

Executive Summary of CTF Survey on Human Rights Education

Overview

In December 2012, the Canadian Teachers' Federation in partnership with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights launched a national human rights initiative called "Canadian Defenders for Human Rights". This multi-year initiative aims to heighten student awareness about human rights issues, develop students' critical thinking skills, and foster social activism in support of human rights at the local, national and international levels.

As part of this initiative, a national survey was conducted to obtain teachers' perspectives on human rights education in Canadian schools. For the purposes of this survey, human rights education was defined, based on Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as being education directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people, racial or religious groups, and the maintenance of peace.

The Human Rights Education Survey was conducted online in 8 of the 10 provinces and all 3 territories from February 11th to March 1st 2013. Results summarized below are based on responses collected from 2,585 teachers across Canada.

Highlights

Over Three-Quarters of Teachers Report Human Rights Education in Curriculum

- Over half of teachers surveyed (52%) reported that Human Rights Education occurs in their school through both the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, while one-quarter (26%) indicated it occurred solely in curriculum implementation.
- 6% of respondents reported that this form of education occurs solely through extra-curricular activities.
- 1 in 6 teachers indicated that Human Rights Education does not occur in their school, ranging from 28% of teachers in a French as a first language school to 13% of teachers in an English school (including immersion). Elementary school teachers were twice as likely as secondary school teachers to report that human rights education does not occur in their school (20% vs. 10%).

Several Curriculum Areas Include Human Rights Education Component

- Almost 8 in 10 teachers surveyed (77%) reported a human rights education component in Social Science and Humanities, including Religious Education.
- 55% of teachers reported English Language Arts, while at least 3 in 10 respondents indicated Health and Physical Education (36%) and Aboriginal Studies (30%).

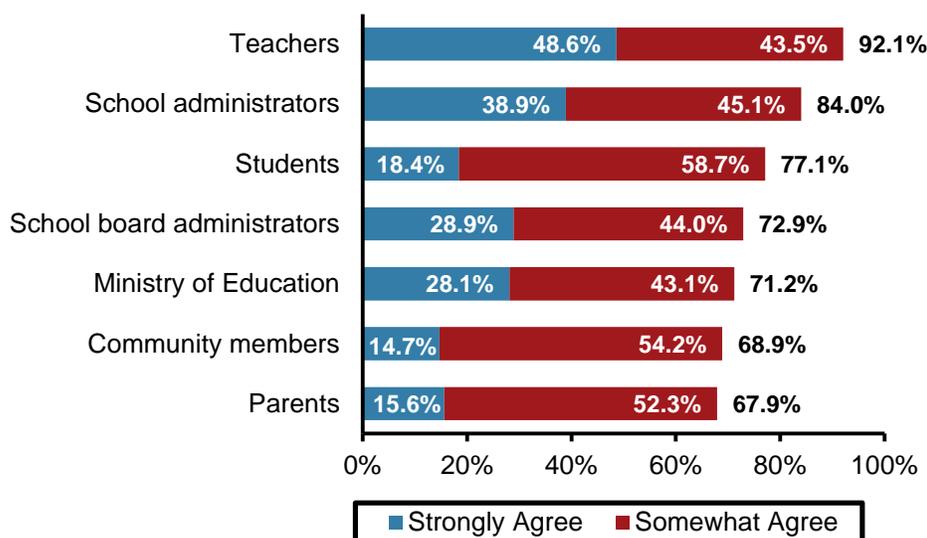
Fewer than 4 in 10 Teachers Engaged in a School-Based Human Rights Education Project

- Only 36% of teachers surveyed reported that they were engaged, along with their students, in a school-based human rights education project as an extension of the curriculum.
- Among those who did participate, 4 of the 6 surveyed project themes were reported by a majority of respondents including Relationships (79%); Social and Cultural Inclusion (60%); Active and Participatory Citizenship (56%) and Environmental Sustainability (53%).
- Fewer than half (45%) of those who were engaged stated that their human rights education project involved a community partner.
- Half of all teachers surveyed indicated that they would be interested in participating with students in a future community-school partnered human rights education activity if an opportunity was available. About 4 in 10 respondents were undecided.

Teachers Believe They Value Human Rights Education the Most

- Over 9 in 10 teachers surveyed (92%) agree that teachers value human rights education, including virtually half (49%) who “strongly agree”.
- 84% of teachers surveyed agree that school administrators value human rights education, compared to fewer than 7 in 10 teachers who agree it is valued by community members and parents respectively. About 4 in 10 teachers believe that school administrators “strongly agree” compared to fewer than 1 in 6 teachers with respect to community members and parents respectively.

Chart 1. To What Extent Do You Agree that Human Rights Education is Valued by:



Only Half of Teachers Surveyed Believe Their School has Sufficient Resources

Despite the fact that 5 in 6 teachers surveyed (83%) reported that Human Rights Education occurred in their school, fewer than half (48%) indicated they agree either “strongly” (8%) or “somewhat” (40%) that there are sufficient resources in their school to support the teaching of human rights education.

