

HOW TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE JAPANESE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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1. BACKGROUND

In Japan, education in social work began in the 1920's. It was a time when the idea of "children's rights" came to be recognized by the League of Nations. This key point became the basis of child welfare education in Japan. During the 1930's, especially toward the beginning of World War II, education in social work itself was put under heavy restriction by the national government. It is easy to understand that the ideas of basic human rights were far from being included within the education for social work under the fascist regime in Japan.

The World War II ended in 1945. The new Constitution of Japan was enacted, and Article 9 renounces all the war forever.

Article 11 states:

The people shall not be prevented from enjoying any of the fundamental human rights. These fundamental human rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be conferred upon the people of this and future generation as eternal and inviolate rights.

Also important, in relation to fundamental human rights is Article 25. It reads;

All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living. In all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health.

Thus, Article 25 made it clear that social welfare is based on fundamental human rights, especially on the right to life.

Subsequently, this idea was clarified and extended in the 1950s and 60s by various welfare legislations such as the Daily Life Security Law, the Child Welfare Law, the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons, the Law for the Welfare of Mentally Retarded Persons, the Law for Maternal and Child welfare, the Law for the Welfare of the Aged, etc. Meanwhile, education in social work education has tended to treat the concept of human rights as a legal matter only. Though the legal discussion of human rights is important, it is not sufficient. Students need full recognition the true meaning of human rights not only as a word

in the constitution. They must be taught to understand human rights as a precious heritage of man's history won through innumerable agonizing struggles in various parts of the world. In other words, the understanding of the idea of human rights in regard to social welfare has been rather limited one in Japan.

2. THE ACTUAL SITUATION

Underlying the process described above, in reality democracy in Japan was still premature at that time because the educators of social work were themselves educated under the "old regime". Hence, although the 'practice of social work' required protecting the basic rights of all human beings as its essential core, actually the matter remained only a slogan, without application to concrete cases. The principles of the social welfare laws and policies were not reflected enough in the methods of social work. I dare to say that the theories of social welfare did not equate the idea of human rights with the concrete needs, necessary conditions, policies and their implication on people's life.

To illustrate the situation above, I would like to point out that an important area of social discrimination has been never taught in schools of social work. One of the typical issues might be the welfare of the mentally ill. In Japan, active welfare measures for the mentally ill are yet to be taken, and only a few hospitals are staffed with medical social workers. This often causes situations in which the human rights of the mentally ill are infringed upon, for example, isolating them in mental hospitals for years. We must admit that the social welfare education is seriously defective as long as it does not show concern for such kinds of hidden problems.

Furthermore, we almost entirely ignore social problems abroad. In education for social welfare little attention has been given to the tremendous hardships endured by people in developing countries. Only a few universities offer courses on world peace and international welfare.

Consequently, there is a tendency for students' interests to be limited to the statute welfare policies and programs, while those much needed and challenging practices in pioneering fields do not attract much of their attention. Of course, there are some social workers making great efforts in such new fields of welfare for the mentally ill and the handicapped as well as international welfare. They are working to ensure human rights for those who are most discriminated against. I hope that the effort of those social workers will be given more recognition in the practice and education of social welfare as a whole, and that their contributions will be incorporated in the development of the welfare theory.

3. SOME ISSUES ARISING

In order to improve the situation in regard to the problems raised above, I would like to emphasize several points and make some proposals.

First, the entire teaching staff must share the responsibility to teach the philosophy of welfare and professional ethics relevant to the suffering of human beings throughout the world. It must be based on their own belief in the dignity of man, and be concretely related to the reality of today's social problems. Only through these teachings, the true sense of "human rights" grow within the students.

One of the difficulties lies in the tendency in social work education in its effort to raise its academic standard, it has come to develop rather narrow specializations such as methods of clinical work, institutional management, policy analysis and the like. Those specializations are necessary and desirable, but at the same time, there is a danger of losing the opportunity to discuss some of the essential values of social welfare in our classrooms.

I want to make it clear that I am certainly not opposing the development of those specializations. Rather, I think it is important that the consciousness of human rights be present in each and every "specialized" course. For example, the keen sense of human rights as a basic necessity in welfare survey which quite often involves the issues of privacy, need to be taught repeatedly in the "social work research" course.

Also extremely important is that every faculty member should express his or her genuine concern for, and direct experiences with the human rights' issues. We must never lose an opportunity in or out of our classrooms to arouse our students' interest in these issues. In doing so, we teach students that human rights are not merely abstract ideas, but are concerns which call for real action, related very closely to our own lives as well. Thereby we gain true insight into our way of life.

Second, the students must have opportunities to learn from lives of people who have devoted themselves to the protection of human rights. In addition it is notable worth for these young people to hear from the older generations of their experiences during the War and how the War infringed upon human rights.

