

Research articles

# Human rights education and the conscience of mankind: developing didactics of perplexity

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## Abstract

The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that ‘disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind’. From this point of departure, we argue that philosophical, political, and religious reflections on core concepts such as conscience, freedom, equality, dignity, justice, and peace can help to create an appropriate balance between a normative framework and a non-affirmative approach to human rights education. Teacher students can benefit from philosophical reflection, critical thinking, and individual judgement, as this will enhance the authoritativeness and self-determination of both teachers and learners. In terms of didactics, we consider the potentials of a concept-based approach inspired by the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt and her critical discussion of the perplexities of the rights of man.

## Keywords

Human rights, religious education, concept-oriented didactics, worldliness, conscience

## **Human rights education in Denmark and didactic challenges**

In the current political situation in Europe there is an urgent need to teach human rights, human solidarity, peace, and security (Osler, 2016) as populist ideas and tendencies towards polarisation and radicalisation seem to be growing. Although Denmark has generally had a high standard for protecting human rights, in recent years we have seen several policy measures that have led to citizens losing some of their procedural guarantees. In its annual report for 2020, The Danish Institute of Human Rights (2020) remarks that ‘with this trend, Denmark is moving away from the fundamental values on which we have built our society,’ and it calls for ‘political measures to ensure the protection of human rights and the fundamental rights of citizens.’ In recent times some political and legal voices have expressed reservations about human rights. The dialogue on human rights is difficult and easily polarised between those who stress universality and binding legal obligations, and those who want to test the limits of international conventions. The Danish Institute for Human Rights, which continuously publishes reports, policy papers and fact sheets on current issues, makes recommendations by weighing different articles and looking at various legal practices. In other words, human rights are not a list of facts but are rooted both in the worldliness of human life and in principles. Human rights can never be taken for granted but are reflected by differences of formalism, idealism, and pragmatism (Christoffersen, 2018). Considering the issue of whether people have human rights, Freeman argues that this may give the impression that rights are a kind of thing with a puzzling quality. But human rights, he argues, are just claims and entitlements derived from moral and legal rules. Believing in human rights is not a matter of whether they exist, but if there are good reasons to uphold them. And if one ought to have respect for human rights, an ongoing rigour is needed to find sufficiently good reasons for them, as well as a justificatory philosophical theory (Freeman, 2017).

A possible strengthening of human rights education (HRE) may be addressed at several levels of the curriculum: societal, institutional, instructional, and personal/experiential (Afdal, 2006; Goodlad, 1979). Whereas the priority of HRE in policy frameworks is a primary condition for a stronger emphasis on human rights in education (Osler, 2016), the objective of this article is to consider the didactic challenges of teaching human rights in teacher education and schools. Parker sees a need for clarification and strengthening of the HRE curriculum and argues that disciplinary concepts such as universal rights, universal respect, human dignity, peaceful coexistence, dissent, and activism should be at the core of the curriculum (Parker, 2018, p. 13). In alignment with the United Nations (UN) Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011), such concepts fall into the category of education about human rights. Parker further emphasises the need for a recontextualisation of knowledge on human rights based on Bernstein’s terms, with consideration of the subjects (children and young people), settings (schools) and purposes (general education) (Parker, 2018, p.13, Bernstein, 2000). This is

related to the level of instruction and how teachers teach the curriculum and relate it to students. Depending on the actual context, there may be a need for clarification of the HRE curriculum, but we also want to stress that the formal curriculum is not the educational reality, as there may be some distance between policy frameworks and actual classrooms (Afdal, 2006). Possible conflicts, dilemmas or paradoxes may not be included in the formal curricula but will be part of the actual experiences in the classroom (Krukow, 2020), so recontextualisation implies that student teachers need to learn how they can encompass and address the paradoxes and dilemmas as well as the principles and ideals of human rights (see also the reflections in Krukow, 2020 based on voluntary HRE for Amnesty).

