

Human Rights Learning: The Significance of Narratives, Relationality and Uniqueness

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# Human Rights Learning

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I want to dedicate this work to the inspiring female role-models I have had the blessing to meet during my years as doctoral student at Stockholm University: Sharon Todd, Agnieszka Bron, Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi, Annika Ullman, Elisabet Langmann, Lovisa Bergdahl and Margaretha Aspán.

## List of Articles

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Adami, R. (2012). Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights, *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, Vol.4, No.2, pp. 22-37

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## Abstract

Whereas educational policy is mainly concerned with the content of Human Rights Education (HRE), philosophers of education have widely explored the subject and its social condition in terms of social justice education. This thesis draws on philosophers of education in exploring the subject rather than the content of HRE, focusing the study on ontological rather than epistemological aspects of learning. In this thesis learning is explored through narratives, as a relational process of becoming. The turn to narrative is taken against the dominant historical narrative of human rights as a Western project. This turn concerns how claims towards universalism of human rights exclude difference and equally concerns how notions of particularity overshadows the uniqueness in life stories. The concept of *uniqueness* serves to elucidate the complexity of the subject, not easily reduced to social categorizations, a concept drawn from Adriana Cavarero and Hannah Arendt.

**Keywords:** human rights, narratives, relationality, uniqueness, Hannah Arendt, Adriana Cavarero, Sharon Todd

*No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story.*  
(Arendt, 1968, 22)

*We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.* (Arendt, 1968, 25)

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# Abbreviations

CESCR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

HRE: Human Rights Education

HRL: Human Rights Learning

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PISA: Program for International Student Assessment

SCANET: Scandinavian Network of Human Rights Experts

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN: United Nations

UN Commission: United Nations Commission on Human Rights

UN Third Committee: United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee  
on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO Committee: UNESCO's Committee on the Philosophic Principles  
of the Rights of Man

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To give an example of how far from cold brick buildings serious research can be, I recall listening to a paper presentation on cosmopolitanism and the

challenges of education in a neo-liberal context, in an old amphitheatre on Tilos, a small Greek island, accompanied by crickets and in the company of great thinkers such as Paul Standish, Richard Smith, Marianna Papastephano, Torill Strand, Paul Smeyers, Claudia Schumann, Klas Roth and Niclas Rönström.

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## Foreword

Throughout my thesis work on Human Rights Learning (HRL) I have continuously been driven by the question: who feels addressed by human rights? How do human rights concern you and me? I want to illustrate these questions in the following narratives.

We hear stories of human rights atrocities daily in media and newspapers but all these stories have faces and names, urgent and present. These experiences do not define a being but they are parts of a whole life story. As an instructor for a course in diversity teaching given at the Department of Education at Stockholm University I went in the fall of 2010 with my twenty-eight students to *Medborgarplatsen*, a plaza at *Södermalm* in Stockholm, where we drank coffee and had the opportunity to listen to life narratives of homeless people who happened to be there and with whom we drank coffee on park benches. For my students (they told me afterwards) this was the first time they had spoken to and listened to the life stories of homeless people. From having been labelled into certain categories and given a collective story of failure and drug addiction, my students had not related to them as individual beings with unique life stories. Consequently, when one of the men on the park bench opened up to the students (in fluent English, as he had been studying English at the university) and started telling them about his life, they were caught in the familiarity of life experiences that they shared; of studying, falling in love, planning a family, finding a job. For different reasons, his life had turned to the worse and he found himself unemployed, divorced and without a home. He caught me by surprise, since we had not been discussing human rights at all, when he told my students that reading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has saved his life. I was astonished by this turn in his story and asked him how. He said that after reading the articles on human rights, and especially the first article on everyone's rights to life, the awareness that he had a right to life had stopped him from committing suicide once. He felt he owed himself the responsibility of respecting his own right to life. 'Read the declaration', he told my students, 'They're your rights'.

For this man human rights were not abstract words without meaning. Reading the declaration, he had felt addressed and he acted upon this feeling of having a duty to respect his own right to life. In his words, through his life experiences, human rights received a certain urgency and importance in the

here and now. His story spoke about anguish and human suffering, of strength and of a willingness to live, in his own terms.