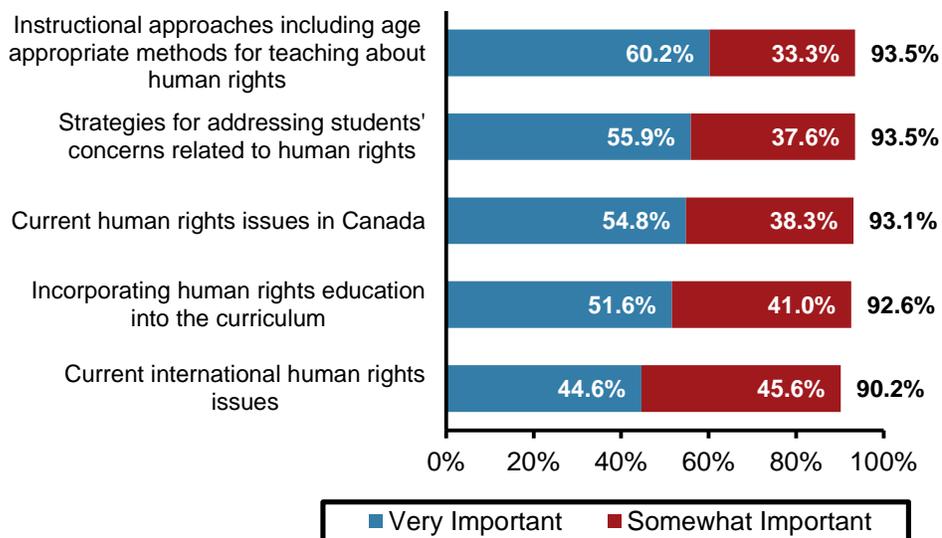
Are There Sufficient Resources in Their School to Support the Teaching of Human Rights Education?

- 62% of teachers who reported that human rights education occurs in their school though both the curriculum and extra-curricular activities agree that there are sufficient resources in their school to support the teaching of human rights education. This compares to a share of 46% among those who reported that human rights education occurred though curriculum implementation only, and 34% where it occurs solely though extra-curricular activities. Only 14% of respondents who reported that human rights education does not occur in their school indicated that resources were sufficient.
- 7 in 10 respondents who reported engaging with their students in a human rights education project as an extension of the curriculum agreed (“strongly” or “somewhat”) that resources are sufficient, compared to just under half of respondents (48%) who did not.
- Two-thirds of teachers surveyed (65%) who participated in some form of professional development activities pertaining to human rights education agreed that resources were sufficient compared to 42% of those who those who did not.
- Among those who participated in related professional development activities, two-thirds of those who were satisfied (“very” or “somewhat”) agreed (“strongly” or “somewhat”) that resources were sufficient compared to just over one-third (35%) who were dissatisfied.
- 62% of school administrators surveyed agreed that resources were sufficient compared to just under half (48%) of classroom teachers.
- 55% of secondary school teachers surveyed agreed that resources were sufficient compared to 44% of elementary school teachers.
- A majority of teachers (53%) in English schools (including immersion) agree compared to 1 in 3 teachers in French as a first language schools.
- 53% of male teachers surveyed agreed, while 46% of female teachers expressed the same view.
- Over 6 in 10 teachers (63%) in large schools with 1,000 or more students agree compared to 44% of those teaching in schools with less than 250 students.

Only 1 in 4 Teachers Participated in Related Professional Development Training but Satisfaction Among Those Who Did Was High

- Three-quarters of teachers surveyed indicated they had not participated in professional development related human rights education. Among the 25% of teachers surveyed who indicated that they had participated in such professional development activities, over 9 in 10 (93%) said they were satisfied, including one-third who were “very satisfied”.
- Over 9 in 10 teachers who responded indicated that it was important to them (“very” or “somewhat”) to acquire additional knowledge or skills training for each of the 5 respective areas surveyed (see Chart 2).
- 6 in 10 teachers reported that additional knowledge and skills training with respect to instructional approaches, including age appropriate methods for teaching about human rights, would be “very important”. In comparison, 45% of teachers expressed the same view with respect to current international human rights issues.

Chart 2. Importance of acquiring additional knowledge or skills training for each of the following areas



Greatest success in relation to teaching a human rights issue

Teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended survey question regarding what they considered to be their greatest success in relation to teaching a human rights issue. These are among the common themes and issues that emerged from the responses.

- Issues related to success in teaching about Aboriginal rights including raising awareness of Aboriginal issues (with some references to the “Idle No More” movement) and teaching about treaty rights, land claims, and the history and impact of the residential school system in Canada.
- Success in raising awareness about bullying and reducing incidents of bullying, recognizing that everyone has the right to a safe and caring learning environment.
- Building inclusive schools and classrooms is an important aspect of human rights education.
- Success in raising student awareness about, and respect for human rights by among other approaches providing opportunities for classroom discussion and debate.
- There were various references to democratic rights and principles such as voting, citizenship rights, individual vs. collective rights, and freedom of speech. Heightened awareness about human rights can sometimes translate into changed attitudes and values as well as student engagement.
- A wide range of human rights and social justice issues related to gender inequality, violence against women, poverty, children’s rights (including the right to education), homophobia and the rights of LGBTQ persons, racism, disability rights, and environmental sustainability among others.
- Volunteer and fundraising activities for diverse social causes, both domestic and international.

Greatest challenge facing human rights education in Canada

The final open-ended survey question asked teachers to describe what they considered to be the greatest challenge facing human rights education in Canada. Again these are some of the common themes and issues that emerged from the responses.

- While teachers are generally aware of the many challenges regarding Aboriginal rights in Canada – inside and outside the school – including discrimination, poverty, the gap in education quality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, and underfunding of Aboriginal education, there is a general lack of specific knowledge about First Nations, Inuit and Métis issues.
- Time stress and workload emerged as a significant challenge for teachers.
- There is a lack of information and resources on human rights education – relevant, engaging, high quality, accurate and unbiased, age/grade-appropriate, easily accessible and available in different media formats.
- Human rights education is subjected to various pressures – for example, too many expectations in the existing curriculum and curriculum integration issues. Another concern was a tight focus on the areas of numeracy and literacy combined with provincial testing programs.
- Teaching controversial issues and topics related to human rights education in public schools can be challenging in the context of a pluralistic society.
- There is a lack of professional development (subject knowledge, pedagogy, etc.) in the area of human rights education.