 'fear of lack of understanding', 'fear of abuse of students' and 'fear of implementation'. This anxiety relating to the fear of challenges to teachers' authority and the power relationship in schools are also reported in Leung and Lo (2012) and Leung, Yuen & Chong (2011). In order to strengthen the human right culture, which is crucial for upholding human rights and an important part of the fabric and core values of the society, building up a human right friendly ethos in schools is important. As discussed, human rights friendly school ethos can be considered as critical vehicles for effective HRE because it makes what is taught about human rights in classrooms become real in daily school life. It helps to build up mutual trusts among stakeholders in schools gradually, which will be

effective in addressing the fears and anxiety identified by Tai (1994). That is it makes “education in human rights” real in the school. In the long run, this human right friendly ethos will help in shaping a human right culture among the students.

2.4 The QEF Project

As discussed above, the promotion of HRE has never been high in the educational agenda. Nevertheless, with the introduction of Liberal Studies in the New Senior Secondary Curriculum in 2009, a platform for HRE is created as some areas in the curriculum are closely related to human rights (Leung, 2008; Leung and Yuen, 2009). However, the training provided to Liberal Studies teachers was inadequate (Leung and Lo, 2012). Therefore, funded by the Quality Education Fund in Hong Kong, the Basic Law Education Project was launched in April 2009 to equip Liberal Studies teachers with knowledge and skills for the teaching of the Basic Law, rule of law and human rights-related concepts and issues under the special “One Country, Two Systems” in Hong Kong; to construct an instrument and conduct a survey assessing the Liberal Studies teachers’ attitudes towards and knowledge of the Basic Law, human rights and rule of law; and to construct an instrument and measure partner schools’ human rights-friendly school environment. This article focuses on discussing the findings of the human rights-friendly school ethos.

2. METHODS

2.1 Approach

Eight partner schools were invited to join in the evaluation of human rights friendly school ethos. Due to the tight teaching schedule, only 3 schools participated in this research. This paper would only focus on the analysis of one of the 3 schools. The research adopted a mixed methodology with both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The Indicators and Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools discussed above was used to obtain quantitative data about how teachers and students felt about the ethos in School X. Respondents were asked to fill in a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire items for the teachers’ and students’ version were identical except some minor modifications in wordings. For example, the item “all adults in school treat students with a rational, equal and friendly manner” in the students’ version was rewritten as “staff treat each other and students with a rational, equal and friendly manner” in the teachers’ version. Simple descriptive analysis was conducted on the quantitative data collected to examine the human rights friendly environment in School X. After the data from the survey

had been analyzed, focus group interviews of teachers and students were conducted to obtain more in-depth information from them.

2.2 Sampling and Data Collection

All teachers in the school and students from F.4 and F.6 randomly selected by responsible teachers were invited to complete the Indicators and Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools. Twelve teachers and 160 students had returned the completed questionnaires by December 2011. 23 students who had filled in the questionnaires were separated into three focus groups and interviewed in January and May 2012 respectively. A focus group was also conducted in May 2012 to interview six teachers.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Questionnaire

The Taiwan instrument discussed above was refined and adopted for the present case study because though Hong Kong and Taiwan are different, especially in democratic development, they are both international Chinese communities, which are highly influenced by both Western traditions and Confucian traditions culturally. According to Fong (1993), the initial framework of the instrument was developed based on the Internal Education Rights Questionnaire (Tarrow, 1987) and the Audit of Human Rights by Osler and Starkey (1996). Twelve areas of concern were originally proposed and were then trimmed down to nine areas, which have been discussed above, after extensive consultations with stakeholders. The original Checklist has been revised for fitting the Hong Kong context. After revision, the area of "Development of Teachers' Professional Autonomy" was deleted as Hong Kong students generally were not familiar with issues related to professional development of teachers. The final version of the Checklist contained 60 items which were categorized into the nine remaining areas as mentioned above. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) was employed to measure each item. A mean score larger than 3 shows that the respondent was positive about the statement, vice versa.

