

Research articles

Challenges and possibilities for transformative human rights education in Icelandic upper secondary schools

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Abstract

Transformative human rights education (HRE) implies a pedagogic intention to generate human rights cultures, protecting against and preventing human rights violations. This article draws on Freirean critical pedagogy to define transformative HRE as requiring four pedagogical principles: an explicit pedagogic intention; critical engagement on purposes of education; a critical holistic approach; and cosmopolitan perspectives. A thematic analysis of ten upper secondary school teachers' narratives on working with human rights in Iceland reveals reliance on tacit rather than explicit pedagogical intentions, a lack of critical engagement on purposes of education, and limited opportunities to develop human rights and HRE knowledge, inhibiting a critical holistic approach and cosmopolitan perspectives. However, the narratives offer content and contexts that provide possibilities to develop the four pedagogical principles required for transformative HRE through processes of critical relational dialogue. This paper raises questions of significance for teacher education in Iceland and internationally.

Keywords

Narrative inquiry, upper secondary schooling, human rights education, critical pedagogy, teacher education

Introduction

Drawing on a narrative inquiry of ten upper secondary school (USS) teachers' experiences of working with human rights (Gollifer, 2021), I discuss the challenges and possibilities for transformative human rights education (HRE) in upper secondary schools (USSs) in Iceland. Despite different interpretations and models of HRE (Flowers, 2004; Tibbitts, 2017), the goal of HRE typically involves empowering students to build and promote a universal culture of human rights by learning *about*, *through* and *for* human rights (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2011), suggesting a transformative intention.

Globalisation has helped to bring about an increased reference to human rights in educational policies since 1990 (Ramirez, Suárez & Meyer, 2007). Yet Nordic responses to the evaluation of the 2005-ongoing United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (United Nations, n.d.) suggest scarce reporting, weak implementation strategies, and the need for HRE national action plans (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2017; Ministry of Justice Finland, 2017; United Nations, 2017). As signatories to international human rights declarations and conventions, Nordic states are responsible for ensuring students' right to HRE. While they do not constitute a political entity, they share commonalities related to culture, social structure, and history, influencing the way HRE is understood and implemented (Osler, 2016). HRE is a new and under-researched field in Iceland. As such, this paper provides valuable insights for HRE implementation in formal schooling both in Iceland and internationally.

Iceland is the smallest of the Nordic countries with a population of 376,248 (Statistics Iceland, 2022a). Its growing migrant population is currently placed at over 15% (Statistics Iceland, 2022b). The introduction of the 2008 Education Act for USSs (2008) and the 2011 National Curriculum Guides (NCGs) (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) for all levels of schooling represented a significant shift from the previous subject-based curriculum. The NCGs promote inter-disciplinary competence-based learning informed by six cross-curricular pillars, including democracy, human rights and equality. Legislation supporting HRE includes the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (article 29), incorporated into Icelandic law in 2013 (Act on the Convention of the Rights of the Child 19/2013). Implementation of the 2010 Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Council of Europe, 2010) and the 2011 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2011) is the responsibility of member states. Although not legally binding, UNDHRET's exclusive HRE focus highlights responsibility for legislative and administrative measures, and policies to support HRE implementation (Gerber, 2011). Understanding the challenges and possibilities for transformative HRE in schools can support effective implementation.

This paper aims to answer the question: *What do upper secondary school teachers' narratives on working with human rights suggest about the challenges and possibilities for HRE as a transformative pedagogy in Icelandic upper secondary schools?* In the next section, I draw on empirical HRE studies to discuss the challenges to transformative HRE in schools. I then present four pedagogical principles drawn from Freirean critical pedagogy that I suggest are needed to foster the transformational potential of teachers' work with human rights. These principles are used to analyse USS teachers' narratives on their experiences of working with human rights. Despite the challenges to transformative HRE, I conclude by suggesting that teachers' narratives offer opportunities for teacher education; the content and contexts in the narratives can be used to develop the four pedagogical principles through critical relational dialogue.

