HR ER | Human Rights Education Review

Volume 2, No 1 (2019)
Date received: 27-06-2018
Peer-reviewed article

DOI: http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.2832
Date accepted: 23-05-2019
ISSN 2535-5406

'They don't have as good a life as us': a didactic study of the content of human rights education with eleven-year-old pupils in two Swedish classrooms

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Introduction

At the end of 2017, the United Nations Refugee Agency reported in its Global Trends study that 68.5 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of war, conflicts, climatic catastrophes or economic disasters (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). The media constantly reports on situations in which human beings are threatened or humiliated. Reports like these put human rights in the spotlight, in that they show how human rights are violated. But what do people in general know about human rights and, in particular, what do children know? What do they learn at school and what do teachers teach? In order to learn and grow as holders of human rights there is a need for adequate education. This didactic study examines the content of the teaching and learning of human rights in two Swedish classrooms.

As is advocated in international frameworks (e.g. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] & United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCHR], 2006), Sweden emphasises the teaching and learning of human rights. This is also clearly stated in the Education Act (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2016/2010) and the current national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018): 'Education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based' (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 5). The Swedish

education system builds on central government policy and so does the curriculum (cf. Gundem, 2011), which means that all education in Sweden is based on the same national guidelines. The fundamental democratic values, which also include human rights, are the core values of Swedish education and are presented in the curriculum in the section *Fundamental Values and Tasks of the School*. In the following extract, the central values are mentioned:

> The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by a Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in school must be non-denominational (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 5).

Fundamental Values is an important section in the curriculum and these values should permeate all education: 'The Education Act (2010:800) stipulates that education in the school system aims at pupils acquiring and developing knowledge and values' (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 5). This means that (all) Swedish education should be based on subject knowledge and fundamental democratic values, in which human rights are included. This article will use the term 'fundamental values' to denote fundamental democratic values.

In Sweden, there is no specifically labelled human rights education (HRE) (e.g. Bajaj, 2017) and the teaching and learning of human rights is often part of the teaching and learning of fundamental values. Bajaj (2011) discusses the contextualisation of HRE and states that HRE can no longer be characterised as a practice where there is a singular understanding; HRE rather reflects the contexts where it is located. Referring to Felisa Tibbitts (2008), Bajaj stresses that HRE is affiliated with different constituencies in different nations and suggests that in countries enjoying strong democratic and economic development the focus is often on issues of discrimination of migrants, minorities and women. Sweden could be an example of such a focus. Here, HRE is not an isolated educational topic, but part of the teaching and learning of fundamental values. This could be one reason for the conflation of human rights and democratic values found in this study.

Another reason for a lack of clarity is the way in which human rights (United Nations [UN], 1948) and children's rights (UN, 1989) are used synonymously. This study, which was part of a three year didactic project (Quennerstedt, et al 2014), investigated how human rights have been taught and learned. In contacts with the teachers and pupils, the researcher has used the term *children's human rights* to enable the participants to make their own interpretations of rights. However, as the findings show, they (teachers and pupils) mix human rights and children's rights and do not differentiate between them. Sometimes they use *human rights* and at other times *children's human rights* or *children's rights*. In this article the term *human rights* is used.

Research on HRE embraces a number of perspectives (e.g. Quennerstedt, 2011; Osler & Solhaug, 2018) but, as far as can be ascertained, no studies have been conducted using a didactic theoretical approach (e.g. Gundem, 2011) that specifically investigates teaching and learning content (Thelander, 2009; Brantefors &

Quennerstedt, 2016; Brantefors & Thelander, 2017). The exception to this is the above-mentioned didactic project (Quennerstedt et al, 2014).

This article reports on a field study that was carried out on researcher-requested, yet teacher-planned activity, in the teaching and learning of human rights in two classes of eleven-year-old pupils. The aim was to explore and clarify the teaching and learning content by drawing on the (European) Didaktik (didactics) tradition (e.g. Gundem, 2011). The article answers the following two questions: 1) What is taught in the classroom (educational content)? 2) What do the pupils say they have learned (substantive content)? Here, content refers to topics, materials or subjects concerned with human rights (Englund, 1997).

In the critical research tradition on human rights and human rights education (e.g. Zembylas & Keet, 2018), questions of power and domination can also be investigated. Human rights as an emancipative idea has been criticised for being merely symbolic, legitimising values of power and domination and lacking any substantial meaning. Critical educators emphasise the need to be aware of these values and patterns of power and domination, otherwise there is a risk that such values will be legitimised in education (Cranston & Janzen, 2017). This study uses a didactic approach to investigate the content of Swedish human rights education by analysing what is taught and learned and exploring the human rights knowledge and values that are transmitted in school; it does not ask questions about power and domination.