The formal curriculum for Danish teacher education has specified goals for realising human rights and the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) it addresses the history of ideas concerning rights as well as the dynamics between human rights, religion, and democracy. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015). The formal aims for the Danish *Folkeskole* (municipal primary and lower secondary education) states: ‘the daily activities of the school must be conducted in a spirit of intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.’ (Ministry of Children and Education, 2018). One of the didactic challenges for teachers is to balance HRE with democratic formation and the principle of *åndsfrihed* (intellectual freedom – or rather freedom of mind). The aims for comprehensive schools reflect values of high political and public priority. Denmark has a long tradition of emphasising freedom of mind as a central democratic and educational principle. Although it is a contested concept, there is a broad consensus on the right to dissent, as freedom of mind includes the freedom to criticise democracy and express anti-democratic views (Ank & Toft Jakobsen, 2020). A central point of reference from the history of ideas is Kant’s ‘motto’ that enlightenment means having the courage to use one’s own reasoning. For Biesta this implies a democratic educational orientation that will encourage everyone ‘to think for themselves, draw their own conclusions and act upon them, rather than following other people’s orders’ (Biesta, 2021, p. 14). In HRE, as well as in education at large, the teacher is confronted with the pedagogical paradox of education: ‘How do I cultivate freedom by coercion?’ We follow Biesta in considering Dietrich Benner’s understanding of educational work as helpful in addressing this paradox (Biesta, 2021, p. 14; Benner, 2015).

As education *about, for, and through* human rights includes ethics, moral education, and critical thinking (Osler, 2016), our aim is to consider how a concept-oriented approach (Parker, 2018; Lenz, 2019; Andersen & Sigurdsson, 2020) can stimulate learners to reflect on the multiple, equivocal, and historically contingent trajectories of human rights (Göndogdu 2011, p. 6). We approach HRE from a pedagogical angle based on Dietrich Benner’s (2005; 2008) non-affirmative theory of formation, while our philosophical analysis builds on the political thinking of Hannah Arendt. From this dual approach we discuss the qualification of teachers

to address didactic challenges and dilemmas in the overlapping areas of RE and HRE (Lilja & Osbeck, 2020; Osler and Starkey, 2018). We place this in relation to the pedagogical paradox and argue that teacher students learning about human rights as a legal and normative framework should also have the possibility of a deeper philosophical understanding of and reflection on the basic values that underpin them. The questions we address are the following:

How can methodologies based on philosophical reflection, critical thinking, and individual judgement help to qualify teacher students to address paradoxes and dilemmas in HRE, as well as in the interplay between HRE and RE?

How might Arendt's analysis of the perplexities of the rights of man contribute to a consideration of the pedagogical paradox in HRE?

What are the possibilities of a concept-oriented didactic approach in the interplay between HRE and RE?

### **Concept based didactics and the 1948 Preamble.**

Two starting points for HRE are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948) and the CRC (United Nations, 1989), and a curriculum for teacher education will include knowledge on core international conventions as well as international law. The didactic approach is often defined as encompassing learning *about* rights, *through* rights and *for* rights (Osler & Starkey, 2018). The basic idea is to consider HRE as a means of transformation but also as a mechanism for transmitting a 'core of shared values on which just and peaceful democratic societies may be built' (Osler & Starkey 2018). The threefold approach to HRE has similarities with the traditional structure of citizenship education (CE), encompassing knowledge (learning *about*), skills (learning *through*), and values (learning *for*). But whereas CE is primarily framed within the nation state, HRE has a universal scope that is related to a cosmopolitan ideal (Kemp 2011; Nussbaum, 2019; Parker, 2018). Recent research has documented how teachers in Denmark are generally concerned with the transmission of values and the formation of future citizens (Pedersen, Böwadt & Vaaben, 2020, p.37). But the transmission of values is at the core of the pedagogical paradox, with a possible tension or conflict between normativity and freedom of mind.

A common challenge for HRE as well as for democratic formation is that human rights and democratic values must be acquired by free consent. This challenge leaves an ambivalence at the core of the pedagogical task. Kant defined the challenge of upbringing when he considered how we can combine submission under law with the ability to make use of one's freedom. The pedagogical paradox is the question of cultivating freedom under coercion (Kant, 1803/2000). More recently, Benner has argued this paradox to be the basic structure of the pedagogical

interaction (Benner, 2005). The moral duty to respect the other as a goal and not as a means entails that even though the relation of teacher and pupil is not an equal one, respect for the other must take the form of recognition. In the pedagogical interaction the teacher as a grownup and the pupil as a growing child share a common cause despite the asymmetric relation. In this common cause lies the possibility of a free and mutual recognition regardless of class or any kind of predetermination of a particular function in society. The requirement of the teacher is to step out of his self-inflicted incapacity and relate to the child as not responsible for its natural incapacity (Benner, 2005, pp. 101-105). It is the teacher's responsibility to address and take care of the open possibility of formation. The practice of the school is to meet the child's need for learning. Human life is a reflective practice, and the teacher must consider the basic paradox that external influence leads to pupil self-reflection (Benner 2005).

