

PANEL 4
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION BEYOND SCHOOLING
Links between formal and non-formal education

CASE STUDY: CANADA¹

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Cassie Palamar argued that feelings of exclusion, marginalization or discrimination and racism prevent some people from fully contributing to the political, economic, social or cultural life in their community. Increasing diversity has seen a parallel increase in systematic discrimination. Though the issue of discrimination in Canada is long standing in relation to the country's aboriginal communities, current discrimination now extends to new and growing minority populations, resulting in complex human rights issues.

Resolving and settling human rights complaints are an important part of the work of all human rights commissions established at the provincial level in Canada, including the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. What is more important however, is the preventative and promotional work that takes place through education, and the recognition of need of community involvement in education to address human rights issues.

Given its service to the entire community as well as its non-formal educational structure, educational work carried out by the Commission is typically non-formal. At the community level, human rights education (HRE) work involves all sectors including the not for profit and profit sectors, through educational development projects which engage people to achieve goals of social change as a community. These educational projects are crucial for the protection of human rights values and the creation of a culture of human rights. In order to have a sustainable impact throughout society, HRE must be accessible, relevant and responsive to the needs of both individuals and communities. This will enhance both family and individual well-being and encourage social cohesion. This wide-scale approach is also an effective way of addressing systemic inequities.

Another important area to be targeted in dealing with HRE in non-formal settings is the private sector. In addition to the community development perspective, our work in the field of HRE is guided by a research-based model called "Pathways to Change".² In this model, public education and awareness-raising are key strategies applied in the area of employment. The workplace generates a high volume of human rights related complaints, including discrimination. A large part of the Commission's work aims to reduce discrimination in the workplace area. This is done through a curriculum-based educational programme that teaches employers to build respectful office environments.

¹ Excerpted from *From Universal Declaration to World Programme: 1948-2008: 60 years of human rights education* [A report on the UNESCO Round Table "Putting human rights into practice: The role of education 10-11 December 2008]

² For more information : <http://culture.alberta.ca/educationfund/priorities/docs/PathwaysToChange.pdf>

The programme is customized to meet the needs of specific organizations, and as it is funded directly by the organization in question, it is a self-sustaining initiative.

The ability to target all sectors of the community is an important feature of HRE. The Alberta Commission has developed an initiative that targets adults who have been historically difficult to reach, including non-English speakers. Through the creation of a newspaper-type publication entitled, “Human Rights in Alberta”³, human rights concepts as well as existing protective mechanisms are explained to the public. This publication features plain language and art in order to reach people at all literacy levels. This is the first publication of its kind, and to date, it has been very successful. The publication is also available in audio form so that people can listen while reading the words. An accompanying educational guide for teachers and tutors was also created. This project has been so successful; it is currently being used in formal educational settings even though this was not its intended purpose.

Racism and discrimination are major concerns in most Canadian communities. The Commission works closely with local governments and other partners to realize a UNESCO initiative: the Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination⁴. This coalition is intended to act as a network of solidarity and exchange among municipal authorities world wide. Under the framework of this project, education is considered a key area for local authorities and stakeholders to make a positive impact on the public. This is clearly an important initiative. However there have been some setbacks. While municipalities may wish to make commitments to affect positive change and address problems of racism and discrimination in their communities, they may not have the necessary capacities to take this action. The gap between their intention and their ability to do so must be closed.

Other concerns stem from the fact that many people continue to encounter discrimination and racism in their day-to-day interactions with people on the street: an “us vs. them” mentality persists in many communities. This raises the question of how to motivate people to change these attitudes and behaviours. One way that has proven successful in Calgary, is the use of media partnerships. Through a series of public service announcements, people are encouraged to make positive changes to improve inter-cultural relations and communication. These advertisements have proven very successful, due in large part, to the wide reach of the campaign. In addition, teacher materials were created to accompany the ads. These materials can be used in either a workplace or a school setting. Feedback indicates that the ads have been very meaningful to many different groups in society. This initiative could serve as a model for other communities.

In terms of outreach to youth, educators in HRE across Canada have designed an interactive web-based resource to engage youth in learning and dialogue on issues relating to human rights⁵. This initiative was developed in commemoration of the 60th

³For more information :

http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/1316.asp

⁴ For more information : <http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/cmard.asp>

⁵ <http://www.tigweb.org/themes/udhr60/>

anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and explores contemporary human rights issues such as the work of the Provincial Human Rights Commissions, various legislative frameworks and practical ideas for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Funding and financial support are very important in the success of any organization. The Alberta Commission is supported by the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Educational Fund⁶. This fund receives an annual allocation from the [Alberta Lottery Fund](#) to foster equality, promote fairness and encourage inclusion in the community which serves to reduce discrimination and barriers to full participation in society for all Albertans. This is very unique method of funding for human rights organizations but has proven quite successful. It could perhaps be implemented in other communities.

Protecting human rights is clearly a challenging and complex task. In order that these efforts have a sustainable impact, work must be undertaken across many dimensions, from formal to non-formal and involving all community stakeholders. Continuous learning for both students and educators is also a key condition for success. We must encourage organizations to be proactive versus becoming involved only when human rights issues arise. We must also move beyond consultation to a full measured engagement.

⁶ <http://culture.alberta.ca/educationfund/default.aspx>