The main contribution of didactics (Didaktik) to human rights education (HRE) is its focus on detailed and structured investigations of content (Uljens, 1997). Knowing what teachers select and offer and what children say they have learned is an important part of all human rights education, although there seems to have been less research into content. The contribution of didactic theory in this study is that it emphasises and analyses both the *what* and the plurality of meanings in the teaching and learning of human rights (cf. Englund, 1997). Knowing precisely what is taught and what is learned and comparing this with the alternatives that are available could make teachers more critically aware of their teaching, and this will enable children to gain a deeper knowledge of human rights.

In the next section, educational research on the teaching and learning of rights is presented. This is followed by a description of the study's theoretical and methodological framework. Finally, the results are presented and discussed.

Educational research on the teaching and learning of rights

Educational research on HRE is extensive and has been carried out from different perspectives. Some studies adopt an ethnographic approach (Thornberg, 2009; Giamminuti & See, 2017), while others are more oriented towards analysing the curriculum (Philips, 2016; Robinson, 2017; Parker, 2018). The majority of studies focus on questions about how children are (or should be) respected, listened to and taken seriously (I'Anson & Allan, 2006; Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011) and there is a wide and rich literature on student participation and citizenship (Alderson, 2016; Emerson & Lloyd, 2017; Osler & Starkey, 2018). However, as indicated above, no studies have so far investigated the teaching and learning of human rights by using a didactic theoretical approach (Quennerstedt, 2015).

In order to better understand the variety of aims and content in the teaching and learning of human rights, a number of educational research publications have been examined, using a didactic theoretical approach (Brantefors & Quennerstedt,

2016).[1] At first sight, these publications appear to reflect similar aims and content, although on deeper examination there are differences. Six dominant aims for why children should learn about human rights have been identified. These are: 1) involvement – children should learn that they have the right to participate in daily life (e.g. Johansson, 2005; Bae, 2009; Sandberg & Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2011); 2) agency – children should be empowered to engage with other human beings (Smith, 2007; Armstrong, 2011); 3) awareness – children should learn to become aware of their rights (e.g. Batur Musaoglu & Haktanir, 2006; Akengin, 2008; Eckmann, 2010; Karaman-Kepenekci, 2010); 4) citizenship – children should learn about rights in order to prepare for active citizenship (e.g. McEvoy & Lundy 2007; Mitchell, 2010; Osler, 2013); 5) the respecting of rights – children should learn to behave in accordance with rights and cultivate good relations with others (e.g. Howe & Covell, 2010; Covell, Howe & McNeil, 2010; Wallberg & Kahn, 2011); and 6) social change – children should learn how to act critically and learn emancipatory values (e.g. Frantzi, 2004; Nieto & Pang, 2005; Mitchell, 2010).

In a second study, one based on Douglas Roberts' conceptualisation of knowledge interests (cf. Roberts, 1982), the above-mentioned six categories are grouped into four HRE traditions. These are: *participation*, *empowerment*, *rights awareness*, and *rights respecting* (Brantefors & Thelander, 2017). Together, the two studies show that there is a range of aims, content and traditions in HRE.

Bajaj (2011) describes three different ideological HRE approaches that resemble the above-mentioned traditions: (i) HRE for Global Citizenship, (ii) HRE for Coexistence, and (iii) HRE for Transformative Action. The first of these, HRE for Global Citizenship, fosters membership of an international community by teaching about human rights and skills related to universal values and standards. This category aligns with the rights awareness tradition, where the aim is to educate children for a human rights culture. The second category, HRE for Coexistence, focuses on the inter-personal and inter-group aspect of human rights, where education about human rights is regarded as a strategy for coping with ethnic or civil strife. This category is similar to the participation tradition. Here, the aim of teaching and learning of human rights is to engage with other people and become members of society. The third and last category, HRE for Transformative Action, usually involves learners who are economically or politically marginalised. Here, HRE is informed by the ideas of Paolo Freire, where the aim is to cultivate pupils' critical consciousness and teach them how they can change their situation. This category aligns with the empowerment tradition and aims to empower pupils to work for social change. The rights respecting tradition is not represented in Bajaj's approaches.

The similarities between descriptions of teaching and learning traditions (Brantefors & Thelander, 2017) and ideological approaches (Bajaj, 2011) show some of the possibilities that are available in classifying human rights education. There is an affinity between the two categorisations that allows us to compare them. It is also clear that these categorisations make it possible to view the different alternatives that are available in human rights education. They also explain and show different ways of teaching and learning human rights. In other words, there is not only one tradition/approach in the teaching and learning of human rights, but several (e.g. Englund, 1997). Investigating the plurality of meanings in education (the traditions/approaches) is a characteristic feature of didactic approaches.