2.3.2 Interview Guide

The interview guides for teachers and students were composed of an identical set of questions developed by the team to facilitate the implementation of interviews with both teachers and students. Interviews were semi-structured with both questions on general situation of human rights friendly ethos in school and specific questions based on the

findings from the Checklist of that particular school. Follow-up and probing questions were asked during the interviews when interviewees mentioned issues which were noteworthy to obtain further information and explanations. In the actual implementation of interviews, respondents could transcend the pre-set questions to highlight any important areas they considered important.

2.4 Our Target School

Choice of School X in this case study was made due to its high scores from the findings of Indicators and Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools and the very positive comments we found in the focus group interviews. This report would shed light on how positive human rights friendly ethos could be cultivated. School X was founded in September, 2006 and is operated as a Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)¹ senior secondary school in Hong Kong. It only enrolls F.4 to F.7 students. The school has a unique mission to actualize creative education through school-based curriculum, comprising both multimedia performing arts and academic subjects. The school is co-educational and has no religious affiliation. The school building is very new, well equipped, and is located in the urban district. The school, just like other publicly-funded secondary schools in Hong Kong, will send its students to sit for standardized public examinations.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 School X as A Human Right Friendly School

The evaluation of the human rights-friendly school ethos of School X by both teachers and students was very positive. Referring to Table 1, the scale mean scores of all the nine areas of both teachers and students were higher than 3. Furthermore, among the 60 items of the Checklist, none of the items got a mean score lower than 3 from the students. For teachers, only 3 items in *A Secure School Environment* and 1 item in *The Implementation of HRE* got a mean score lower than 3.

¹ A direct subsidy scheme school is a publicly funded. But on top of government subsidy, it can also collect a limited amount of tuition fee from each student. Direct subsidy scheme schools are expected to develop their own niche but a majority of their students should study the local curriculum and sit for the local public examinations.

Table 1: Scale Mean Scores of Teachers and Students and Significant Difference between Teachers and Students in the Nine Areas

Area	Teachers			Students		
	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean
A Secure School Environment	3.88	2.63	3.20	5.00	1.00	3.67
A Friendly School Ethos	5.00	3.75	4.31	5.00	1.00	3.87
The Uphold of Students' Study Rights	4.78	3.44	4.24	5.00	1.00	3.96
Equal and Fair Treatment	5.00	4.00	4.52	5.00	1.00	3.94
Protection of and Appeal for Rights	4.83	3.83	4.35	5.00	1.00	3.91
Respect for Diversity and Differences	5.00	3.43	4.18	5.00	1.00	3.96
Democratic Participation and Learning	5.00	3.80	4.38	5.00	1.00	4.00
The Implementation of HRE	4.80	3.00	3.82	5.00	1.00	3.73
Being Loved, Respected and Blessed	5.00	1.75	3.75	5.00	1.00	3.82

In the following, results from the survey were discussed alongside with the positive comments obtained from focus group interviews under a number of different headings.

3.1.1 *A Friendly School Ethos and Being Loved, Respected and Blessed*

Both teachers and students gave a high score for the areas *A Friendly School Ethos* and *Being Loved, Respected and Blessed*. The mean score for *A Friendly School Ethos* was 4.31 and 3.87 for teachers and students respectively while the mean score for *Being Loved, Respected and Blessed* was 3.75 and 3.82 for teachers and students respectively. The close relationship between teachers and students and the respect and love students felt could be supported by the findings in the student focus group interviews:

“We become real friends with teachers...unlike what is so-called ‘teachers and students are just like friends’ in other schools”

“We call teachers by their name...maybe because of this, teachers and students are in a very equal position...they do not treat students as they are in a lower position from a high position”

3.1.2 *Equal and Fair Treatment and Protection of and Appeal for Rights*

This is the pre-published version.