The study of the history is especially important in Japan, because students often have the mistaken idea that the discussion of human right is a post-war phenomenon in Japan. They think that it was brought from abroad after the defeat of World War II. They have little awareness of the long history of the fight for human rights in Japan, and how it was suppressed before and during the War. Furthermore, the younger generations do not have any knowledge of the bitter history of our social

welfare education which was cut down during the War when even the use of the term "human rights" was prohibited as offensive to the military government's policy. Without knowledge of this historical background, an understanding of "human rights" would naturally become superficial. Students of social welfare need to have a real understanding of the meaning of "human rights" and a full knowledge of how they have been realized by the efforts of many people in Japan and in other countries. They should also realize how essential it is that the people become fully aware of the need for the protection of basic human rights, and consequently, how the preservation of peace will insure human rights.

In the course of the study of history, tangible evidence for the disregard of human rights in modern Japan should be brought out. For instance, the Ashio mine intoxication case during the Meiji era is a good example of the public and governmental indifference to a serious pollution problem which was not known until recently. Cases are also found in the inhumane treatment of the mentally ill and of the aged who lived in institutions during wartime. Their food was so restricted that they eventually died of starvation. This was done in order to supply food for the army. Nevertheless, there were social workers at that time who worked closely with them in the face of many difficulties to secure as much food, shelter, and clothing as possible. Many died on the job. We should never forget that peace is the solid basis of welfare while wars destroy it.

Third, education through field work needs to be emphasized: Participation in international campaigns for the protection of human rights is an important part. In many cases, field work placements tend to be limited to institutions and agencies of conventional type. However, an organization such as the Japan Civil Liberties Union which is carrying on a campaign to protest against the unjust hospitalization and inhumane treatment of mental patients, would make a very good educational opportunity for social welfare students. The Union consists mainly of lawyers with some other professionals and citizens who express concern for social justice and welfare. Participating in their programs, students can learn what it is really like to protect the human rights of mental patients.

To cite a few more examples, there is the Center for Asian Women Workers' Fellowship which was established in Tokyo in 1983. The following is a text describing the objectives of this Center. It says; ".....seeking cheap, docile women workers, many international corporations based both in Japan and the West have moved production to various Asian countries since the 1970s. Most of the women workers in textile, garment, and electronics industries are in their late teens or early twenties. Low wages, long working hours, and midnight shifts make manifest the

inhumane working conditions. Their attempts at organization are a sheer struggle for health and survival. We create a linkage between providing accurate information and other resources, as well as making the Japanese conscious of Asian issues."

Another example is the Asian Women's Shelter, founded in 1986 as "a new ministry for young women from other Asian countries, who lured to Japan by promises of lucrative employment, fall victim to sexual exploitation." Within a very short time since it began operating, the centre is able to provide valuable experiences to those students who have chosen it as the place for their field work. They learn there what it really means in regard to the protection of human rights for these women and what are the various methods to cope with related problems.

Participation in the organizations and activities of voluntary groups for aid to the children in Africa, or assistance in relieving the burdens of daily life for the handicapped and the aged of the community will be another large area of exceedingly valuable education. Those groups welcome students' active involvement and ideas and in turn, the students' learning experiences will be even more enriched. Voluntary groups and organizations have special abilities in teaching students to have a genuine concern for what is most needed, how to express concern by action.

Fourth, the involvement of students in social surveys of the socially handicapped and those who are discriminated against should be encouraged more. If possible, experiences of participating in research projects in developing countries, and to study first hand the conditions of the life and labor of the people would be of great value. Experiences in international programs are meaningful for students in all countries. I hope it will be possible to combine our efforts in order to start planning some kind of sharing program through our international organization.

It may sound extremely unrealistic, I suppose, since this type of teaching has not yet been discussed among educators in social work. However, I would like to point out several factors which might work favorably toward the realization of such projects. They are appearing rather recently around us. To begin with, an increasing number of people are traveling to Asia and Africa. Moreover more students and former students accompanying their families have experienced living in Asian and African countries. Such opportunities could be utilized effectively if we can prepare them by giving them good orientation and guidance. Also exchange programs of students between countries are increasing, as well as comparative and crosscultural investigation projects in social welfare. Though Japanese schools of social work have long been learning only from European and American countries, there is a need to learn more from countries in other parts of the world. Until we

achieve the protection of human rights in all parts of the world, we cannot fully realize the protection of human rights in our own countries. The work of the above mentioned Center for Asian Workers' Fellowship clearly demonstrates this truth.

Fifth, instructors should be encouraged to utilize audio-visual material to a much greater extent when teaching about the actual conditions of the socially handicapped, and of the problems of life, labor and health in developing countries. It will supplement direct experiences students gain through field work and research. Also, it would give students a fuller picture of social problems and the suffering people. For example, students can follow the processes of physical and mental development among severely handicapped children through video films recorded for many years from various angles, showing the children's relationships with family members, friends, social workers, teachers, and other professionals and volunteers. Audio-visual media transmits ample information without time or geographical barriers.

Good teaching materials are urgently needed. We need to work on producing a number of movies and video tapes, and on inventing ways for their creative use in classrooms. The use of such well prepared audio-visual materials will help students to integrate knowledge from other courses and direct experiences in field work thereby gaining a total picture and deep understanding of the human rights issues today. The responsibility of social workers in protecting human rights will become clearly understood as well.

Education concerning human rights, its thought and actual situations, are both the starting point and the foundation of all social welfare education. It will eventually lead to a true comprehension of the very heart of social welfare.

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