Theoretical framework: Didaktik – didactics

The Didaktik tradition

The study is theoretically anchored in the Didaktik tradition, which has a long history in non-English speaking (northern) Europe. Didaktik is defined as the theory and praxis of teaching and learning, and focuses on one or several of the key elements of education, i.e. the content, the teacher and/or the student and/or the relationships between them (e.g. Uljens, 1997; Gundem, 2011). However, Didaktik is not one theory but several, and is more of a theoretical framework than a precise conceptualisation. It is also contextually dependant and one concept does not always have the same meaning in all contexts. Professor Emeritus Bjørg B. Gundem describes this ambiguity:

> […] Didaktik has different meanings. There is no common and unambiguous understanding of the content of Didaktik, its scientific field, its methods or its structure. As there are different schools, different traditions and different models of Didaktik, there are therefore numerous definitions, each claiming legitimacy in both historical and contemporary contexts. It should be emphasised that the Didaktik field not is one field, but many different fields. The validity of one concept in one particular context is not necessarily valid in another. What we have is a conceptual richness that can be confusing (Gundem, 2011, pp. 20-21, author's translation from the Norwegian).

In English speaking countries the use of Didaktik theory has been limited (Hudson & Meyer, 2011). In these countries the questions addressed by Didaktik are often discussed in terms of teaching and learning, curriculum and curriculum theory. However, there has been an ongoing dialogue between the European Didaktik tradition and the Anglo-American curriculum research tradition, and this has resulted in the two traditions coming closer together over time (e.g. Hopmann & Riquarts, 1995; Westbury, 1995; Gundem, 1998; Hopmann, 2007; Hudson, 2007; Hudson & Meyer, 2011; Hopmann, 2015). Two examples of this are Roberts' (1982) *curriculum emphases* on different knowledge interests in science education (cf. Roberts & Östman, 1998) and Englund's historical *conceptions* of citizenship education (1986). Both conceptualisations are examples of discursive analyses of the educational content. There are also examples of overlapping interests in the interface between Didaktik and educational theory, for example in the work of John Dewey (e.g. Englund, 2016; Stone, 2016). Didactic theorising often involves approaches other than Didaktik, such as philosophy or pragmatism (e.g. Dewey 1916), for discussing and clarifying educational content and processes. Gundem (2011) suggests using the term meta-analysis for this kind of socio-cultural analysis of educational issues.

Researchers in the curriculum theory tradition suggest that Didaktik contains fruitful theoretical concepts and tools for the study of education. Didaktik theory offers a language with which to systematically engage and talk about teaching and learning (Uljens, 1997). In line with Westbury's suggestions (2000a) that Didaktik contains concepts and a language for describing central issues in the teaching and learning of human rights, I suggest that Didaktik theory can help to articulate and structure the analysis of the content of the teaching and learning of human rights and clarify the plurality of meanings. In English, the terms 'didactics' and 'didactic' have

different meanings and sometimes negative connotations, which means that misunderstandings might arise (cf. Wickman, 2014). However, the word 'didactics' (for Didaktik) has been commonly employed in research contexts in recent years and in order to engage with other Didaktik researchers I have chosen to use the term *didactics* in this article.[2]

Basic concepts

One of the basic concepts of the didactics tradition is the didactic triangle (Hopmann, 1997, 2007; Klette, 2007; Hudson & Meyer, 2011). The triangle shows the fundamental elements in all educational situations, namely the content, the teacher and the student, and is a useful tool for educational planning and analysis (e.g. Uljens, 1997; Hudson & Meyer, 2011). Although the triangle has been used differently (e.g. Hudson & Meyer, 2011) in different contexts, the principal idea is that it describes the relationship between the three elements. The content is placed at the top of the triangle and the teacher and student on the other two angles. Each side of the triangle represents a relationship; teacher–content, student–content, and teacher–student (Hopmann, 1997). The elements and relationships in the triangle are all points of departure for analyses of teaching and learning processes. The focus can either be on the teacher or the student, on the content per se, or on the relationships between several dimensions in the triangle (cf. Klette 2007).

The triangle is thought to originate from the work of Comenius (Hopmann, 1997), as are the three didactic questions of 'what', 'how' and 'why' (Kroksmark, 1994). The question 'what' addresses the content used in the educational situation, 'how' concerns the processes and the form of education, and 'why' focuses on the motives for the selection of content and processes. Other didactic questions could be asked about the educational situation, such as 'who' is learning and with 'whom', 'when' should children learn, and 'where'? (E.g. Uljens, 1997.) Consequently, several aspects of the educational situation can be analysed. In this study the 'what' question is examined from the teachers' and pupils' perspectives.