Both teachers and students gave a high score for the areas *Equal and Fair Treatment* and *Protection of and Appeal for Rights*. The mean score for *Equal and Fair Treatment* was 4.52 and 3.94 for teachers and students respectively while the mean score for *Protection of and Appeal for Rights* was 4.35 and 3.91 for teachers and students respectively. Focus group interviews with students rendered supporting evidence:

“In the previous school you will get a demerit if you are late for 5 times...I would try to avoid getting demerit before but did not understand why it was wrong...but in this school, if you are late, teachers will discuss with you why you are late, and then think of a solution together...instead of just giving you a demerit”

“Searching of school bags only happens when there is theft.....we voluntarily let teachers see what were inside our bags instead”

3.1.3 Democratic Participation and Learning

Both teachers and students gave a high score for the area *Democratic Participation and Learning*. The mean score for *Democratic Participation and Learning* was 4.38 and 4.00 for teachers and students respectively. Student Voice, the Student Council of School X, acted as a vital platform for empowering students to participate in school governance, which resulted in their high level of satisfaction in the area of *Democratic Participation and Learning*. We now turn to have a look at a pertinent quotes collected from the interviews with teachers.

“We have a Student Council (known as Student Voice), which would discuss rules and present them to school, for example, school uniform, hair style are on the discussion list. Students had once discussed about the problems of food in the tuck shop. After discussion, they established a concern group for food and participated in improving the quality...we have provided a chance and a platform for students. If they participate actively, they can influence the issues.”

3.1.4 Respect for Diversity and Differences and the Uphold of Students’ Study Rights

Both teachers and students gave a high score for the areas *Respect for Diversity and Differences* and *the Uphold of Students’ Study Rights*. The mean score for *Respect for Diversity and Differences* was 4.18 and 3.96 for teachers and students respectively while the

mean score for *the Uphold of Students' Study Rights* was 4.24 and 3.96 for teachers and students respectively. Supporting positive comments were collected in the interview with students:

"From the angle of an art student, I am satisfied with this school, because it is an art school...teachers in my previous school would describe me as dirty when I had paint all over my body, but teachers in this school consider it as art. I finally have a sense of belonging. Apart from this, my previous school emphasized academic results. It treated students according to their academic results, like hierarchy. You could get more activities and were given awards if you scored higher marks. But this school is concerned about students' performance in art"

"The principal in my previous school was really annoying. He labeled all the bad students and put all resources in classes with good academic performance. I was always trampled when I was in the class with poor academic performance. Once I forgot to bring my textbook and I met him in the corridor. He scolded me loudly in the corridor...everybody could hear that...something as disrespectful to students as this could happen"

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Factors Contributing to School X's Success in Building up a Human Right Friendly Environment

The road to building up a human right friendly school ethos may not be totally identical for all schools but it is the intention in writing this article that we can share with its readers how a school can do it with some successes. Hopefully, this can be of reference value to schools that are also trying to make its environment more human right friendly.

In reviewing the case of School X, it can be discerned that the human right friendly school ethos doesn't come by chance. Instead, it is the result of different factors, comprising inter alia commitment by the school leaders, institutional design, as well as real practices in the school.

4.1.1. Commitment of the School Leaders

Mission Statement of School X stated that the school aims at “cultivating a learning community which develops together with a creative economic and civil society”. Civil society is indeed seldom mentioned in schools’ mission statements in Hong Kong where school education has often been criticized as examination focused and training of docility. The emphasis on civil society clearly implies active citizenry who are rights conscious and participation active. The following were excerpted from an earlier research study with the school that covered school leaders². Such school leaders include supervisor, directors, principal, vice principals and senior teachers. This can be exemplified by the quotes below.

“Students should have knowledge and passion for the society.

They should feel being part of the society, and they should be well informed and actively participating. They should know their rights, responsibilities, and how to make things better.”