In Benner's view it is characteristic for humans that we come into being through practice. Practice is not defined by sheer action. Practice as a distinctly human activity requires two criteria. First, practice means doing something with a purpose; second, any kind of practice is always a substantial answer to a need. Education is one sphere of practice among others: work, politics, ethics, art, and religion. Every sphere meets these two criteria, as different kinds of practice are passed on culturally and not biologically. Education is an answer to this need, but teaching neither repairs nor removes the need, once and for all. One can look at the newborn child as incomplete with such open possibility (Benner, 1980). As the main task of school is to take care of and challenge the unique and open possibility of formation, the ongoing pedagogical practice of the teacher is to watch out for the moment when the pupil can take over, and the teacher can step aside and become redundant. The aim of the school is to teach the pupils a reflective and critical practice. A non-affirmative formation needs the pedagogical paradox in the basic structure of teaching. The teacher must be aware—particularly when it comes to ethical, political, and religious issues—that much can only come to the mind of the child if the school creates exercises with opportunities for freely encountering matters of the world which the child does not get to know naturally (Oettingen 2011, pp 70; 92-110).

The paradoxical structure of the pedagogical practice reflects the basic vulnerability of human rights, which is expressed in the political writings of Hannah Arendt:

That all men are created equal is not self-evident, nor can it be proved. We hold this opinion because freedom is possible only among equals, and we believe that the joys and gratifications of free company are to be preferred to the doubtful pleasures of holding dominion. .... Their validity depends upon free agreement and consent; they are arrived at by discursive, representative thinking; and they are communicated by

means of persuasion and dissuasion. (Arendt, 1961/1993, p. 247)

In addition to the threefold (*about – through – for*) approach to HRE, Osler has highlighted the potential of narratives to ‘link legal and ethical frameworks with learners’ own struggles’ and argued that narratives need to be placed centrally within HRE (Osler, 2016, p. 74). This includes three key elements: (1) information about and experience of democracy and human rights in theory and practice; (2) opportunities to explore and reflect on various identities and cultural attributes, to create personal narratives, and to develop processes of self-learning; and (3) cooperative practice, teamwork, and the development of collective narratives, and study of cognitive models that enable learners as a group to make sense of the world (Osler, 2016, p. 75). Whereas this approach to HRE is comprehensive and multifaceted, we suggest that a concept-based methodology can develop and further support the cognitive element, especially when we address the paradoxes and perplexities of HRE.

As a point of departure for the didactic reflection, we will outline some central points from the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt, with special attention to her investigation of thinking in *The Life of the Mind* (1971/1978) and the critical reflection on what she calls the perplexities of the rights of man (Arendt, 1951/1979; Göndogdu, 2011). Göndogdu (2011) has convincingly argued that Arendt’s critique of human rights is of an aporetic nature, as it is centered on the perplexities and paradoxes of these rights: ‘The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable – even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them – whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state’ (Arendt, 1951/1979, p. 294).

Aporetic derives its meaning from the Greek *aporos*—an impassable path or unsolvable problem. However, for Arendt aporetic becomes a methodological orientation that does not paralyse but rather paves the way for ‘rearticulating human rights beyond the binaries that prevail in the conventional understanding of these rights’ (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 7) – binaries such as man/citizen; universal/particular; nature/history. In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt describes how Plato’s Socratic dialogues are aporetic in the sense that ‘the argument either leads nowhere or goes around in circles’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 168). It is characteristic for concepts that ‘when we try to define them, they get slippery.’ Therefore, the important point is not that Socrates discovered the concept, but that we ask what he did when he discovered it (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 170).

Arendt characterises the Socratic approach to concept-dialogue through three ‘similes’ (metaphors) that he applied to himself: the gadfly, the midwife and the ‘electric ray’ (a fish that paralyzes and numbs by contact) (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 172). The gadfly represents a sting that will arouse the citizens from a condition of sleeping to thinking and examination.

The midwife represents the ability to purge people of those unexamined pre-judgements that would prevent them from thinking and help them get rid of bad opinions without giving them truth. Finally, Socrates ‘remains steadfast in his own perplexities, and like the electric ray, paralyzed himself, paralyzes anyone he comes into contact with’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 173). But what seems to be paralyzing from the outside can, according to Arendt, be ‘felt as the highest state of being active and alive’ and, as such, indeed be a very productive moment (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 8).