Wolfgang Klafki is one of the most important modern German didacticians (Hopmann, 1997). In his critical-constructivist didactics he combines a critical approach to education and school with a focus on current social problems (Gundem, 2011). He is also known as the leading theorist in the field of *Didaktische Analyse* (Klafki, 1995/1963). Didactic analysis is a structured analysis used in educational planning, and is based on the above-mentioned didactic questions - 'what', 'how' and 'why'. Klafki describes the double analysis of content in planning when he differentiates between the *Bildungsinhalt* (the educational content) and the *Bildungsgehalt* (the substantive content) (Klafki, 1995/1963). The *Bildungsinhalt* is the material to be taught, which seen through the pedagogical lens of education forms the subject matter into an educational content. The *Bildungsgehalt* is the content of substance, or the educational substance in the content, and is the content that should be the effect of education. Klafki (1995/1963) discusses the relationship between these two dimensions of content and emphasises that teachers must be aware of both in their educational preparations. Although this is a structuralistic way of viewing the content dimensions (e.g. Rorty, 1967), the reason for using Klafki's content distinctions is that they help to theoretically frame the analysis. Accordingly, the concept of *Bildungsgehalt* refers to the teaching content, whereas the concept of *Bildungsinhalt* refers to the learning content the pupils create themselves.

Another conceptualisation that is used for the two dimensions of content is the meaning offered and the meaning created (Englund, 1997). The meaning offered is the content that the teacher provides, while the meaning created is the content created by the pupils. These two concepts were developed at a time when the linear understanding of communication was being challenged. In this article, the 'what' is analysed as both the offered and the created content and is theoretically framed by Klafki's concepts of *Bildungsinhalt* and *Bildungsgehalt*.

Methodology

This study was part of a three-year research project on the teaching and learning of human rights in four different year groups in Sweden: at preschool, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 8. The investigations for this article were conducted with eleven-year-old pupils (P1 and P2) in two Year 5 classes. The field study was carried out between November 2015 and February 2016. During this period the researcher observed all kinds of education for approximately 10 hours a week. However, only some of these observations are referred to in this article.

An invitation to take part in the study was sent to 25 urban and rural Year 5 classes/schools in a Swedish municipality. Two classes accepted the invitation. The others declined due to lack of time. One of the classes (S1) was from an urban school with 600 pupils, where 60% originated from countries outside Sweden; the other (S2) was from a rural school with 100 pupils, none of whom had non-Swedish origins. Both classes consisted of 22 pupils. The teachers (T1 and T2) had trained at teacher training institutions in Sweden and were obliged to follow the Education Act (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2016/2010) and the national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018), both of which are guided by democratic working methods and progressivist ideals. Both teachers had been in the profession for 5-10 years.

The researcher asked the teachers to undertake planned teaching on children's human rights and said that they were free to choose the content and the working methods. No further guidance was given. The researcher chose this approach so as not to influence the teachers in any way. The data was collected by means of video documented observations and interviews with the teachers and pupils (Fitzgerald, Hackling & Dawson, 2013). The interview questions were related to the three didactic questions mentioned above - 'what', 'how' and 'why' (cf. Klafki, 1963/1995). The pupils were interviewed in pairs shortly after the lesson on human rights. In the interviews one of the pupils usually answered the questions, although his/her partner was also encouraged to respond, which almost always happened. The teachers were interviewed individually. The study followed the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines and requirements regarding information, informed consent, confidentiality and data use (Swedish Research Council, 2011). All the people involved in the study agreed to participate, and did so until the study was completed.

The material for the analyses outlined in this article consists of video records of planned teaching of human rights (5 hours per class) and the interviews with the teachers (1 hour per teacher) and pupils (2 hours per class). An analysis (Klafki, 1963/1995; cf. Gundem, 2011; Hudson & Meyer, 2011) of the 'what' in the transcribed material, i.e. the educational content (teaching content) and the substantive content (learning content), was carried out.

There were five analytical steps:

- The different statements were highlighted in different colours to differentiate between the educational content (teaching content) and the substantive content (learning content).
- Statements with the same meaning were grouped together in a matrix.
- Different content themes - of the educational content and the substantive content - were identified and named.
- The content themes were thoroughly examined in order to identify qualitative similarities and differences in themes and patterns (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Finally, the themes' educational content and substantive content were compared, which made it possible to identify different content themes.

Results – the content

The main result of the study is that the educational content, i.e. the meaning offered by the teachers, is similar to the substantive content, which is the meaning that the pupils themselves created. In view of this, the teaching and learning content are not presented separately, but together. Four common and dominant content themes (the 'what') were identified: 1) fundamental democratic values, 2) declarations of (human) rights, 3) bullying and violations, and 4) negative life conditions. The following abbreviations are used: T1=Teacher 1. T2=Teacher 2. P1=Pupil from school 1. P2=Pupil from school 2.

1. *Fundamental democratic values*

The teaching and learning of human rights is not an isolated theme, but is related to democracy and the fundamental values of the Swedish curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). One of the tasks of a school is to bring about and anchor these values in each pupil. This is also shown in the analysis. For example, T1 states that human rights are about 'our dignity', 'our fundamental values' and 'our views of mankind'. T1 relates human rights to democracy in the sense that they are concerned with the right to *decision-making:* 'everybody has the right to decide', which also implies that pupils need to *create their own views*. In school 1, this is practised by forming (and discussing) opinions about school lunches, rules and prohibitions, whereas in school 2 the pupils are encouraged to air their own views: T2 says: '[…] the pupils should not always accept what the media says, or what I say, or what mum and dad say. Free thinking is important'. Accordingly, these examples show that decision-making and the creation of one's own views seem to be related to democracy, rather than human rights.