“A good citizen should be able to help in improving the society for quality living, both physical and metaphysical by voicing his opinions to influence the public policies”

“Get involved in the civil society and be so in an informed way”

School X’s leaders shared a distinct mission of expecting students to have active concern for the civil society and be able to communicate with others to influence the communal lives. This undergirded the constructing of a human right friendly school environment as students were not discouraged, as in many school cases, but strongly encouraged instead to be rights conscious, vocal, participatory, and being active as members of the civil society. The commitment of the leadership and management to placing rights and participation of students at the heart of all policies and practice was the major contributing factors that make School X a human rights respecting school (UNICEF, 2007; UNICEF UK, 2010, 3013).

4.1.2 Institutional Design

At issue now is how such philosophical commitment of the leaders was translated into institutional design which would provide a framework for allowing students to become rights conscious and participation active students, i.e. the human rights friendly principles have to be brought to daily school life through the institutional design. We have followed the development of the school and found that it had a number of institutional arrangements

² The study was conducted in 2008 when the school was newly founded.

to help accomplishing its unique mission of nurturing students to become rights conscious and participatory citizens. These in return helped bring about a human right friendly school ethos.

4.1.2.1 Students' Role in Governance

The school had actively engaged students in its governance with governance here construed as the making of policies affecting school life and the daily operation of the school. There were a number of channels for students to take up an active role in governance, thus providing in the school room for rich democratic participation and learning democracy by doing, which echoed with Fong (1993).

First, the school started with holding summits with students from time to time. Summits could be held with students on controversial issues so that the management can know the students' views and that a decision agreeable to both can be reached. Examples of such contentious issues discussed were students' involvement in admission exercise, the right to use cellular phones in school, etc. Summits usually took the form of direct dialogues between all the students and the administration in the school hall. No formal rules were set to allow for a more comfortable exchange of ideas. After a summit had been convened, the students could be allowed to make rules for themselves.

The arrangement of summits was both a way to enhance democratic participation and a means to realize students' right to form and air their opinions about how the school should be run and this is a right the students, as members of the community, are well entitled. Summits might have the effect of empowerment and might serve as a means to avoid highly popular policies being pursued without allowing the students a way to comment. This helped to make the school more human and friendly. However, the arrangement might become unilateral and ad hoc as they were often convened on controversial issues the school leaders thought they needed to talk with student.

School X eventually also set up a platform known as Student Voice. This was actually an assembly with assigned timeslot (once a week) for students to gather and come up with agendas and discuss. Often, their agendas would be related to school policies, like whether deep-fried food should be allowed in the tuck shop, whether dyeing of hair should be allowed, and whether it was time to redesign the school uniform etc. Once the students could come to their consensus, the school administration would respond to students' decisions.

4.1.2.2 Simple School Rules

School rules are often contentious particularly in the consideration of a human right friendly school ethos. Schools rules, if set appropriately, can help ensure equal and fair treatment of students and the protection of rights (Fong, 1993). On the other hand, such rules can be draconian and rights invasive if they are excessive. Most schools in Hong Kong keep a very elaborate set of school rules, enacted without the participation of students, in terms of forbidden behaviors which are enforced with specified punishments. This is not a unique Hong Kong practice. Schimmel (2003) for example explained how in the US students had been expected to play a non-participating, unquestioning role with regard to school rules. Raby (2005) also reported a lack of student participation in rule making from his study done in Ontario, Canada.

School X on the contrary passed a set of loose guidelines, with both encouraged and discouraged behaviors, thus leaving room for continued negotiation and adjustment. The guidelines in its original form are listed in the following table.

Table 2: Encouraged Behaviours and Unacceptable Behaviours of School X

Encouraged Behaviors	Unacceptable behaviors
Be initiative in learning and participate actively with joy	Unlawful acts
Concern for people and matters, respect for both individual and community	Bullying and violence
Balance between rights and responsibly	Smoking in the campus or in school uniform
Value time and resource	Showing disrespect to teachers and schoolmates
Develop creativity by positive means	Cheating
Develop healthy life style	Harassment
To adopt an open attitude towards issues	Vulgar language
Have courage to implement decisions	Using mobile in class without teachers' permission
	Lateness, truancy and absent without reasons
	Changing natural color of the hair

It should be noted that the rules were set after consultation with students. This is atypical in the case of Hong Kong where almost all the schools hand out rules like a decree.