The aporias and the perplexities they cause appear in two ways in Arendt’s analysis of human rights. First, they are ultimately groundless, as is expressed in the statement that the claimed equality is neither self-evident, nor can it be proved (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 5). As Göndogdu elaborates: ‘Despite endless search for normative foundations to clarify their subject, scope, and ground, they continue to be defined in terms of tensions between man/citizen, universal/particular, natural/history’ (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 9). Second, there is an often tense, and at times even conflictual, relationship between human rights and the institutional structures established to protect them. Arendt traces the source of this perplexity to ‘the unbridgeable abyss ... between living in solitude and living together’ (Arendt, 2005, p. 85), the very condition of plurality among humans. This abyss is apparent in Plato’s definition of politics as different from labour, on the one hand, and philosophy, on the other. Either sheer utility or rationality defines the human area of politics. In a historical perspective Arendt explains how the church transformed this reservation and made solitude a possibility for everybody, not something limited to a few. The search for truth in solitude, whether this search is a contemplation of the idea of ideas, or if it cares for the salvation of the soul, confines the political space (Arendt, 2005, pp. 137-139). Within this distinction, the unbridgeable abyss, Arendt defines the limits of politics. In relation to this second perplexity of human rights, issues concerning religion, culture, and identity make it particularly complex to teach in the interplay between RE and HRE. But the analysis and discussion of human rights in Arendt’s work also reflects the historical context of the 1948 declaration. A central concept for Arendt, as well as for the UDHR, is conscience.

### **The conscience of mankind**

The Preamble of the UDHR calls upon the conscience of mankind. Arendt witnessed the collapse of human rights the moment large groups of people in the nineteen-thirties became refugees in the heart of Europe. With no state to secure their rights, there were millions who did not even have a minimum of rights. In the collapse of politics, she turned to the promise of politics, claiming at the same time that there were limits. ‘It is the question whether conscience can exist in a secular society and play a role in secular politics’ (Arendt, 2005, p. 22). It is central that politics deals with the coexistence and association of different people,

whereas ‘Man, as philosophy and theology know him, exists – in politics only in the equal rights that those who are most different guarantee for each other’ (Arendt, 2005, p. 94). Man, for Arendt, is synonymous with human being. It is an apolitical concept because politics arises in what lies between men and is thus outside of man. This emphasises the relational nature of politics and implies a critical approach to the Western tradition of substituting history for politics: ‘In the idea of world history, the multiplicity of men is melted into one human individual, which is then also called humanity. This is the source of the monstrous and inhuman aspect of history, which first accomplishes its full and brutal end in politics.’ Thus, politics and legal institutions are needed to secure plurality in the world of humans and to avoid a deterioration to a right of sameness for every individual. Arendt is critical of the idea of natural law as found in Hobbes and Rousseau and prefers Montesquieu. She is a pragmatist who is less suspicious of prejudice than of ideology. Whereas prejudice in the form of prejudgment lies behind all judgements, ideologies pretend to understand all historical and political reality. However, prejudices, the inherited common sense of a bygone context, must be examined and replaced by judgement and dedication. Prejudices easily turn into pseudo-theories. According to Arendt, the promise of politics lies in the unfolding of the core concepts of human rights, freedom, and equality. ‘Freedom exists only in the unique intermediary space of politics’ (Arendt, 2005, pp. 102-103).

In line with Socratic methodology, Arendt looks at the conventional accounts of human rights and shows how—just like the everyday concepts of Socrates—the term has become ‘slippery’. Her goal is not to demonstrate that human rights are void or without meaning, but rather to ‘open a critical space for their evaluation’ (Göndogdu, 2011, p.9). The critical concept-based investigation helps to avoid two problematic approaches to human rights: 1) Drawing arguments for human rights from binary thinking, which ultimately leads to abstractions; 2) The temptation to turn to absolutes in a process of foundation-giving (a transcendent or metaphysical source of authority). From this analysis of the implicit perplexities of human rights and the Socratic approach to concept-dialogue, we will turn to the connection between critical thinking and concept-based learning.