When the pupils talk about human rights in the interviews and relate them to democracy, they emphasise the same ideas and content as the teachers. A lack of clarity about the relationship between democracy and human rights is also expressed: 'It is important that it is democratic, those rules are very important, that everybody has their rights' (P1). They echo the teacher's claim that everybody should be involved in decisions and that this is related to democracy: 'It should be democratic' (P1). Some of the pupils try to sort out the relationship by saying that 'everybody should get involved in deciding, this is connected to democracy […]' (P1). However, only the pupils in school 1 (P1) emphasise 'the right to have a view' in the interviews by stressing that '[you can] believe in what you want or feel what you want'. Interestingly, none of the pupils in school 2 mention the creation of one's own

views, despite teacher 2 having emphasised this. However, the pupils in school 2 always act in accordance with this model, in that they actively discuss and question the prevailing conditions and express their opinions.

While it is understood that there is a strong connection between human rights and fundamental democratic values, the relationship between the two is not clear to the teachers or the pupils.

2. *Declarations of (human) rights*

The teachers' principle aim when teaching about human rights is that the pupils should learn how to *(inter)act with other people*. Based on the idea of *equal value,* the pupils should learn to respect others, become good fellow humans and not discriminate: '[…] first they should learn to cooperate and discuss, practise taking turns and socialising' (T1). When working in groups, the pupils (P1) in class 1 study specific Articles of the Convention that T1 has selected: life and development (Article 6), nationality and identity (Article 7, 8), forming and expressing views (Article 12), freedom of expression (Article 13, 14, 15), and health and health care (Article 24). In contrast, in class 2 the pupils (P2) decide themselves to work with children's rights, children's development and the rights of girls.

In the lessons, information about rights is gleaned from websites (Swedish version), such as those of UNESCO and Amnesty International, and no textbooks are used. The choice of website thus determines which rights (e.g. human rights or children's rights) are emphasised and how they are described. For example, Amnesty International's website emphasises freedom rights, whereas others prioritise other rights. In general, when rights are mentioned and conceptualised the Convention on the Rights of the Child is referred to before the Declaration of Rights, although sometimes rights are not mentioned at all. Even though the vocabulary changes, and concepts like children's rights, children's human rights and human rights are used, the concept of children's rights appears more frequently.

When the pupils are asked about what they have learned, they have very little to say about human rights. They say that they should know about human rights as 'rules that the UN has' (P1) in order to know what you can do and not do in the future ('when you are grown up' [P2]). The most important right to be mentioned is *equal value*, which is repeated over and over again: 'Whatever you look like, or your background, or if you are homosexual or so, everybody has equal value' (P2). When the pupils mention human rights they mostly highlight problems with rights that are not fulfilled, such as 'the right to education and not working' (P1), 'having food and not starving' (P2), 'living with and having support from parents' (P2), or 'not being beaten' (P1). They return to this *negative view of rights* on a number of occasions.

3. *Bullying and violations*

This study shows that human rights are related to bullying and violation. In particular, T1 discusses this: 'This should grow, this should be more than just about violations and bullying, because this is a minor part of our human rights'. The teaching resembles earlier lessons about bullying and violations, although this time violations are not related to pupil interactions, but to the refugee and migration crisis of 2015-2016. The analyses show that *violations of cultural rights* are particularly emphasised in class and the focus is on those individuals who have their human rights violated. When the study was carried out, the closest example of this was the refugee crisis and the US presidential election. For example, the pupils note that President Trump

violates human (cultural) rights: 'he is a racist', 'if you were a Muslim you would feel rejected' (P1).

> You can say whatever you want as long as you are not violating anybody. He [Trump] says what he thinks, but he is violating other people. He expresses it in a way that makes people sad […]. How can people vote for somebody who violates someone else? (P1)

Even though the term bullying is used, it does not necessarily refer to specific human interaction; it is also used for different kinds of violence or conflict ('stop hating' [T2]) ('love each other/peace' [P1]). However, the pupils underline the interactive, personal aspect and the need to counteract bullying. They repeatedly say that everybody has equal value and that nobody should be discriminated against or bullied: 'You have to respect the situation and the circumstances, that is to say the religion, the skin colour or the belief…' (P1). '[You can] say whatever you like as long as you do not violate or make somebody sad, or are racist' (P1). The pupils stress that bullying and violations should always be counteracted.

4*. Negative life conditions*

The final content theme in my analysis is concerned with the conditions and circumstances of other human beings. In order to understand and respond to others, irrespective of background, the pupils have to learn about *different life conditions*: T2 says '[…] that's what is central, we talk about different life conditions and equal value and that we are not as different as we think we are'. This theme is specifically about the negative life conditions of human beings or refugees in war-torn or developing countries, and is about children's rights to (have) *support and protection*. In contrast to theme 3, which also focuses on refugees, immigration and violations of cultural rights, this content theme draws attention to how rich countries should help poor ones, 'so that their conditions will be as good as ours, because everybody has equal value' (P2).