Challenges to transformative HRE in schools

Over 50 years ago UNESCO recognised the transformative potential of education to promote peace and international understanding, identifying a specific role for human rights to act against all forms of racism, fascism, and apartheid (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1974). UNESCO's most recent report, *Reimagining our future together: a new social contract for education* (UNESCO, 2021), continues to emphasise the power of education to repair injustices and transform the future. As Donaldo Macedo states in the introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2005), education can never be neutral given its directive nature and, as such, must always be transformative. The notion of education as a transformative process is implied under article two of the UNDHRET, which presents HRE as learning *about*, *through* and *for* human rights to contribute to the promotion, protection and effective realisation of all human rights (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2011). Learning *about* refers to human rights knowledge, learning *through* to pedagogies underpinned by human right principles, while learning *for* reflects the action-oriented dimension integral to transformation. Article 4 makes explicit UNDHRET's transformative intentions, stating its purpose as the 'eradication of all forms of discrimination, racism, stereotyping and incitement to hatred and the harmful attitudes and prejudices that underlie them'.

Studies show that HRE in schools, if it occurs at all, is far from transformative. Tibbitts (2017, p. 86) suggests that dominant HRE models in schools reflect 'socialization towards prosocial behaviour'. Various tendencies combine to dilute the transformational potential of HRE in schools: over-emphasis on declarationist approaches (Keet, 2017); narrow ethical and moral foci without legal knowledge (Lundy & Martínez Sainz, 2018); interpretations of human rights and HRE as synonymous with national values (Osler & Lybæk, 2014; Strømme Lile, 2019; Vesterdal, 2016, 2019); and emphasis on personal rather than institutional responsibility for

human rights (Bajaj, 2012). Struthers (2017) draws on extensive empirical data on teaching human rights in primary schools in England to suggest that inappropriate attitudes to the empowerment of students and weak government policy make it unlikely that students leave school capable of contributing to broader human rights cultures. She calls for improved teacher education to build teacher confidence and comfort in engaging with transformative approaches. Other research calls for teacher education to build teachers' human rights knowledge (Vesterdal, 2016; Zembylas, Charalambous & Charalambous, 2016), including legal literacy (Lundy & Martínez Sainz, 2018). Without adequate teacher education, teachers are challenged to engage with human rights controversies and develop students' political human rights consciousness (Jerome, Liddle, & Young, 2020; Struthers, 2017). HRE is further challenged by inertial constraints to the introduction of new content such as human rights. Assumed acceptance of an education system has a preservative function which results in a general conservatism that protects traditional subjects, fails to provide space to critically engage with potential futures and encourages lack of accountability to ensure enactment of policy (Jónasson, 2016, p.14). I will now suggest how Freirean critical pedagogy provides a base from which to address these challenges, creating transformative forms of HRE.

Transformative HRE

Freire refers to education as a political act to develop *conscientização* (critical consciousness) of social reality. This act is informed by praxis (reflection and action); critical dialogue and examination of root causes of oppression to transform an unjust world (Freire, 2005). Freire understood dialogic pedagogy as the practice of freedom to develop the capacities necessary for human agency. This implies a critical learning process aimed at 'an expanded notion of politics and agency through a language of scepticism and possibility, and a culture of openness, debate, and engagement' (Giroux, 2010, p. 718). Dialogic pedagogy is not a simple pedagogical technique but an epistemological social relationship, requiring a critical and respectful mind. Learning and knowing are dependent on dialogue not as an end but as a critical relational process to develop understanding of the object of knowledge (Freire, 2005).

A reading of Freire suggests that four pedagogical principles—*an explicit pedagogical intention, critical engagement on purposes of education, a critical holistic approach, and cosmopolitan perspectives*—are needed to support the transformative potential of HRE in formal schooling. These interrelated principles can challenge inertial constraints by building teachers' human rights-related knowledge and confidence through relational and critical judgements about purposes of education, as I now explain.