It's a right of the students to be heard in school rule making, their voice was heeded in this case. This was also a sign of respect and a form of democratic participation. The unacceptable behaviors as stipulated in the school rules, namely the prohibition of unlawful acts, bullying and violence, harassment, and use of vulgar language, were forbidden to provide a secure and non-threatening school environment. The conformity with human rights principles when designing school rules was a contributor to the human rights friendly school ethos in School X (Fong, 1993).

4.1.2.3 Student-Designed Uniform

In Hong Kong, primary and secondary students are normally required to wear school uniforms, with neither choice of color nor style. Whilst requiring students to wear school uniforms, School X allowed students to be directly engaged in designing the school uniform. The student-designed school uniform came in with options (in terms of colors and styles etc.) and individual student could make his/ her choice by choosing between the options allowed. Apart from making good use of the artistic talents of the students, this arrangement did send out a clear message of respect to students and allow for some differences amongst the students whilst preserving the need of having a uniform.

As illustrated above, students' participation was encouraged and well treasured by School X as shown in the summits, Student Voice, designs of student uniform and school rules. All elements for students' participation, including voice, space, audience and influence had been well addressed (Lundy, 2007). The various human rights respecting institutional arrangements contributed to the building up of a human rights friendly school ethos (UNICEF, 2007; UNICEF UK, 2010, 2013).

4.1.3 Supportive Practices

Philosophical commitment of leaders and institutional set up alone couldn't make the school environment human right friendly if they were not buttressed by practices supportive of it. This section reports examples of such supportive practices which were cited in the interviews.

4.1.3.1 Teachers Are Friendly, Approachable and Liberal

The following excerpts of student discourses better illustrates this:

“We are real friends...The staff room here is open to all students...they want to let students drop-in and find teachers to discuss their academic or personal issues at anytime when they wish. Teachers are very liberal, they do not reject students”

“Teachers in the previous school thought that they were always right...They would not give you any chance to explain. It is different here; there is a room for discussion. You have a chance to explain when you do something wrong. You will get a fair treatment after your explanation. I feel comfortable in this area”

4.1.3.2 Diversity in Students’ Development Is Valued

This can be reflected in student discourses reported below:

“Even students were weak in art...they can work hard in other areas, for example in academic. Some special awards are given to students who join a lot of activities outside. School also encourages students to participate in social movements. In my previous school, if you join demonstration, you would be considered as silly and anti-government...but this school emphasizes exploring issues from different angles, not only in a single way”

“In this school if you have your reasons, and a right motive behind, school will provide you with lots of resources, space and opportunities to do what you want. The school is liberal; you can do what you want if you do not create trouble for other people. For example, we have an activity to recycle plastic bottles in the patio. A lot of plastic bottles have been recycled, which is good. If we want to have this type of activities in traditional schools, they will definitely reject; because it may affect the image of the school, or it may be dangerous. They have lots of excuses to reject us”.

4.1.3.3 Students Treasure Participation in School Governance

The following discourse represents how a student described how they would participate in the platform Student Voice:

“If we want to discuss an issue, we have to follow the procedure of Legislative Council, pass through First Reading, Second Reading and Third Reading. First Reading is voting by students, and then it passes to Second Reading, which is staff meeting, and then to the Board, finally the decision is made”

4.1.3.4 Teachers Encourage Student Participation in School Governance

This can best be exemplified in a teacher’s discourse reported below:

“Student Voice is composed of students’ speeches most of the time. Even if teachers give speeches, it does not affect those of students. Teachers only express their opinions on certain issues. Furthermore, the transparency for school governance was very high. Staff meetings were open for the students to sit in. Students could discuss and respond to the issues they heard in the staff meetings.”