The following three examples illustrate the teachers' selections of the teaching and learning content.

a) The first example is a film clip showing Clowns Without Borders entertaining large groups of children in war-torn areas. The children appear to be having fun. They clap their hands, laugh and smile. The idea behind Clowns Without Borders is that they 'bring laughter where it's needed most'.
b) The second example is a classroom discussion about what Sweden could have done about the refugee situation in 2015-2016. Most of the pupils want to support the refugees: 'We should take care of them, give them food and somewhere to live' (P2) although one pupil finds that problematic: 'In the end there will be more of them than Swedes' (P2).
c) The third example is a game called The Lottery of Life, from the Save the Children website. This game presents children's negative living conditions - such as war, flight, poverty, malnutrition, no housing, no schooling, child labour and corporal punishment. These conditions are presented in relation to Swedish circumstances, which are regarded as being 'much better'.

These three examples illustrate children's poor living conditions and the support that is needed. They also show that life is regarded as being 'much better' (P1 and P2) here (in Sweden) and that the lives of 'others' would be improved if they received support and protection. The message is that solidarity should be developed with those migrating to Sweden, or with the weak and vulnerable in far-off lands.

When the pupils describe what they have learned, the content appears to have more or less the same meaning as that offered in class. They underline two things: the differences between rich and poor countries and the need for richer countries ('us') to support 'the others'. The pupils state that children in other parts of the world 'don't have as good a life as us' (P2). 'The world isn't fair; some flee, others die' (P2). The subject that is most talked about in the interviews is people's negative life conditions: 'there are no schools' (P2), 'children get corporal punishment' (P2), 'children could be married off with anyone' (P2), 'homosexuals are discriminated against' (P1) and 'you cannot have an opinion' (P1). With statements like these, the pupils show how unfair things are and that we need to care more about others. They continuously describe other people's life conditions in polarised terms, i.e. what 'the richer' countries have and 'the poorer' countries do not have. 'We' have human rights and so do 'they' - but 'their' human rights are not fulfilled. In contrast, some of the pupils have xenophobic ideas about people who are different from themselves. This is particularly so in relation to immigrants.

Discussion

The purpose of the study is to examine the 'what' – the educational content (the teaching content) and the substantive content (the learning content) – in the teaching and learning of human rights in two Year 5 classes. (cf. Klafki, 1995/1963; Gundem, 2011). The use of didactic theory enables a precise analysis of the content, and didactic conceptualisation clarifies and structures the analyses. The didactic approach also casts a light on shortcomings in the preparation of teaching and the teaching itself.

The results show that the principle intention with the teaching and learning of human rights is to facilitate good *interactions* with other human beings. Apart from the last theme, the four identified content themes – fundamental democratic values, declarations of (human) rights, bullying and violations, and negative life conditions –are concerned with cultivating 'good' relations with other human beings, which means that 'the other' should be treated with respect and solidarity. The four themes are related to human rights, but links are not always clear. There is also a negative interpretation of rights, with an emphasis on the violation of rights and the need for children to have support and protection.

The results show that the meaning created by the pupils is the same as that offered in class, and that this is the case in both classes. Even though there are contextual differences between the classes, the content of education and the content of substance are similar, albeit with slight variations. This indicates that the pupils seem to have learned the offered content. The most striking difference between the classes is that the urban class (S1) demonstrates more pluralistic and open-minded views of other human beings' life conditions. These pupils also know more about life conditions in different parts of the world, which is natural given that they originate from different countries. In contrast, the rural class (S2) (with no pupils originating from outside Sweden) has a narrower worldview. These pupils talk in more

charitable terms about how to take care of those in need, although xenophobic ideas are also expressed.

As mentioned earlier, teachers in Sweden can work independently, but they have to operate within the framework of the Education Act (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2016/2010) and the national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). This is corroborated in the study. Even though the pupils' contexts and backgrounds are different, there are more similarities than differences in the work that is done in the classes; this could be due to the teachers' state-regulated working conditions. Interestingly, no participants express criticism of or critical ideas against human rights or human rights education. Rather, they are very polite (except for the few xenophobic utterances) and seem to be unaware of such a possibility.

