

XXIII. EDUCATION AS A STRATEGIC PROACTIVE MEASURE

Unique Education Role of Human Rights Ontario

One strong common thread throughout the consultation was a call to use strategic education initiatives to enforce the *Code*. Research conducted for the Task Force by the Urban Alliance on Race Relations finds that "[f]ew people know what rights are protected under the *Code*."⁸⁸ "[T]he best anti-discrimination laws with the strongest of provisions are ineffective if no one knows about them, understands them or is able to use them."⁸⁹ Many respondents said that education would enable them to improve their performance in ensuring equality.

A great deal was heard on exactly where this education should take place, who should receive it and who should provide it.

The Task Force believes that the strategic use of education initiatives is an important part of the new human rights enforcement system. Human Rights Ontario has a unique and important role to initiate and oversee education activities which will advance its overall strategic plan for the enforcement of human rights. Human Rights Ontario should focus on educational initiatives which are most likely to concretely contribute to the reduction of systemic discrimination in the strategic areas it has identified.

Education can help to establish the proper environment of understanding for dealing with and redressing systemic discrimination and therefore avoiding the filing of claims.

RECOMMENDATION (75):

- **Strategic proactive education is a key human rights enforcement strategy to ensure, advance and maintain a culture of equality.**
- **Human Rights Ontario has a unique and important role to play in the area of education to oversee and initiate education activities which will advance its overall strategic plan for the enforcement of Ontarians' human rights.**
- **To be effective, education must be innovative, reach all Ontarians and enter into strategic partnerships in doing so.**
- **Human Rights Ontario should focus on educational initiatives which are most likely to concretely contribute to the reduction of systemic discrimination in the strategic areas it has identified.**

Education initiatives, aimed at the general public as well as specific communities, will be the responsibility of the Commissioner for Education.

... the responsibilities of the Education unit will be to ...

- develop and implement creative and innovative educational strategies, in partnership with the Commission Advisory Council, so as to increase understanding of human rights by the general public;
- inform disadvantaged communities of their rights and how to access them, using creative, non-traditional approaches;
- widely distribute regular, up to date information to community groups and the general public on human rights developments and decisions;
- assist the Commissioner of Compliance Services in identifying needs and educational resources to assist the community of individuals and organizations responsible for ensuring equality;
- work with the Commissioner of Advocacy Services to identify needs and develop training for community advocates;
- use the following principles in developing educational initiatives:
 - is the educational campaign accessible?
 - does it adopt a consumer-centred, empowering approach to human rights education?
 - does it use the existing human rights expertise within the community?
 - does it meet specific regional needs?

Other agencies, in additions to the Human Rights Commission, also have a mandate to educate and promote equality rights. The Ontario Women's Directorate, the Anti-Racism Secretariat, the Office for Disability Issues, for example, fund community outreach and development, distribute informational material, do research, and carry out a variety of proactive, educational initiatives to advance equality rights for the particular group they target.

Unlike the other Government equality agencies with educational mandates such as the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Commission is responsible for ensuring that the rights of Ontarians which are protected by the *Code* are achieved in employment, accommodation and services.

- Government agencies are part of government, whereas the Human Rights Commission must be totally independent of government and free from any possible government interference,
- Their mandate is for one group only, whereas the mandate of the Commission covers fifteen grounds of discrimination, and
- The mandate of these agencies covers such things as education, research and community development, but does not include the responsibility to enforce the provisions of a law.

In order to avoid duplication and to obtain the maximum benefit, it would seem desirable to coordinate the different educational work of government agencies and the educational work of the Human Rights Commission.

Much criticism has been voiced of the Human Rights Commission's failure to show a strong presence and leadership in educating people about human rights. A number of people said, for example, that the Commission should undertake a massive educational campaign using television ads to inform people of their rights. One factor in the failure of the Commission to carry out a major educational campaign of this kind, however, is its budget. It simply never had the staff or resources to play a major educational role around the province for all the groups and issues covered by the *Code*.