The practices discussed above manifested that students, teachers and school leaders in School X all collaborated to develop and maintain a rights-respecting school community (Amnesty International, 2012; Covell, Howe, and McNeil, 2010; Fong, 1993; Howe, 2005; Howe and Covell, 2009; UNICEF, 2007; UNICEF UN, 2010, 2013), which students’ rights and participation were well respected and treasured.

5. CONCLUSION

We found from our study that at least as for School X, the success of building up a human right friendly school ethos can be attributed to the convergence of three constituting elements, namely commitment of school leaders, institutional design, and supportive practices by both teachers and students. These elements scaffold each other and together construct the human right friendly ethos. This can be exemplified by Figure 1 below.

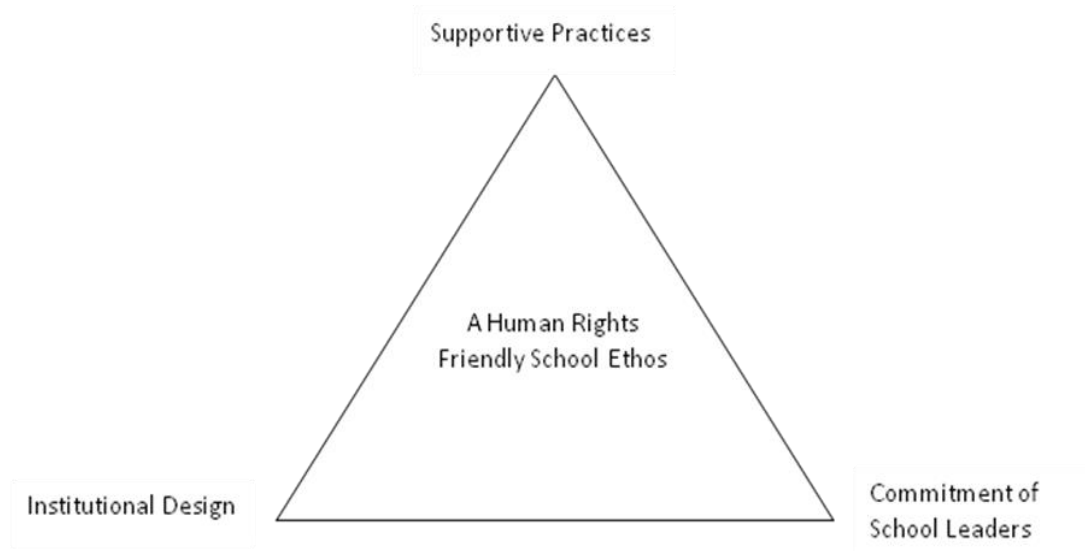


Figure 1: Elements Contributing to a Human Rights Friendly School Ethos

The contributing factors to human rights friendly school ethos include the commitment of the school leaders to the rights of children (UNICEF UK, 2010, 2013) and collaboration of all stakeholders to develop and maintain a human rights friendly school which embraces human rights as core operating and organizing principles (Amnesty International, 2012; Fong, 1993; UNICEF, 2007; UNICEF UK, 2010, 2013).

Commitment of school leaders and their philosophical disposition are found to be important in the literature. UNICEF UK (2010, 2013) emphasized the importance of leadership and management of schools in placing the values and principles of human rights at the heart of all policies and practice. Trafford (1997) explained that the process of democratization demands a great deal from school managers, particularly heads. The importance of the head teacher was also mentioned in Huddleston (2007). As pointed out by Dobozy (2007), one of the features of democratic schools, which share many features with human rights friendly schools, is that the heads of the school perceive the school to be no 'ordinary' school and are distinctively different from traditional schools.