Four main conclusions can be drawn from the study: i) knowledge of human rights is weak, ii) human rights are the other's rights, iii) human rights are violated and iv) human rights education resembles democratic education. Let me elaborate on these conclusions.

i) *Knowledge of human rights is weak*

When the pupils discuss human rights in the interviews they have very little to say, probably because they are not very familiar with them. According to the pupils, human rights are 'rules that the UN has' (P1), or 'rules that you need when you are grown up' (P2). If we compare the more precise rights content (human rights or children's rights) expressed in the group work with the content in the lessons, the knowledge that is talked about in the interviews is diffuse and imprecise. For example, rights are things that others do not have, are the basis for treating other people well, or are for protecting and supporting the weak and vulnerable. In this sense, human rights are not precise knowledge to be memorised and learned (appropriated), but guidelines for good social (inter)action. Neither do the teachers have any definite opinions about which human rights the pupils should learn. The rights content (in class) is not chosen by the teacher, but is determined by his or her choice of website. This may be a coincidence, although it is more likely a result of the teacher's (lack of) knowledge about human rights.

The choice of content is a central didactic issue (cf. Uljens, 1997; Gundem, 2011). If content is not consciously chosen, it will have consequences for the education that is provided and for what pupils learn. This lack of clarity is also apparent in the pupils' answers, which are imprecise. This means that as knowledge content, rights are *cognitively weak* (cf. Englund, 1997). Although the pupils work with human rights to a certain extent, they are not expected to remember or be particularly *knowledgeable* about them.

ii) *Human rights are the other's rights*

Both schools relate the teaching and learning of human rights to the world's refugee and immigration situation. The planned teaching has an international and cultural slant, although the primary aim is to become a good fellow human being. However, there is a greater interest in those who are weak and vulnerable, or in people living in poor conditions or difficult circumstances. Human rights are something that others either have or *do not have*.

The themes that the pupils talk most about, especially in school 2 (the rural school), are the poor conditions of refugees and immigrants and violations of human

rights. The pupils continually repeat that 'they' have problems and that 'we' must help them. This educational discourse was dominant in the 1980s, when many non-Europeans migrated to Sweden and the focus was on helping them and solving their problems (cf. Brantefors, 2015, 2011). Today, some thirty years later, ideas about pluralism have been modified and the educational trend is to counteract 'us and them' relations (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). However, my data shows that parts of the older 'us' and 'them' discourse remain and that this is still dominant in classroom discussions.

The curriculum also states that children should learn to have solidarity with those who are weak and vulnerable (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). But what does solidarity mean to the children in our two classes? Professor Emeritus Sven-Erik Liedman (2012; see also Leistina, 2005) discusses two main principles of solidarity: one where there is an interdependent relationship, and another that is unilateral. In the first principle, solidarity is mutual and those who are related to each other benefit from the relationship. However, in the unilateral principle there is no reciprocity, which means that here solidarity is more like charity. The findings show that the unilateral principle of solidarity prevails in the two classes. 'The other' is not close, but somewhere else, often far away. The pupils never really get to know who they are to feel solidarity with, or what it means. It is clear that this unilateral solidarity shields the pupils and the teachers from real situations and makes their actions symbolic (cf. Cranston & Janzen, 2017).

The question is how to challenge this approach. In order to overcome the charity-oriented discourse, teachers need to critically examine their teaching content and teaching methods and become more aware of the different alternatives. They also need to examine their own knowledge of human rights. Although they have probably learned about human rights issues in their teacher education, the 'us' and 'them' approach still appears to dominate on the websites (Swedish versions) they use. The conclusion is that the teachers need to be much more critical about their own knowledge of human rights and their teaching materials. It is also desirable that the quality of websites, as well as the messages their teaching and learning materials contain, is properly examined before being used in human rights education.

iii) *Human rights are violated*

As the themes of bullying and violation are repeated at all levels of education, from preschool to higher education, the pupils in the two classes are already familiar with them. In this study, bullying and violations are emphasised as aspects of human rights, particularly by T1. However, they could just as well have been treated separately and the pupils could have talked about violations without even mentioning rights. For example, it is unlikely that pupils would say: 'Do not touch me, you are violating my human rights'. They would be more likely to say 'You are not allowed to violate me'.

Violation is not just a matter of bullying; it has other forms and expressions, such as racism. Violation and bullying can mean anything from interpersonal relations to hate between nations. Silvia Edling (2017) discusses an expanded view of violation and maintains that bullying, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, violation, discrimination and oppression are often treated as isolated phenomena in research into violence. However, in one way or another these phenomena are permeated by violence and often have common denominators: '[…] there are similar patterns between different forms of violence' (p. 9). A common conception of the different

forms of violence is the inability 'to handle and respond to human pluralism' (p. 9). This study shows that pupils practise and learn how to engage with and relate to other human beings with or without relating their behaviour to human rights. Relational issues and practical action in plural contexts are aspects of daily life at school and the pupils constantly acquire new experiences of them (cf. Dewey, 1916). As Edling advocates, these daily interactions are about dealing with differences between people (human pluralism).

iv) *Human rights education resembles democratic education*
International overviews of the teaching and learning of human rights (Brantefors & Thelander, 2017; Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016, see also Bajaj 2017) show that teaching and learning traditions are different in different parts of the world. As described in the introduction, the content of human rights education changes in relation to the context (Bajaj, 2011). For example, in the Scandinavian countries the focus is mainly on democracy and human rights, whereas in other parts of the world the focus is on human rights and knowledge about them. In Sweden, fundamental values, including human rights, are emphasised at all educational levels. Here, human rights education is either *part of* democratic education or is *replaced* by democratic education and fundamental values. This is also what this study has shown, namely that human rights are mixed with fundamental values and concepts of human rights are used unconsciously and unclearly. The same phenomenon (in a Norwegian context) is also found by Osler and Solhaug (2018): 'In everyday discourse, the terms "human rights" and "democracy" are often conflated, and the emphasis is generally on democratic *practices* in schools' (p. 278).