He spoke about his problems of living in an apartment in the city, he wanted to be free and he felt captivated within four walls. He told us that his childhood had marked him for life, for him, danger was situated within the four walls of a home. In the streets, he felt at home. In this sense, he did not, as some 'human rights educators' try to define or determine the meaning of human rights for my students, he did not say 'everyone has the right to a home' hence everyone 'should' have a home. He simply recalled how and in what sense he had felt addressed by the language of rights and duties, where he saw that the duty to respect human rights included his duty towards himself. Through his life narrative, human rights came into life. Their scope and meaning was renewed by the political urgency of his life situation.

When I began my studies in human rights at University College, I felt an obligation to always include the legal aspect of the international system on human rights in my teaching with secondary high school pupils<sup>1</sup>. With the result of pupils looking at me like question marks and they stopped making notes after five minutes. After the lesson I asked them why they didn't ask any questions. 'You lost us at convention', a boy replied. The international legal system for them was really incomprehensible and ungraspable. I felt a frustration, both for my lack of communicating human rights to them, but equally frustrated with the actual education I had received myself on human rights – which had been overly legalistic.

Years later I was invited to hold a lecture for five hundred secondary high school pupils on human rights. The theme of the day was 'the urgency of human rights'. I went into that lecture hall, the same in which I had been as a secondary high school pupil, with a notion that human rights in their realization or violation, is urgent here and now, in the politics of everyday life, and that all these pupils carried their own, unique story, their own suffering and hope. When I got up on stage there were posters behind me from international NGOs, portraying starving children from African countries. What image of the other did this create? I asked myself, and was it ethically defensible to expose others' suffering and vulnerability in this way, in order for students to acknowledge social injustice? I had no answers to these questions, but I felt that talks of human rights did not leave us without responsibility of how we expose others in our talks. The 'urgency' for human rights seemed in these lectures held by NGOs and policemen to be somewhere else, urgent for a distant someone. Not even *a* someone but a group of people, who where being represented as if they were voiceless, without personal history and without their own story to tell. I questioned in my lecture the

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<sup>1</sup> Between 2005-2006 I worked part time as substitute teacher, in the teaching-subjects of English, Swedish and Political Science in Stockholm suburb schools, ranging from primary level to secondary high school.

notion of human rights as solely educating *about* the suffering of distant others (we are faced with these images of suffering through daily news, to the point of numbing our senses). Could it be different? Could it be learning, (not *about*, nor *from* someone who is supposed to represent the collective story of a ‘minority’, ‘marginalized’ or ‘vulnerable group’) but rather *through* our own life narrative, *in* relations? If we share the understanding that human rights, for example the right to home and security, are both about positive and negative experiences, of realizations and violations, we can agree that the situations in which our human rights have been violated may be the most vulnerable moments in life. I told the students that I did not expect them to share any of these experiences with me (as a stranger to them) and that it was good if they had someone to talk to after the lecture. I said I would not talk about atrocities in other parts of the world or show them pictures of war and suffering, but this hour would be dedicated to their rights and vulnerable situations in which they might find themselves, as children growing up in the hands of adults and peers. I told stories and pointed to structures in society created to secure the rights of children that they could make use of.

I had told a teacher at the school before the lecture that I was afraid that it would be emotionally strenuous for the pupils, but the teacher laughed at my worries and responded that I might have to ‘shake them’ in order to ‘reach them’. The response from the pupils was everything but disinterested, almost everyone was attentively listening, maybe because I addressed issues that concerned them, referring to problems and challenges that one might face at their age. I talked about human rights in terms of child abuse, of influence in how schools use their budget and of the National Curriculum in which their right to a good education is formulated. I talked about their upcoming graduation and scenarios of sexual abuse and of shame in contrast to rights. When I left the room, local policemen were up next, showing overheads of international organized crime, such as trafficking. Some pupils turned their heads down in their arms, I think it was too much for them to handle. This violence directed at them, through the good intentions of a ‘moral education’ left them powerless and speechless. What were they supposed to do in response to such utter injustice? How could they respond to political questions that adults themselves fall short on facing?

This dissertation is a critical response to the normative ways in which Human Rights Education (HRE) is often taught which seems to overlook the very pedagogical relations through which relatedness and feelings of self can be articulated<sup>2</sup>. Treating HRE as intrinsically good and un-politically, leaves the legal discourse of HRE un-problematized.