### **Concept-based learning**

In line with Socratic methodology, an education based on critical thinking should not seek to give final answers to questions of definition, but ‘enable learners to investigate the possible meanings of concepts, reflect on the conditions that inform their own and others’ way of understanding, and negotiate reasonable and adequate definitions with others’ (Lenz, 2019 p. 73). Concept-based learning is often included in school subjects such as history, religious studies, and ethics. Didactic tools for concept exploration can also be found in the methodologies of Philosophy for Children (Martens, 1999; Kallesøe & Groth, 2016). Lenz has

presented a methodology for concept-learning, drawing on the conceptual history of Koselleck (Lenz, 2019) and the phenomenological notion of worldliness in Arendt's political thinking (Lenz, 2019). Koselleck argued that a history of concepts must investigate the interplay between social structures and concepts, seeing these as 'containers of historical experience' (Lenz, 2019; Koselleck, 2007). Lenz suggests that the exploration of concepts can 'become a source of *worldliness* and contribute to the learner's capacity to take part in and build the realm of common affairs', and that such exploration of the differing meanings that concepts have in different contexts can 'become a source of critical thinking, mutual understanding, and political agency' (Lenz, 2019, p. 67). The methodology includes three aspects of concept exploration: (1) reflecting on individual pre-assumptions, (2) synchronic analysis, (3) diachronic analysis (p. 74).

The methodology of Lenz is exemplified through a division and diversity workshop for teachers and teacher trainers, based on participatory and collaborative group work where the concepts of normality, minority and multiculturalism are examined. This methodology is very appropriate for workshop activities and the explorative approach to concepts is also relevant in the qualification of student teachers for HRE. But we suggest a further development for teacher education; one that includes more philosophical, historical, and didactic reflection on basic HR concepts and facilitates reflection on the differences between learning *about* rights, *through* rights and *for* rights. We would like to investigate how concept-oriented didactics for student teachers can be informed by the analysis of thinking and the relationship between the faculties of thinking, willing and judgement in Arendt's last major treatise, *Life of the Mind*, published after her death in 1975. In the next section we will briefly introduce some basic features of Arendt's complex work on thinking which will provide the foundation of a conceptual didactic model.

### **Thinking and the banality of evil**

The question of thinking runs through most of Arendt's work, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958), through her report from the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, which she covered for *The New Yorker*, as well as a number of essays and articles. She controversially described Eichmann as a banal rather than an intentionally evil figure. Banality is for Arendt not stupidity, but rather a sheer thoughtlessness and a total lack of imagination, and what the court demanded was that human beings must be capable of 'telling right from wrong, even when all they have to guide them is their own judgement, which moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them.' (Arendt, 1963/1994, p. 295).

Arendt analyses the relationship between the faculty of judgement, the use of imagination and the quality of thinking through questions that have profound implication for education, questions such as ‘how is it possible for a person living in a totalitarian system to tell right from wrong?’ When public communication, education, and respectable society have turned ethics upside-down and established norms and values that contradict human dignity and diversity, and when discrimination and dehumanisation are legalised and criminal acts are sanctioned and demanded by the government - how then is it possible for the individual human being to trust his own judgement and conscience and go against the stream? Even in democratic societies these questions may challenge us to critically consider the meaning of freedom in education - as well as the distinction between teaching *what to think* and *how to think* (Council of Europe, 2016).

Politics for Arendt is related to the fact of human plurality, as it deals with the coexistence and association of different individuals (Arendt, 2005, p. 93). Politics arises between these individuals and is established in relationships. Human plurality has the twofold character of equality and distinction: ‘Just as there exists no human being as such, but only men and women who in their absolute distinctness are the same, that is *human*, so this shared human sameness is the *equality* that in turn manifests itself only in the absolute distinction from another’ (Arendt, 2005, p. 62). This principle of equality-in-difference (Benhabib, 1996) contrasts with totalitarian attempts to erase human plurality and freedom and eliminate all spontaneity, thus transforming the human personality into a mere thing (Arendt, 1951/2000, p. 119).

The fundamental view of human existence is not the lonely subject but the self-disclosure of the individual in speech and action. ‘With words and deeds, we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance’ (Arendt, 1958/1998, pp. 176-177). Arendt calls this second birth ‘natality’. Natality is the ability to begin something new, which is inherent in the constant influx of newcomers into the world. And natality is connected to the principle of freedom and the unpredictability of human action—both of which totalitarian ideologies attempt to control and suppress. As mentioned above, consciousness is a central concept in the UDHR Preamble of 1948. Arendt’s analytical methodology is anchored in philosophical phenomenology and her argumentation reflects a Socratic concept-orientation. In relation to HRE it is relevant to look at the concept of consciousness and the way she relates this concept to thinking. Later we will unfold possible implications of this analysis for the structure of concept-based HRE.

## **Consciousness and conscience**

The process of thinking is connected to, but not the same as, consciousness. The act of thinking is dialectical and proceeds in the form of a silent dialogue: ‘The inner duality of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who asks and the one who answers.’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 186). This inner plurality is founded in the Socratic criterion of inner agreement: being consistent within oneself. Through the discourse of the soul, man is two-in-one, and thinking is both dialectical and critical as it goes through a process of questioning and answering (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 191).

