

**IHRTP 2007 - June 13, 2007**

***The Role of Human Rights Education in the Process of Global Social Change***

**JEFF PLANTILLA, Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS),  
Osaka, Japan**

We need to have more knowledge about human rights education (HRE); know exactly what our objectives are.

What incentives are there to pursue HRE?

- The problem of poverty
  - The problem of illiteracy
  - Globalization and its consequences
  - Migration, viewed as a problem
  - The problem of occupation and war, civil or other
  - Climate change, and how it affects the displacement of people
- All of these are problems that need to be faced.

What already exists?

- Community education
- Social action
- Popular education, democratic education, encouraging people to take action
- Formal education, schools, universities
- Government staff training

These are our opportunities but also our limitations. We need them to exist but we also need to change them, to improve them. Our ultimate goal should be global social change.

Who is already doing HRE?

- HR organizations
- Legal groups
- Government centers

What to do?

What to do given the challenges, the limitations, but also the opportunities?

- Participants (Ps) mentioned that the thing to do is to educate the powerful people, who play key roles in society (lawyers, politicians).
- Importance of networking, groups working together
- Having a program of action
- Integrity: groups working on HR can not violate HR
- Advocacy and lobbying, especially towards government, in order to encourage the spread of HRE
- Mechanisms for HR educators, to minimize the risks they face and protect them
- Mass awareness campaigns, to make as many people aware of HR issues as possible
- The use of local cultures in HRE; making use of the positive side of every local culture to produce change

In his own experience, Jeff feels the biggest challenge is to bring HR issues to a grassroots level – making everyone aware, concerned and active.

**SHIRLEY SARNA, Interim Director, Département d'éducation, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec.**

Pretending to be a Minister of Education, Shirley told participants (Ps) she was an intolerant, impatient person and that she didn't have time to talk about HRE.

The Ps had to convince her of its importance.

She told them HR were already respected by the legislation of her country - what more did they need?

HR discourse, moreover, was disturbing. Only clear codes of conduct were necessary in a country. HR discourse was also a western idea, and didn't need to be adopted by other countries.

Finally, obsession for HR and HRE might just increase problems, she argued.

Answers of Ps:

- HRE must begin at a very young age and continue through university. It should be multi and cross sectoral, and take place in formal and informal educational contexts. It must be implemented in all departments, from that of family affairs to that of education, and must be taught in the legal and judicial systems. It must contain a broad and transversal approach. It must also make use of participatory methods.
- Ps felt HRE should focus on women in particular, as women are the principal victims of HR violations. Special attention should also be paid to ethnic minorities, and everything should be translated into their languages, as social inclusion is fundamental.
- HRE should be transmitted orally for those who do not have access to formal education. Efforts must be made to train those already involved in HRE: NGO members, educators, trainers, and those belonging to active NGO networks.
- These people moreover are not paid sufficiently, they lack financial resources.
- Importance of reducing conflicts, which undermines HRE.
- HRE can improve society, reduce violence. In Canada, young students and professional learn how to manage their disputes in peaceful ways.
- A population informed of its rights is capable of acting for the defense of those rights.
- Consensus in the group was that HRE constituted a crucial link within the field of knowledge, the link between knowing how to be and knowing what to become. HRE will facilitate emancipation for various marginalized sectors of society, from women, to the handicapped, the poor, and people from remote areas or impoverished urban centers. The goal is to liberate the potential of marginalized people, to call on their dynamism. Traditionally, broad ranges of society have been excluded and must be liberated.

In conclusion, Shirley calls upon Ps to continue to dream.  
Victor Hugo said that there was nothing better than a dream to engender the future.

**KRISTI RUDELIUS-PALMER, Educator, Human Rights Centre, University of Minnesota**

How do we know HRE works? How do we hold ourselves accountable? How can we be transparent and effective? How can we make sure our practice for social change is working?

We need baselines, assessments made at the beginning, to know where we are going and if it is working. We need to know how to share what we are doing. We need to use methodologies that are acceptable for local communities.

We need to always make sure we are working with target communities and impacting them positively.