Addressing human rights should not be dependent on participatory and student-centred approaches, where human rights are implicit. Developing a culture of human rights requires

an explicit pedagogical intention. The role of the critical pedagogue is ‘to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world’ (Giroux, 2010, p. 717) by drawing on ‘discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality’, with the intention to transform lived realities ‘as part of a broader democratic project’ (Giroux, 2010, p. 717). To develop an explicit pedagogical intention, teachers require critical engagement with diverse others about purposes of education. Transformative HRE moves beyond education aimed at qualifications and socialisation, which Biesta (2020) describes as two domains of the purpose of education. It also requires subjectification, the third domain (Biesta, 2020). Exploring the self in relations with diverse others allows for new interpretations and knowledge that inform the way the world is viewed and engaged with. For teachers, critical consciousness opens space for questions about *what, how* and, importantly, *why* students learn; what education is about and for. Encouraging Freirean critical dialogue to explore purposes of education provides teachers the opportunity to challenge assumed acceptance of dominant purposes of education and adopt critical holistic approaches when working with human rights concerns.

A critical holistic approach is the antithesis of what Freire refers to as banking education, where ‘the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits’ (Freire, 2005, p. 72). Applied to HRE, a critical holistic approach implies a cognitive, affective and action-oriented process informed by critical relational dialogues based on mutual trust and respect. Processes of learning and knowing require both theoretical content and practice to make visible conflicting and competing histories and ideologies (Freire, 2005). Such an approach emphasises learning about human rights in ways that challenge acceptance of human rights as a legitimised universal consensus; it encourages accountability for rights, and challenges what Freire (2005) calls verbalism (reflection without action) and action for action’s sake (action without reflection). A critical holistic HRE approach develops reflection and action that allow the moral and the legal dimensions of human rights to intersect to create critical judgements understood as political acts (Adami, 2017). These critical judgements are informed by cosmopolitan perspectives.

Cosmopolitan perspectives challenge narrow interpretations of human rights and HRE that can be discriminatory and exclusive. Cosmopolitanism refers to an understanding that ‘one should relate ethically to people from around the world as equal fellow humans’ (Gasper, 2006, p. 1229). Cosmopolitan perspectives reflect Freirean critical consciousness in that both seek indivisible forms of solidarity between people and lived realities, with reality understood as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity (Freire, 2005). Osler and Starkey (2010) present a cosmopolitan vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, underpinned by universality, solidarity, reciprocity, and indivisibility. The universality of human rights should not be understood as diplomatic universals built on assumed consensus

or to imply sameness. Applying a cosmopolitan perspective to the notion of universal human rights allows for ‘the otherness revealed through the multitude of unique life narratives of individuals in diverse contexts’ (Adami, 2017, p. 68).

The interrelated nature of these four principles—*an explicit pedagogical intention, critical engagement on purposes of education, a critical holistic approach, and cosmopolitan perspectives*—supports the critical potential of HRE. Combined, they help to problematise narrow interpretations of HRE (Adami, 2017; Keet, 2012; Tibbitts, 2020) and challenge a divisive nationalistic consciousness that affirms subjectivity in hegemonic terms, blocking access to rights for certain members of society (Adami, 2017).

Methods

Teachers’ narratives provide a valuable resource (Osler & Zhu, 2011) offering diverse understandings of human rights and the complexities involved in pursuing justice through schooling. The study of teachers’ narratives, that is stories of teachers’ own experiences, has been recognised as crucial to the study of teachers’ thinking, culture, and behaviour (Clandinin, 2013). This paper uses teachers’ narratives to answer the question: *What do upper secondary school teachers’ narratives on working with human rights suggest about the challenges and possibilities for HRE as a transformative pedagogy in Icelandic upper secondary schools?*

USSs in Iceland present an interesting context to research HRE because of a continued emphasis on academic subject specialisation (Bjarnardóttir, 2019), despite 2011 policy supporting interdisciplinary and cross-curricular teaching and the introduction of new content, including human rights. In this research project, gatekeepers assisted in the selection of the five female and five male USS teachers who self-identified as working with human rights while teaching mathematics, English, history, science, geography, geology, gender studies, philosophy, and cultural literacy. Teaching experience ranged from four to over 25 years, and teachers worked in each of the different types of USS in Iceland: schools with exclusively academic study programmes, comprehensive schools offering academic and vocational programmes, and vocational/technical colleges.