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<sup>2</sup> The importance of a relational perspective in pedagogy is frequently overlooked, but is stressed for example in the thesis ‘What or Whom’ by Moira von Wright, (2000).

## Human Rights – a Debated Concept

The social imaginary and potential for political change that lies in the concept of human rights can be seen in the immediate struggles in the name of human rights that we have been witness to through media coverage. For example on the girl Malala Yousafzai, who spoke up against an oppressive regime in the name of human rights and who was willing to risk her own life for the right to education. In the light of such human sacrifice in the name of human rights, the criticism and debates surrounding human rights as perceived by some religious organizations, government representatives and not the least by philosophers and critical theorists concerning the universal validity of rights may seem irrelevant. Looking more closely at the critiques against human rights, however, we may better determine their underlying justifications where the viability of human rights can be strengthened by meeting these critiques. I therefore distinguish between how particularist claims on human rights are used and debated in different ways in diverse contexts and how universalist claims on ‘rights’ are critically examined as a philosophical and theoretical concept.

### The Notion of ‘Rights’ and Human Rights

There are two notions of human rights discussed in this thesis: 1) ‘rights’ as a concept debated in philosophy and political theory where human rights are linked to political and moral claims; and, 2) ‘human rights’, as found in international UN declarations and conventions that receive universal legitimacy through the plural and diverse voices who speak up for human rights, even though these voices may ground human rights on morally and politically conflicting ideas.

I make this distinction in order to differentiate between how the conceptual territory of ‘rights’ and ‘human rights’ are infused by moral and political claims, and how I withhold from drawing such moral and political connections to the notion of ‘human rights’ as found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

## Human Rights as Based on Moral Claims

Human rights as a concept has gained universal legitimacy as useful in discussing justice and equality and because of its moral authority, it is one of the most debated and criticized concepts in philosophy and political theory.

In *Taking Rights Seriously*, James Griffin (2008) criticizes the human rights discourse as an erosion, arguing that everything desirable has become the object for rights claims and hence there is no solid ground for the concept that frames and defines what is meant when one refers to ‘human rights’.

In *On Human Rights*, Ronald Dworkin (1977) makes an equivalent claim against human rights, although arguing that there is a lack of philosophical justifications for why rights are desirable in the first place. He sees a weakness of the concept due to this uncertainty in how one can claim that a certain list of human rights are desirable universally and other rights are not. He therefore seeks to create a philosophical inquiry that would lead to a theory useful in deciding which rights are desirable universally and which are not.

The justificatory ground for human rights that Dworkin (1977) criticizes has been debated and elaborated on differently by other philosophers and political theorists. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971) seeks a moral theory of justice. He argues that we would be able to determine what is just and fair if people could meet behind a “veil of ignorance”, of neither knowing one’s own social position and cultural belonging nor that of the other. If we decided from this position, with the premise that everyone were ignorant of the social position they would have in that same society, according to Rawls we could then determine the moral rules in a society one would want to live in. Rawls theory has been criticized for the way it ends in conceptions of rights and justice within a liberal framework and for emphasizing rationality (Nozick 1977). We can see the work of Martha Nussbaum (2013) and Iris Marion Young (1990) as critical developments of notions of social justice.

Nussbaum (2013) takes inspiration from the work of Amartya Sen’s (2001) *Development as Freedom* when she argues for the need to ground any rights claims on the acknowledgement of human capabilities. In *Creating Capabilities: the Human Development Approach*, Nussbaum analyses the social conditions for women in India to cultivate their human capabilities in life. She identifies a list of human capabilities she finds essential for human beings to be able to cultivate throughout life. She argues that rights claims need to be measured against the human capabilities that will be supported by the realization of human rights<sup>3</sup>. Once again, we find here a theory that seeks to legitimize the universality of human rights from a moral perspective.

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<sup>3</sup> The ten ‘capabilities’ Nussbaum argues should be supported by all democracies are: 1) Life, 2) Bodily Health, 3) Bodily Integrity, 4) Senses, Imagination, and Thought, 5) Emotions, 6) Practical Reason, 7) Affiliation, to live with others, 8) Other Species (to live with concern and in relation to animals and nature) 9) Play, and; 10) Control over one’s Environment.