Concerning institutional design, the importance of school council is much discussed in the literature. Lundy (2007) stressed that to respect students' rights to participate in all matters related to their interests, all four elements of voice, space, audience and influence must be well addressed. Alderson (2000) emphasized student council is important both as an indicator of respect of students' participation rights and as a formal, democratic, transparent, accountable and whole-school policy forum. Backman and Trafford (2006) considered student council as an indicator of democratic governance. Huddleston (2007)

suggested that the student council should not be rigidly limited with regard to the topics it can discuss or students' enthusiasm will fade. Our study showed that School X had respected its council, known as Student Voice, not just by allowing it a very wide scope of concern, but also by enlisting it as a partner in governance. This of course served to realize and protect the rights of students. On top of the student council, School X opened up the governance system and permitted its students to take part in such decision making which students were normally excluded: making of school rules and designing school uniform etc. These definitely enriched the students' chance for participation and exercise of rights (Amnesty International, 2012; Fong, 1993).

Supportive practices by teachers and students deserve some elaborations here. Believing that students can act out in a way in support of a human right friendly school ethos actually is grounded on affirmation of students' status. Osler and Starkey (2005) for example explained that children are now recognized as "citizens in their own right" instead of "citizens-in-waiting". The passing of the United Nation's Convention on the Right of the Child had far-reaching consequences on teaching and learning as well as school governance (Amnesty International, 2012; UNICEF, 2007). But more basically we should note the change in mentality undergirding the development. In the case we reviewed, School X entrusted her students with rights to participation and this was returned with enthusiasm and positive involvement by the students. This was vividly exemplified by the students' discourses in relation to their appreciation of the school and their active participation in Student Voice as reported above.

Devine (2002) pointed out that teachers can feel uncomfortable with student's empowerment as it is seen as threatening. The authoritarian tendency of teachers to both teaching and preferred leadership style was also reported in Carter and Osler (2000). Ekholm (2004) on the other hand pointed out that for democratic schools to be viable, teachers should be willing to give up some of their privileges and powers on the one hand, and spend time discussing the meaning of school democracy with the students. In the case we reviewed, School X's teachers had shown such openness and were more willing to accept their student on equal terms. This, together with the dedication of the students in participation, actually became the force that drove the open, democratic and rights respecting institutions to work.

In this case study, we believe that to build up a human right friendly school ethos, we have to bring together the three constituting elements, namely school leaders dedicated to human rights, institutional arrangements allowing for rights fulfillment and participation, and supportive practices by both teachers and students. In the case reviewed, we observed

This is the pre-published version.

the following sequential order. First there was the formation of a team of liberal minded school leaders (supervisors, management committee members, and principal and deputy principals). This was followed by agreement on participatory and rights respecting philosophy. Then teachers and students who shared the philosophy were recruited whilst various institutional arrangements were gradually enacted. Readers of course need to be reminded that we studied a newly founded school here. For schools with tradition and history, perhaps it may be reasonable to expect that existing philosophy, ethos, institutions and practices can also have impact on selection and hence dispositions of leaders.

If we revisit the Evaluative Checklist for Human Rights Friendly Environment in Schools, the very instrument adopted in this study, we should note that Area 10 ***“Being loved, respected and blessed”*** actually penetrates the other nine areas. Fong (1993) stated that the essence of human rights education is the feeling of human dignity, respect, caring and love. Education should focus on students' sense of self-value, or else, education will lose its worth, and become the country's "persecution" and "basic human harms" of the vulnerable. If students do not have the sense of being loved and respected in school, they probably will not love and respect the others when they grow up. Shafer (1987) also suggested that in a democratic classroom, every student should be respected by the others. Thus, teachers and students should participate together in designing and implementing teaching plans in an environment full of love and care. This is the essential element of a human rights friendly classroom environment, which acts as a basis for human rights education. This belief was actually supported in our study as we found that many students considered their school as rights-respecting because they could clearly discern the ethos of friendliness, love and care.

We cannot claim that our theory can be generalized given that this is a single case study done in one cultural context whilst the impact of school and cultural differences certainly can't be ruled out. It may also be illuminating if this article based on a relatively successful case can be compared and contrasted with other less favorable cases so that how factors can act for and against the rights-respecting ethos can be better explored. Notwithstanding these, we hope what we found in this study can be a reference to researchers and school leaders who are interested in enhancing human rights in schools.

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