Open-ended interviews were used to collect data on teachers’ reasons for identifying as working with human rights and social justice, their teaching practices and perception of challenges. The teachers were interviewed between one and three times in English and were encouraged to use Icelandic when they lacked a word or a phrase. In the rare cases they did, transcripts were checked for accurate translations. This paper does not draw conclusions, make comparisons, or claim population representation in relation to variables such as school type, school culture, subject area, age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The

teachers' stories are used to identify and inquire into the challenges and possibilities for transformative HRE in USSs, suggesting a social constructivist understanding of knowledge creation (Clandinin, 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2014). Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was used to generate themes associated with the four pedagogical principles introduced in the previous section. The themes I will now present are supported by quotes using pseudonyms.

Dependence on tacit pedagogical intentions

Well, first of all, I don't think I am doing it enough... I mean, I am doing it very unconsciously, until starting this project with you, I hadn't really thought of myself as using, you know, human rights approaches, I haven't been very conscious of it but it's just more, part of who I am and what I think is important (Ella, English teacher).

Ella's comment above reflects a common sentiment amongst the teachers; their work with human rights is unconscious rather than informed by explicit pedagogical intentions. As Bjarni, a geography teacher points out: 'It was not an agenda to promote social justice, but I think you are always promoting social justice and human rights, but you don't know you are doing it'. Despite self-identifying as working with human rights and social justice, Helga, an experienced history teacher with a strong sense of justice, admits she has not thought about teaching and social justice in any depth: 'I wanted to ask you what you meant by social justice because that is something that I would say, yeah, that's me, definitely, social justice, but then...what are we talking about?' Tumi, an English and philosophy teacher, suggests that social justice intentions are: 'more like something that just unconsciously slipped through because it is a concern with all of us, I mean, all the teachers will all think about this a little bit'.

Tacit knowledge explains people's ability to implicitly know and do things. However, they are not able to articulate such knowledge very well, and this makes sharing it difficult (Polanyi, 1966). Dependence on tacit knowledge dilutes the transformational potential of human rights, which requires an explicit pedagogical intention informed by knowledge of human rights and HRE to ensure critical holistic approaches and cosmopolitan perspectives. Despite their good intentions, teachers' work can perpetuate unjust school practices. As they individually attempt to engage with social justice concerns, inertial constraints in the form of assumed acceptance of traditional school practices allow dominant purposes of education to persist, pushing new content and ways of teaching to the periphery of the curriculum. Developing the tacit into explicit pedagogical intention requires critical engagement on purposes of education to develop teachers' critical consciousness about what education is about and for. However, institutional constraints impede such critical engagement.

Institutional constraints

All ten teachers refer to tensions between introducing new content, such as human rights, and stakeholder expectations of conventional subject teaching and assessment processes. In a school culture characterised by what Tumi refers to as ‘self-regulation’, teachers find themselves conforming to existing dominant practices:

I come into a [school] culture, and I come in with some ideas... but then you settle into this rhythm, a routine... and there’s nobody from above or from outside coming to tell you or saying you have some *grunnþættir* [the fundamental pillars]... the conservative teachers, they are the ones who win out in the end.

As a science teacher concerned about student dropout rates, Simon suggests a need for the school leadership to better engage: ‘I am deeply worried about my school. There is no discussion... I think that the leadership of the school is taking no responsibility’. Anna, a gender studies teacher, points out, ‘if you have a job as a teacher, you get students and you go into the classroom and you do what you damn well please’. Lack of critical relational dialogue amongst teachers about the implications of having democracy and human rights as a core curriculum pillar can create hostility towards teachers who want to address human rights in schools. Selma, an English teacher, was involved at the national level in the development of the 2011 curriculum. While mathematics, English and Icelandic were allocated a certain number of credits and teaching hours, schools could decide how to organise the remainder of the curriculum. Selma found the situation stressful because of resistance from teachers who sought to defend their own subjects: ‘This is such a political thing, and how do you sort of, what do you put in that recipe? Do you throw Danish out?’ She describes teachers as defensive and focused on their own subject speciality during school planning meetings. She recalls feeling intimidated by a colleague who asked her, ‘are you implementing gender issues because you are a feminist?’ while referring to her work on gender in her English class. Selma talks about feeling guilty when she addresses social justice and human rights because it may be perceived by other stakeholders as not doing what she is paid to do.