There are obvious differences between the present study and an earlier study of the teaching and learning traditions of human rights (participation, empowerment, awareness and respect of rights) (Brantefors & Thelander, 2017). The main difference is that the aims and contents of the teaching and learning of human rights do not correspond to any of the four traditions, but are instead concerned with *democratic education*. This could be understood in relation to the context – in this case Swedish education. The study shows that the teaching and learning of human rights is more or less, and probably unconsciously, linked to fundamental democratic values. These values have a central place in the Swedish education system, a system regulated by the Education Act (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2016/2010) and the national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). The question is whether it would be possible to transform established fundamental values education into an education that has a specific human rights focus. And would this be deemed desirable?

None of the three ideological approaches of HRE – HRE for Global Citizenship, HRE for Coexistence and HRE for Transformative Action (Bajaj, 2011) – are fully reflected in the results of my research. It can be noted that transformative and critical ideas about human rights education are practically absent in Sweden. Here, human rights education is strongly linked to fundamental democratic values and this means that human rights are described as things that are not necessarily for 'us', but for 'them'. This result is interesting in relation to multicultural Swedish society and this might raise the didactic question 'for whom'. I will return to this point below. However, the problem remains of how to analyse and theorise the different contextual conditions of HRE (Bajaj 2011, cf. Tibbitts 2008). I agree with Bajaj and would argue that each context needs to be described in terms of its own conditions.

With regard to the teaching and learning of human rights in Sweden, I therefore suggest an additional category of tradition/approach: *human rights education as democratic education*. This category is suggested in order to show that Sweden has a dominant tradition or ideological approach to the teaching and learning of human rights that is unique.

The fundamental values of the Swedish curriculum (in which human rights are included) have been criticised (e.g. Roth, 1998) for not being adequate for a multicultural society. The problem is that so-called common values are seldom common, but are instead based on the values of the majority society (the national) (cf. Osler, 2008, 2011). Ljunggren (2011), on the other hand, states that open, pluralistic and tolerant Sweden has always been a society in a state of continuous creation. This means that it is possible to see two different scenarios of values education: one in which 'othering' is more dominant (cf. Brantefors, 2011, 2015) and another in which pluralism and mutuality are core values (cf. Liedman, 2012). The results of this study of HRE indicate that the teaching and learning of human rights take place at the junction between different conceptions of values education. The first conception is that fundamental values, including human rights, are for everyone. This is based on the pluralistic view of society expressed in the curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). The second conception of 'othering' and charity is more problematic and is the one that emerges in this study. The conclusion is that the tension between what is expressed in the curriculum and what happens in the classroom requires action. If a different human rights education is desired, then this needs to be provided.

Finally, we can ask whether the human rights education the pupils receive has enabled them to become more critically aware of human rights and to grow as holders of rights. It is clear that they seem to have learned the content that their education has offered them. However, as has been described in the article, this content deals with other themes than human rights. Dewey talks about the actively engaged child and that growing has to do with doing (Dewey, 1916). What is characteristic of the education of the children in the two classes is practical action. Although the connection to human rights is not clear, the pupils' experiences involve human rights. They experience a democratic and human rights influenced education, although it is doubtful whether this has helped them to grow as holders of human rights. The final conclusion is that if a human rights education is required, then this needs to be discussed and the prerequisites for it changed. Firstly, we have to actively discuss the curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018) and what human rights education means. We also need to ask some didactic questions: What should be the contents of human rights education, and how should it be taught? Who are the rights for? We also have to reflect on the available teaching and learning alternatives and to make conscious selections. Secondly, and finally, teacher education courses on the teaching and learning of human rights need to be examined. Some research shows that this is a neglected area in teacher education. Accordingly, we need to make student teachers aware of human rights and teach them how to critically examine rights and their preconditions. In order to provide a better education in human rights the preconditions for it will need to be fully scrutinised.

Notes

[1] In the first search for potentially relevant publications, 111 articles dealing generally with the teaching and learning of rights in early childhood education or formal education were selected. After screening the 111 publications, 57 remained and were read in full. 28 publications were included in the final analysis (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016).
[2] A European research network for didactic research was established in 2006: *Didactics – Learning and Teaching* (http://www.eera-ecer.de/networks/didactics/ .

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