The importance of creativity: we need to view ourselves as creative artisans of change, keeping creation and innovation alive. We need to focus on knowledge, attitudes and skills.

To all those guidelines, Ps added the importance of evaluation and development - two key points within our own teaching practices. With respect to evaluation, Ps talked about monitoring and about learning from one's mistakes. They stressed that evaluation was linked with promoting constant development. We have to be open and innovative as HR educators in order to be effective, and look at our own capacity-building in development.

How do we communicate what we learn?

- Use Equitas Community to share and network
- Promote other ways of creative networking,
- Use on-line technologies
- Make sure to integrate all these tools in our practice

How can inconsistencies in laws be challenged at all levels, not just locally but nationally?

- The importance of promoting effective connections at that effect.
- Making use of judiciary roles, using educational systems
- Looking back at strategies that have been effective in the past

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Planning tools in curriculum area: click on "action steps" - accountability process of 7 steps

Planning tool could be used a plan or program in Ps organization

1: need - what is the need behind HRE? - Assessments

2: sharing stories

3: generating ideas for potential actions

- 4- acting them out
- 5: community impact
- 6: reflection on accountability
- 7: communication and demonstrating HR-learning back to a larger group

Finally, we need to take time to celebrate what we are doing, breathe and connect with each other, share stories, see how we've impacted others and others have impacted us, remember positive moments.

### **Question and answer period**

In response to a question on "who discriminates against whom", Jeff Plantilla states that there exists systems of discrimination. It is not just the government that discriminates and discrimination does not always take place against one particular group, in one particular form. Discrimination is a system and a complex one.

In response to a question on "who constitutes a HR educator", Jeff declares that anyone can be an educator and should be, because the problem is so big, but that it is also important to agree on a common set of principles in carrying out HRE

A HR educator in short is someone who is doing something to improve the problem of HR.

Shirley Sarna spoke of a project of the Quebec HR Commission, linked with Bing from Equitas who belongs to the committee. She described a situation that was brought to the attention of the HR Commission concerning migrant workers from Guatemala, Ecuador and Haiti. The workers were being severely exploited in an agriculture firm 20 min from John Abbott. They were not paid their wages and they were segregated from other employees. The situation was completely unacceptable, similar to apartheid. Migration is a HR issue, even here in Canada, even 20 min away from John Abbott. The Commission taught the employees that they had rights and that they needed to work together to stop this system of exploitation. The Commission summoned the employers to meetings on HR. They did something similar for employees in Spanish and Creole.

Shirley argues that a person does not have to belong to a target group to be an educator. She just has to have a sense of justice, act as a model and inspire trust.

Regarding HR educators, Kristi adds that we must also be our own evaluators. We need to have an accountability checklist that touches upon knowledge, skills and actions.

We have to aim at achieving a consensus, linking each other and the systems.

Question of Ps on HR culture vs. HR values. We already have our own cultures, we want to include HR values in our cultures, integrate them. Question of culture is not tangible. Cultures require long time to develop and spring from the ones we already have.

Shirley does not see a contradiction between the two. Our task as HR educators is to find links between the two and join them together. We must look at religious beliefs, languages, the role of women, children etc. There are always ways to connect our culture to a culture of HR. She does not think there any culture exists that excludes HR.

Jeff feels that a HR culture is not just question of culture, in the sense of a social culture. It is way of thinking and living. It does not make you different from the rest of society. You are part of society, of your culture, but you have a passion for HR

With respect to a question on the war on terror, Jeff reminds Ps of the authoritarian governments in the 70s who told many lies to people for them to behave. People, however, should not sacrifice freedom for security. He stressed the importance of emphasizing fundamental liberties, rule of law, protection of rights and ensuring that people's rights are protected and not violated in the name of the war on terror. Our liberties are not restricted because of the terrorists.

Kristi adds that the question of borders, whether physical, linguistic etc. tied to the war on terror, is our greatest challenge today.

We must recognize that people evolve, ideas evolve, and even HR evolve. We must be careful, constantly question ourselves, always be accountable, and constantly challenge ourselves and others. Keeping accountability and cross check system working constantly in the US, importance of global partners and communities to keep US government in cross-check.