## Human Rights as Based on Political Claims

The debate on the concept of human rights does not solely concern the moral basis for rights claims. A large number of thinkers point their critique to the concept of human rights as seen within the international framework of the UN. Amartya Sen (1999), for example, raises three points of critique against the concept of human rights: 1) The legitimacy critique: that there is a lack of jurisdiction and legal framework that can realize human rights; 2) the coherence critique: that there are no corresponding duties or “agency-specific duties” that corresponds to a social reality; and, 3) the cultural critique: that human rights have gained universal moral authority but that ethics may be rooted more in different cultures and values than in notions of human rights (Sen 1999, 228).

One can read the work of David Held et.al. (1995) as debating the legitimacy critique (1) in the exploration of a supranational, or cosmopolitan world order in which democracy and legal institutions meet the challenges of a globalized world where human rights atrocities are not confined within the borders of nation states. Dworkin (1977) stakes another route for the legitimacy critique, in limiting the definition of human rights so that it harmonizes with what the law can mean in national jurisdictions.

The coherence critique (2) that there are no identified agencies with defined duties that correspond to the notion of human rights, can be seen in debates concerning the UN bodies that are supposed to uphold and promote human rights through development projects in the world, such as the World Bank and IMF. Ariel Buria (2005) Richard Peet (2003) and Peter Coffey et.al. (2006) give their respective argumentative evidence of the imperialistic tendencies of the World Bank and IMF to impose development projects and “rescue packages” on countries in economic need under the pretext of promoting and respecting human rights as a way of camouflaging neo-liberal ideologically driven initiatives. The conflation of economic values with human rights is one reason why the concept of human rights has been debated, as it was in the three regional conferences preceding the Vienna Conference in 1993, where African, South American and Asian countries reaffirmed the universality and interdependence of human rights, whereas at the same time they criticized the use of human rights as political pressure in global trading (Adami and Schumann 2014).

Finally, the cultural critique (3) of human rights is one of the most influential debates in the discourse on human rights, where criticism of the very moral legitimacy of the concept has been raised. The cultural critique concerns the clashes between values in different religions and traditions and the

values that human rights are seen as upholding.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Langlois (2001) for example, explores and questions a critique against the universality of human rights from the notion of so-called Asian values. He argues that this critique has been used mainly by governments against claims from NGOs for increased rights of workers and women, although these same governments seem to have no problem to apply liberal, western economic values in trade and for the advancement of capitalism. The critique of particularist positions, on the other hand, has been aimed at some of the values that are being conflated with notions of human rights, such as a strong defense for individualism against more collective social notions and for how human rights are used as political rhetoric in placing neo-liberal demands on countries in international trade (Adami and Schumann 2014). The anti-human rights positions equally presuppose and thus limit human rights to presumably “globalist economic” values, as do some of the human rights defenders, such as the IMF and the World Bank.

If “human rights” is such a debated concept, why even insist on holding on to the concept in any contemporary study? Why not simply adopt a relativistic position where any universal pretext of justice and equality is questioned in the face of violence, difference and social injustice? These critiques take as their starting point the notion of rights as universally applicable, hence question whether or to what extent we can speak of a ‘universal moral’ or ‘universal ethics’. The universality of human rights is derived from its position in international and universal UN declarations and conventions on human rights. The most universally accepted UN document is the UDHR.

However, there are different ways of understanding the position of human rights in international policy documents. Whether we understand human rights as values, moral principles, universal ethics, legal entitlements or plain practical principles, reconcilable within conflicting value systems, we see today a universal recognition of its impact in political policy and educational policy worldwide.

It is precisely because of the contradictions surrounding the concept and because of the gap between the social imaginary of human rights and concrete injustice in the world that I find the concept relevant, since its universal legitimacy as a notion in relation to the criticism against its interpretation triggers further analysis for anyone interested in justice, equality and human rights.

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<sup>4</sup> The cultural critique is re-phrased in the thesis as the presumed dichotomy between universality and particularity, which I deal with extensively in chapter six, as well as in Article 3, “Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights”, *Cosmopolitan Civil Society Journal*, Vol.4, No.2, pp. 22-37 (2012)

In the articles, I draw on thinkers who critically examine and question moral and political claims to human rights<sup>5</sup> and who engage with the tensions that arise in talk of rights, between theory and practice, between abstract words and concrete lived reality, between the declarative and the acted, between universal notions of human subjects and the particularity in people's cultural context, between dominant narratives of sameness and counter-narratives of dissonant voices.