Lack of respectful and relational critical engagement on issues of concern raised by teachers and about their pedagogical choices can lead to feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence. Simon recalls an incident when one teacher tried to create a dialogue amongst teachers about the gendered nature of extracurricular clubs. The result was a heated email exchange with no action taken. Simon describes his colleague’s attempt to generate staff discussions on gender concerns as a wasted opportunity. He points out that although the same concerns are raised each year by individual teachers, lack of initiative and interest from school leadership creates complacency. The situation he describes reflects what Jónasson (2016) refers to as inertial constraints to curriculum reform. Tumi describes attempts by two female colleagues to

challenge decisions made by student associations because of content that he describes as ‘borderline, you know, sexist, I don’t know, I’m not saying racist, but, you know, scary, a little iffy’. The lack of support from school management left his colleagues feeling frustrated.

When dominant purposes of education emphasise qualification and socialisation and neglect subjectification (Biesta, 2020), teachers’ attempts at challenging injustice are unsupported. Without legitimising what teachers do, their capacity to collectively organise and engage in critical and relational ways is limited. This means that dominant purposes of education persist and possibilities to generate alternative critical approaches become diluted.

Diluted criticality and cosmopolitan perspectives

The teachers associate HRE with participatory, student-centred pedagogy and modelling human rights values in the classroom. They refer to ‘mutual respect,’ ‘care,’ ‘fairness,’ ‘empathy’ and ‘learning about different others’. Ilmur, a cultural literacy teacher, describes encouraging students to recognise and appreciate diversity to challenge what she refers to as a national culture that is ‘not accepting of whomever’: ‘It is important to think about where we come from, how diverse it can be, what we think to be right and wrong towards others’. Similarly, Helga describes an elective human rights course where students volunteer with the Red Cross and take part in a 24-hour simulation of being a refugee. Helga discusses the course as a means of developing student capacity to learn about the other: ‘that’s probably what I am hoping for, just a kind of better understanding towards those who are different in some way, in school or out of it’. Ella and Selma use literature to engage students in discussions on characters’ experiences of injustice by creating opportunities for students to place themselves in the position of marginalised characters. Ella also uses creative writing and journaling to encourage students to explore themes related to racism, sexism and prejudice in her English class. These examples reflect learning through human rights in that teachers adopt learning and teaching approaches that reflect human rights principles.

In an analysis of case studies of social studies teachers in different national contexts, Starkey (2021) suggests that teachers’ prefigurative practices and counternarratives can be understood as transformative civic education. The teachers’ narratives provide examples of challenging dominant hegemonic social and school discourses by encouraging democratic processes reflective of their own vision of the ideal society or school. For example, Tumi uses democratic deliberation techniques to engage students in a game where they collaboratively create their version of a democratic society while Viktor, a mathematics teacher, emphasises pedagogy to build student confidence and wellbeing to challenge a school system that favours academic achievement, leaving students labelled as ‘able’ or ‘not able’:

When you fail maths, and you're not sure what you are going to do, and your self-confidence isn't high, then you don't allow yourself to experiment and try different things.

Some teachers adopt more action-oriented approaches. Ingimar, a history teacher, refers to project-based activities to challenge dominant textbook narratives: 'I did not want to have a class where all we did was to confirm some stereotypes of how life and things are'. Anna aims to generate student moral and political consciousness by writing about domestic violence and pornography, while Bjarni actively sought to collaborate with a colleague to challenge the perception that human suffering in unfamiliar contexts is 'not as serious a matter as things that happen in your backyard':

We have been taught about the Jews and the Holocaust, you know, from since they were born, and so we can probably imagine that, but this reality, I don't think they understand it.