The public, equality seeking groups and respondent groups have high expectations that the Human Rights Commission should do far more educational and proactive work for a wider range of groups, in addition to carrying out enforcement responsibilities under the *Code*.

The budget of the Human Rights Commission for enforcing the Human Rights *Code*, as well as carrying out educational and proactive initiatives to advance human rights for all the groups covered by the *Code* is significantly less than, for example, the budget for the Ontario Women's Directorate. The budget of the Commission for 1991/92 was about two-thirds of the Ontario Women's Directorate.

While the budgets of the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Anti-Racism Secretariat, the Office of Disability Issues, are needed and appropriate, the Commission must be properly funded to carry out its distinct role in human rights education.

The Task Force believes strongly in the importance of educational, preventative initiatives. It also takes note, however, that the rights in the *Code* are of near constitutional importance and the *Code* is the only vehicle for accessing and enforcing those rights.

Priority must therefore, in the Task Force's view, be given to doing education which will result in providing access to those rights and effective redress.

RECOMMENDATION (76):

- **Under the Human Rights Ontario budget, priority must be given to providing education aimed at making human rights enforcement accessible and effective.**
- **The education work of the various equality agencies inside government, such as the Anti-Racism Secretariat, the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Office for Disability Issues, should be coordinated with the work of the Human Rights Commission through a clearly identified, regular process of liaison.**

Human Rights Education in the Schools

Many people appearing before the Task Force emphasized the importance of providing positive human rights education through the regular school system.

From the earliest years, human rights should be part of the school curriculum. This would bring many advantages. Children who belong to groups who experience discrimination would be affirmed in their sense of self esteem and confidence. Children would learn the importance of respecting and including all members of society.

The history and present reality of discrimination in Canada and the ongoing struggle for human rights should be taught to all students. Students should learn what human rights protections exist and how to access those protections. Students should be encouraged and assisted in spreading human rights information in their own communities.

Human rights curriculum material for schools has already been developed and is being used in different parts of the country. The Ontario Department of Education should review what teaching material already exists, improve and supplement it as needed and require it to be taught throughout the Ontario school system.

The Task Force welcomes and endorses the strong recommendations to implement anti-racism and multicultural policies and practices throughout the education system, recently made by Stephen Lewis in his report to the premier as Advisor on Race Relations. The Task Force also welcomes initiatives underway and being proposed by the Ministry of Education to achieve that goal.

For example, Bill 21, currently before the legislature, would give the Minister of Education the power to require every school board in the province to develop and implement an employment equity policy for groups designated by the Minister, as well as to implement an ethno-cultural equity and anti-racism policy.

The Task Force urges all parties in the legislature to give full and prompt support to this Bill. It urges the Minister to take vigorous and effective action to implement the Bill once passed.

RECOMMENDATION (77):

- **Effective human rights material should be developed and included in the regular school curriculum at every level from the earliest years.**
- **The Ontario Ministry of Education should review the human rights curriculum material that already exists, improve and supplement it as needed and require it to be taught throughout the Ontario school system.**

Access to Teacher Training

Faculties of Education throughout the province should take positive measures to open up training opportunities to groups who have traditionally been excluded, such as persons of colour, persons with disabilities, poor people.

Some Faculties of Education have taken action to broaden accessibility to the training they provide. Others have not.

In his report to the Premier, Stephen Lewis noted that some Directors of Education with whom he met were "considerably agitated about the exclusionary policies of Faculties of Education."⁹⁰

The Task Force notes the Teacher Education Council, Ontario's recommendation, recorded in the Lewis report, which is supported by various Boards of Education and would require

that 9 per cent of admission places in Faculties of Education (to reflect the work-force) be reserved, on a right-of-first-refusal basis, for qualified visible minority candidates, and that they be equally eligible for all other places.⁹¹

Such provisions could be extended to other disadvantaged groups such as persons with disabilities.