Without consciousness in the sense of self-awareness, thinking would not be possible. And consciousness is connected to conscience in the sense that each of us has an inner witness who awaits us and will pose critical questions, ‘if and when you come home’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 191). Thus, conscience becomes an afterthought; it does not give positive prescriptions but states the claim of self-examination. Its criterion for action will not be ‘the usual rules, recognised by multitudes and agreed upon by society, but whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words.’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 191)

In this sense, the banality of evil, Eichmann’s sheer thoughtlessness, refers to a lack of thinking. Conscience is not a matter of wickedness or goodness as it is not a matter of intelligence or stupidity. The inability to think has nothing to do with a lack of brain power, but ‘everybody may come to shun that intercourse with oneself’—and against that background Arendt points to the relation between thinking and ethical judgement: ‘Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought? Do the inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience coincide?’ (Arendt, 1966/2003, p. 160).

The practice of judgement is then related to two—or three—interconnected aspects: (1) First, common sense as understood by Kant in *Critique of Judgement* as ‘a sense which fits us into a community with others, makes us members of it and enables us to communicate things given by our private five senses’ (Arendt, 1966/2003, p. 139). Common sense works through the imaginative capacity, the enlarged mentality whereby we can create representations of other people in our minds. When judging, we take others into account, considering, but not necessarily conforming to, their judgements. Thus, judgement is not entirely subjective but rather intersubjective.

But the practice of judgement gets more complicated in times of historical crises, when facing ‘a total collapse of moral and religious standards’, as there is really nothing to hold on to when we are called upon to decide that this is right and that is wrong (Arendt, 1966/2003, pp. 142-

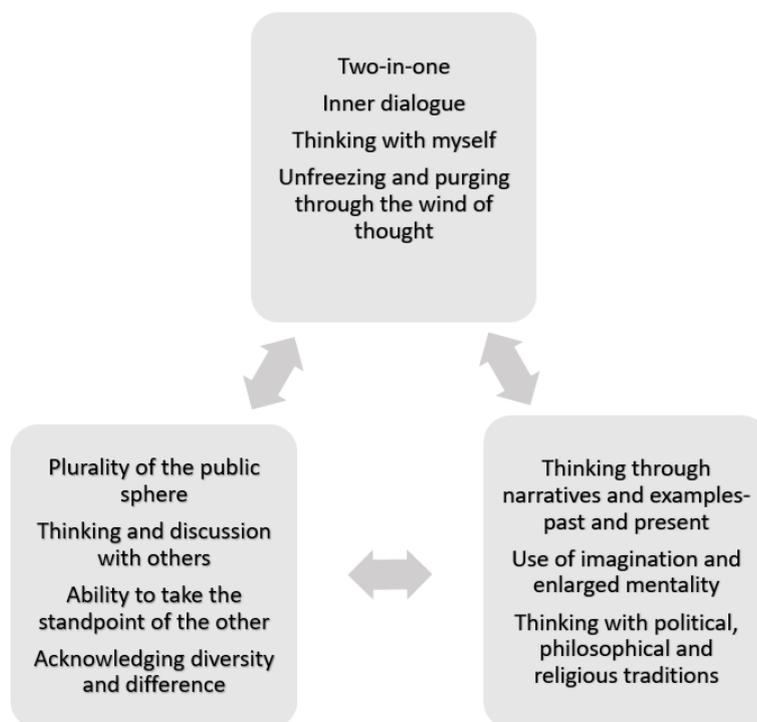
143). In such situations Arendt proposes (2) the use of examples or ‘exemplary thought’. Examples are the ‘go-carts’ of all judging activities (as Kant expressed it) and the guideposts of moral thought. Examples are linked to narratives and stories: Achilles exemplifies courage, Solon insight, and Jesus of Nazareth goodness (Arendt, 1989, p. 84). Storytelling is a fundamental human activity, and in Arendt’s interpretation of the human condition narrativity is constitutive of identity. Action as well as human identity has a narrative structure as we take part in a constant retelling, re-evaluation, and reconfiguration of the past.

Thinking and judgement are thus connected to the inner plurality, the use of imagination in the enlarged mentality, and the use of examples. But it is also the nature of thinking (3) ‘to undo, unfreeze, as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought – words’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 175). The ‘wind of thought’ is (in line with Socrates) a purging that can undermine all established criteria, values, measurements, and prejudgements. And this destructive aspect of thinking has political implications because the destruction has a liberating effect on the faculty of judgement: ‘The manifestation of this wind of thought is no knowledge, it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down’ (Arendt, 1971/1978, p. 189).