However, it is important to question the extent to which teachers' practices are prefigurative or represent counternarratives with transformative potential. Prefigurative practices challenge dominant hegemonic discourses and practices; they function as a form of counter-narrative because they 'challenge the implicit dominance of the ruling mainstream narratives' (Starkey, 2021, p. 239). McCowan (2010, p.23) understands prefiguration as 'forms of organisation' that 'reflect or model the ideal society they wish to bring into being'. His three functions of prefiguration include realisation of the ideal society in the present, learning as a process for the development of new ideas, and exemplification as a side-effect that allows people to see the possibility of alternatives. Although teachers' practices reflect degrees of these three prefigurations, as for example Ingimar's attempt to challenge dominant textbook narratives and Tumi's use of democratic deliberation techniques, depending on tacit knowledge rather than human rights and HRE knowledge, and lack of critical relational dialogue on purposes of education, can dilute the development of critical holistic approaches and teachers' cosmopolitan perspectives.

Despite an explicit political intention in the way that she works with students, Anna acknowledges that while she draws on the law in her own feminist activism outside of school, she does not do this sufficiently when teaching about gender-related concerns. Her use of legislation such as the Icelandic Constitution or laws related to gender equality have focused on historical perspectives rather than accountability and responsibility: 'I have not, you know, in my work as a teacher, I have not put any effort or focus on that, but this, this conversation makes me just start thinking about it'. Similarly, Ilmur explains that while being familiar with the legal dimension of human rights, 'it is not something that I thought of, you know, as being important'. The legal dimension of HRE, including legal knowledge, is an important component

of HRE to foster political awareness and action (Jerome et al., 2020; Lundy & Martínez Sainz, 2018). It provides an opportunity to inform Freirean praxis, reflection and action that generates an action-oriented response to injustice. Over-emphasis on socio-moral dimensions of human rights without engaging with the legal and political dimensions suggests a diluted critical holistic approach. Helga wants her students to empathise with refugees through the 24-hour simulation activity. However, without opportunities for collective and critical analysis of why and how human rights legislation can work to protect some but fail others, student capacity to develop cosmopolitan perspectives towards injustice is limited.

Despite these challenges, I now suggest that teachers' narratives also offer content and contexts that provide possibilities for teacher education to develop the four pedagogical principles required for transformative HRE.

Possibilities for transformative HRE

Narratives can provide content and contexts that provide opportunities for in-depth analysis of struggles for justice and counternarratives (Adami, 2017; Osler & Zhu, 2011; Starkey, 2021). In this section, I illustrate how working with the content and contexts drawn from the teachers' narratives through processes of critical relational dialogue can encourage explicit pedagogical intentions, critical engagement on purposes of education, a critical holistic approach, and cosmopolitan perspectives.

The narratives provide important content to develop human rights knowledge and challenge dominant hegemonic perspectives, by exploring human rights from a moral, legal and political perspective. This content can be framed in terms of rights to and in education and human rights concerns more broadly. For example, Simon and Viktor use student-centred and participatory methods to challenge the didactic approach common in USSs, where subject hierarchy and traditional power structures are common. If counternarratives build on convictions that they can be justified by human rights (Starkey, 2021), there is a need for human rights knowledge. Simon's and Viktor's narratives can be used to make connections between the right to be in school and feel secure and a school system that legitimises exclusion of certain students. This helps to build recognition that discourse promoting equal rights for all can draw the political dimension of human rights towards reasonable justifications for neglect (Adami, 2017). Such knowledge builds teachers' awareness of the role schools can play in violating students' rights even when their rights to education may be realised.

A second example of how content can be used to develop human rights and HRE knowledge is drawn from Bjarni's narrative. He describes an annual multicultural event organised by the school association:

We have had a dance from girls from Vietnam, cooking, cooking classes from Asia and tapestry from Eastern Europe... we are promoting other cultures by letting the students do it themselves.

His narrative provides an important opportunity for teachers to discuss the role of student associations in maintaining hegemonic views, despite good intentions. Events such as multicultural days can create simplistic views of culture and ethnicity that perpetuate rather than challenge prejudice and discrimination (Gorski, 2008). Providing an opportunity to critically engage with these concerns can raise questions about perceptions of 'a homogenous 'us' restricted to certain kinds of national, ethnic, cultural, religious or socioeconomic belongings' (Adami, 2014, p. 293). This can help to develop cosmopolitan perspectives that challenge the limits of human rights, including how they may be used to promote 'national narratives of homogeneous, political and cultural accounts of belonging' (Adami, 2017, p.71).