Under the contract compliance provisions of the Human Rights *Code* (which the Task Force has recommended in Section XII of this report be expanded to include service equity requirements), universities and colleges might have to report on their progress in equity when submitting their budgets to the Government.

Part of the decision-making in granting funds to universities and colleges should be how well they were serving all the people of Ontario. The employment and service equity record of the university or college should be a key element in making that decision.

RECOMMENDATION (78):

- **The Government should require Faculties of Education to take positive measures to open up training opportunities to disadvantaged groups.**
- **Under the contract compliance provisions of the *Code*, the Government should examine the employment equity and service equity progress of universities and colleges as a factor in judging the quality of their operations and the funds they should receive.**

Teachers Should Promote Human Rights

Children and their parents have the right to a teaching environment of equal respect for themselves and their community.

Teacher training courses should include training in human rights as a requirement for certification as a teacher. Teachers already in the school system should be required to take a professional development course in human rights within a specific time period.

In order to value *all* students with genuine respect, a teacher needs to support the equal human rights of every group a student may belong to. A teacher cannot be allowed to promote discrimination contrary to the *Code* against a group to which one of his or her students may belong, for example, a teacher who inside or outside the classroom supported anti-semitic or white supremacist causes.

RECOMMENDATION (79):

- **Teacher training courses should include training in human rights as a requirement for certification as a teacher.**

Hiring Policies of Schools, Colleges and Universities

An effective way of promoting human rights is by one's own conduct. The education system must, by its own conduct, take a leadership role to two areas:

The first is in hiring and promoting members of disempowered groups. The second is in providing its services to students in an equitable manner. School Boards, colleges and universities should be required to implement a clear, effective plan to overcome discriminatory employment practices and to have teachers and administrators, at all levels, reflect the full community.

Students learn by what they see happening more than by what they are told is supposed to happen. When people of colour, when people with disabilities, when women are not seen in a fair and representative way at every level in the education system, students pick up on prejudice and stereotypes against these groups, which they then carry with them as they start on the rest of their lives.

In addition, the quality of an education system declines when it fails to benefit from the knowledge, skills and experience of all the groups who make up Ontario.

School superintendents and persons responsible for decisions to hire and promote should be accountable and be judged on their performance in meeting employment equity goals. It should be a specific and significant part of their job performance appraisal.

RECOMMENDATION (80):

- **School Boards, colleges and universities should be required to implement a clear, effective plan to overcome discriminatory employment practices so that teachers and administrators at all levels reflect the full community.**

Providing Equitable Services to Students

If significant progress is to be made in overcoming discrimination, the education system must play a key role.

If children at school are treated with equal respect and equal expectations, they have a chance to overcome the stereotyping and prejudice common in our society. Children from groups who experience discrimination can be helped to develop self esteem and confidence so as to see themselves and their community as equal members of society.

The education system has a responsibility to overcome discrimination in the services they provide. Schools, colleges and universities should implement a clear plan of positive action to make sure that students from groups that experience discrimination derive equal benefit from the services the institution provides.

This plan should include monitoring to see how services are being used. For example, are students of colour fairly represented in all courses, at all levels and with equal success? Are female students participating equally in non-traditional courses and in sports opportunities? Are students with disabilities integrated successfully with their peers?

Groups who are not currently benefitting equally from the education system should be given a key role in developing, implementing and monitoring the service equity plan.

In Saskatchewan many school divisions, in cooperation with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, have implemented Education Equity Plans, aimed at redressing the high drop-out rate of Aboriginal students. The Plans, which now cover 75,000 students, include such measures as: cross-cultural training for school staff, changes in the school curriculum, development of anti-racism policies, increased hiring of Aboriginal teachers. Public hearings, at which interested persons can make submissions, are held to allow the Commission to review and ask questions on what progress has been made in implementing the Education Equity Plan.⁹²

RECOMMENDATION (81):

- **The Ministry of Education should require School Boards, in partnership with the community, to develop and implement service equity plans to ensure that all students receive equitable educational services.**