In teacher education, we find that concepts like plurality, equality, rights, freedom, conscience, and judgement can be investigated and discussed through a didactic methodology based on Arendt’s interpretation of thinking. This involves a combination of three elements: (1) Individual preconceptions and thinking (previous knowledge, experience, and ideas); (2) An imaginative approach to history, ethics, religion, and political philosophy in relation to human rights; and (3) Cooperative and participatory activities based on dialogue, active listening, and negotiation (Sigurdsson, 2019). The didactic model below (Figure 1) structures an exploration of concepts through a combination of three interconnected dimensions: (a) Individual reflection on a given concept. Each student should have time to think and take notes, and possibly draw a mind-map of the concept. This creates a space for uncovering preconceptions and everyday language, but also for exploring how these can be questioned in a Socratic manner; (b) Dialogue in groups or in the whole class. This can be structured in different ways (concept-exploration, taking different roles, dialogical methodology for active listening and explorative questioning, etc.); (c) Use of examples, narratives and definitions from the history of ideas, religious traditions, literature, or history. The teacher will need to find relevant sources—such as longer texts, thought-provoking quotes, cases from history, media-clips, or stories—to inspire and qualify the concept-exploration. The dynamic of the model is illustrated by the two-way arrows, as the teacher(s) may choose to start from any of the three points. However, all three dimensions should be included to stimulate connections between them.

The exploration can be supported by questions such as: Where and how do we find this concept in the history of ideas or in specific religious traditions? When and how has it been an object of conflict and paved the way for new interpretations? What is my own understanding of this value or concept? How do I relate to it? Which questions or hesitations does it raise? Finally, the use of cases or questions can facilitate dialogue and negotiation and ability to engage in communities of disagreement (Iversen, 2019) on current dilemmas and challenges in relation to the chosen concept. In HRE, relevant concepts for such investigation can be introduced through selections from the UDHR Preamble: e.g., inherent dignity; equal and inalienable rights; freedom, justice, peace, and the conscience of mankind. Another relevant starting point would be the CRC (United Nations, 1989), with concepts such as culture, religion, family, protection, and responsibility.

**Figure 1:** (Sigurdsson, 2019)



As part of their training for teaching human rights, student teachers must learn to address the complex and demanding political and ethical dilemmas that are shaped by historically contingent events and conditions, and which can enable or undermine democratic struggles for rights (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 15). This includes an honest approach to the perplexities of human rights, but also an introduction to the history of human rights which can illuminate how political actors negotiate these perplexities and how historical events shape and transform human rights politics.

Examining the history of ideas as well as the relation between human rights and religion

should not be structured as a search for absolutes but rather be inspired by the image of pearl-diving. Arendt used this picture to describe how the thinking of the present can work with the ‘thought fragments’ of the past: ‘Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and strange, the pearls and the corals in the depths and to carry them to the surface, the thinking delves into the depths of the past’ (Arendt, 1983, p. 206). The purpose is not to conserve the past, but to let these strange, beautiful, crystallised thought fragments disturb, renew, and transform the present—and in this way also allow the pearls and corals we have found to unfreeze our subjective preconceptions, thoughts, and doctrines (Arendt, 1968). In the following we will further develop the concept-oriented approach in the interplay between HRE and RE.

### **Didactic examples of the interplay between religious education and human rights education**

One of the core concepts of politics, as well as of HRE, is freedom. The concept of freedom of religion is not that easy to define (Freeman, 2017). According to the UDHR Articles 1 and 18, all human beings are equal and free in dignity and rights, and everyone has the freedom of thought, the freedom to have a religion and the freedom to change one’s religion. But what if a religious group condemns those who want to leave the religion or convert to another? The freedom to condemn violates the right of the individual to convert. How can one make sense of human rights if one article violates another one? These articles are potentially contradictory (Freeman, 2017), and it is important that a concept-based approach includes reflection on any possible incompatibility.