There is a tendency for teachers to react towards injustice from an emotional and moral standpoint without addressing the legal and political role of institutions to respond to discriminatory and exclusionary practices (Lundy & Sainz, 2018). Ella's narrative provides content that can be used to illustrate the importance of discussing rights from a legal and political, as well as moral perspective. She talks about studying in a university in the U.S. with a predominantly African American student population. This experience provides an opportunity for Ella to critically discuss issues of privilege and power. Similarly, her description of a family trip to Mexico can be used to examine socioeconomic wellbeing. She describes the trip as an opportunity to get her children to appreciate what they have and is proud when her son wants to give his shoes to a Mexican boy living on the street. This content allows for an analysis of acts of generosity, raising questions about how well-intentioned responses can perpetuate injustice and mask privilege. An analysis of her son's act of generosity that is informed by a legal and political human rights perspective can raise awareness of systemic influences on social inequalities and lack of institutional accountability to ensure human rights.

Dialogues on content raised in the narratives—such as socioeconomic inequalities, gender-based violence, student dropout, refugees and asylum seekers and the role of student associations—raise critical awareness of individual, state and school accountability and responsibility to ensure human rights, when informed by domestic legislation such as the Act on the CRC (No. 19/2013) and the Act on Equal Treatment Irrespective of Race or Ethnic Origin (No. 85/2018). Working as individuals dependent on tacit pedagogical intentions informed by moral and political convictions can lead to pedagogical choices that allow assumed acceptance of dominant hegemonic perspectives. Analysing content in teachers' narratives informed by human rights theory and knowledge can help teachers to develop explicit pedagogical

intentions and critical holistic approaches, underpinned by cosmopolitan perspectives. Providing this opportunity for teachers to collectively discuss content in their own narratives also creates contexts for critical relational dialogue that promotes the significance of subjectification as one of the three domains of the purpose of education.

Narratives can be used as contexts for relational approaches to teacher education. Dialogue informed by teachers' unique and diverse perspectives generates learning *with* others, as opposed to *about* or *from* others (Adami, 2014). When this dialogue aims to kindle teachers' intellectual curiosity to discover what learning is about and indeed for, it offers possibilities for subjectification as a necessary domain of the purpose of education (Biesta, 2020). Subjectification emphasises freedom to act as relative to the subjectification of others, placing more attention towards questions of content, teacher/student relationships and, in particular, purposes of learning. In this sense, teachers are developing human rights-related content/knowledge through relational approaches dependent on dialogic pedagogy, where plurality is understood as the necessary condition to become a subject (Biesta, 2013). Teachers' narratives provide content and contexts made up of perspectives of teachers from different subject specialisations. Learning in relation with each other's diverse stories in respectful ways can address hostility towards new ways of doing things in environments of competing interests. Processes of critical relational dialogue encourage intrinsic responses rather than instrumental intentions to achieve the educators' purpose, encouraging the development of teacher agency.

Teachers' narratives as content and contexts for in-depth analysis of justice concerns provide teacher education the opportunity to develop *explicit pedagogical intentions, critical engagement on purposes of education, a critical holistic approach, and cosmopolitan perspectives*, the four pedagogical principles needed for transformative HRE.

Conclusion

An analysis of ten USS teachers' narratives identifies challenges to transformative HRE in Iceland. These challenges are related to reliance on tacit rather than explicit pedagogical intentions, lack of critical engagement on purposes of education, and diluted critical holistic approaches and cosmopolitan perspectives. However, possibilities for teacher education to develop the four pedagogical principles required for transformative HRE through processes of critical relational dialogue lie in the content and contexts of teachers' narratives. When educators engage in the courageous act of education, characterised by being open to the world and diverse others, and are receptive to the possibilities that unfinishedness offers social justice (Freire, 2005), transformative HRE can become a reality. Empirical studies on how relational approaches to teacher education can work in practice in diverse educational

and country contexts can contribute to understanding the possibilities for transformative HRE in formal education.

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