When we look at the Judeo-Christian tradition, freedom is also at the core of the narratives of the books of Genesis and Exodus (Bibelen. Autoriseret. Det Danske Bibelselskab [The Bible, authorised. The Danish Bible Company], 1992). The understanding of freedom is played out in a web of narratives that combine the pact of Abraham with the sign of male circumcision (Gen 12, 1-3; 17,1-14), the escape from slavery through the desert under the guidance of Moses, and God giving the law on Sinai prior to entry into the promised land (Ex.) Religious rituals are rooted in ancient traditions and, in some respects, they may seem to conflict with human rights while at the same time they are a source of morality and identity. In recent times, male circumcision has become a controversial issue in society as well as in teaching. Over the last few decades, with less and less knowledge of the Judeo-Christian tradition and biblical narratives and a general lack of religious literacy, the context in which male circumcision is evaluated has changed. Currently, ideas of an atheistic rationality and individual health issues hold promises of a better life. In the classroom the dilemmas are religious, philosophical, ethical, and political. The current situation seems to be a case of sound rationality over and against a tradition. In public debate this may be sidelined by accusations of child abuse or

defended as a prophylactic intervention for health reasons. Thus, it takes an extra effort for students to understand the context of religious narrative and ritual.

The Danish Institute of Human Rights recently published a report and a policy paper (2020) showing how both sides, arguing for and against prohibition of male circumcision, claim to have human rights on their side. Internationally, interpretations of human rights are not identical, but all states support parents' choice to pass on the religious tradition when it comes to male circumcision. This role of the family is articulated in the Preamble of the CRC. It is the 'fundamental group of society and the natural environment for growth and well-being' and the child 'should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding', and at the same time be 'brought up ... in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity' (United Nations, 1989). Both Art. 14 & 29 consider the rights of the child in relation to parents and the surrounding society, and both open more possibilities for interpreting the concept of freedom and religious freedom. Art 14.1: 'States parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'. Art 29 1(c): 'Respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language, and values'.

Male circumcision is a case where the concept-based approach will allow space for investigating different concepts of freedom. History can be looked into in order to interpret biblical and other religious narratives, testimonials, and symbols of cultural memory, and to consider the importance of belonging, and reflect on different worldviews. In comparison with specific core concepts of human rights—such as inherent dignity, equal and inalienable rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the conscience of mankind—cross-examination could open up for a discussion of different value systems that exist side by side in today's liberal and plural society. Working out the concepts according to the model, the students could deepen their reflection on how human rights differ from other kinds of rights. How do human rights differ from legal rights or desirable social objectives (Freeman, 2017)? Other relevant starting points would be concepts such as culture, religion, family, protection, and responsibility.

The concept of freedom should be approached from as many angles as possible such as investigating personal experiences of freedom, reading different accounts and interpretations of the practice, discussing how some political decisions led to emancipation, while others led to restriction of freedom of mind. This would also include how freedom of religion relates to the sharing of memory and rituals and reflects questions of ultimate concern in human life.

To teach in a non-affirmative way is to present obstacles, create discussions and give assignments that will encourage critical thinking. Pupils should reflect on different kinds of freedom and consider what kind of legal institutions it takes to manage dilemmas in the field of human action.

Another obvious point of departure for a concept-based approach to HRE is to invite teacher students to reflect on the Preamble of the UDHR of 1948. The reference to the barbarous acts of World War II is apparent in the Preamble, and there is a very distinct formulation—‘which have outraged the conscience of mankind’. What is the conscience of mankind? What is the difference between, or maybe rather the connection between the agent and conscience of a single human being and the conscience of mankind? A preliminary dialogue with teacher students could take the concept of conscience as a starting point. Is the feeling of what is right or wrong an intuition, an internal dialogue, or a reflection which offers guidance on how to respond in action and thinking? Does it make sense to talk about a collective conscience? Is conscience empathic or socially adaptable? In such a dialogue the use of different similes can be focused on, and the conversation can be deepened. The conscience of mankind could reflect the boundless will to communicate, the common and plural reference of memory as a gesture of a retrospective conscience, and the will to imagine and act politically by legislation on a prospective conscience. Koselleck’s concept-based approach to history and social science relies on the hermeneutical principle that focusing on concepts creates the possibility to become contemporary with the uncontemporary, with situations, decisions, and human acts of another time (Nevers, 2007).

For teacher students the concept-based approach opens for other possible didactics when they prepare their own teaching. Concept-based didactics will allow for a combination of examples from a wide range of contemporary and historical contexts, inner dialogue, imagination, and interaction between the pupils in groups and in pairs. Maintaining the courage to grapple with the perplexities of the rights of man can help student teachers to understand how these are manifested in ‘new forms of rightlessness as well as new struggles for equality that can reinvent the meaning of human rights’ (Göndogdu, 2011, p. 19), and to consider the paradoxical structure of pedagogy as they engage in the complex task of teaching.

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