Human rights as referred to in the thesis, are not based on moral or political claims, but as my historical study illustrates in article 3; human rights may as well be argued as universally claimed on conflicting ideological grounds. In this way, my thesis is distinct from the majority in the field of studies in human rights since these often base human rights on moral and political claims. With this said, human rights are not seen here as open for any cultural relativistic critique and I am not proposing, as some scholars, that we need to re-negotiate a list of rights that take in the cultural critique of human rights. On the contrary, through a re-reading of the UDHR in the third article I am questioning these cultural relativistic claims that human rights is to be defined as a Western project. That human rights uphold Western values is held as a serious critique against the concept of 'human rights' by Mutua (2002) who argues for a need to re-negotiate the scope and list of rights between the multitude of cultures in the world. Brooke Ackerly (2008) combines this cultural critique with a feminist perspective on human rights in her *Re-thinking Human Rights in a World of Difference*, arguing for a new way of conceptualizing human rights that takes into account the sexual and cultural diversity in the world. Micheline Ishay (2004) takes up six controversies with human rights, one of them is the origin of human rights and another is the Enlightenment legacy of human rights.

Cultural relativistic positions underwrite a notion of human rights which grants way too much space to their defenders for neo-liberal globalist reasons: instead I will propose that human rights have to be understood according to conflicting historical narratives (in chapter four). I will argue differently than the position that human rights is just reflective of Western values, by reclaiming non-Western negotiations and interpretations by turning to the actual drafting process of the UDHR in 1946-48 where people from different religions and cultures claimed human rights. The cultural relativists, against their own intentions undermine and silence these non-Western voices that seem to feel there is something important to human rights.

I am in this sense closer in my reading of human rights to thinkers such as Elena Namli (2013) who questions that the universality of human rights

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Todd speaks of 'rights' and 'human rights' (2010), Hannah Arendt speaks of 'right to have rights' (1973), Adriana Cavarero of 'human rights' (2005) and Jacques Rancière of 'rights of Man' (2004).

contradicts different religious and cultural interpretations in her claim that the constructive potential of international human rights law does not lie in practicing human rights as positive law, but in acknowledging the political nature of human rights.

Hence, I am proposing in the thesis a notion of human rights that is neither based on specific political or moral claims nor tied to certain ideological projects of globalization, but instead suggest that the strength of human rights lies in the multitude of readings that are being made for its universality.

### ‘Human Rights’ in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The concept of human rights was for the first time in history debated in an international arena after the Second World War, when delegates from 58 member states of the United Nations met to draft the UDHR. This is the first international document that defined what was meant with *human* rights, as in contrast to the “rights of the state”, defined earlier in the UN Charter.

This UN document is the most available UN text, since it has been translated into more than four hundred languages and dialects. The UDHR is the most translated document in the world. The UN has, through UNESCO and other UN bodies, worked for promoting and spreading the awareness of this document. All other UN conventions on Human Rights came after the UDHR, to strengthen the protection of Human Rights for ‘women’, ‘children’, ‘migrants’, ‘refugees’ etc. who throughout history have been denied their most basic human rights.

The UDHR lists thirty articles of human rights, where the notion of human dignity and equality are premises for the non-discriminatory basis of human rights, the relation they have with lasting peace and the interdependence of the realization of all rights. The interdependence of all human rights means that for example the right to free expression is connected to the right to education. The right to education is related to the right to health. The right to health is related to the right to life and the right to a home is related to the right to seek and be granted asylum in another country.

In the third article of this thesis I explore the historical drafting of the UDHR in 1948, involving 58 member states of the UN. The universality and interdependence of human rights was reaffirmed by consensus by 177 countries in the Vienna Declaration in 1993<sup>6</sup>. The UDHR is the only UN docu-

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<sup>6</sup> I am exploring the preceding regional conferences, leading up to the Vienna Conference in 1993 in a co-authored book chapter with Claudia Schumann (2014) “Towards a Critical Cosmopolitanism in Human Rights Learning: The Vienna Conference in 1993.” In Pappastephano, M. & Strand, T, (eds.) *Philosophy as Lived Experience. Navigating through Dichotomies of Thought and Action*. Berlin: VDM Verlag.

ment with customary law status, since all member states of the UN stand behind this proclamation, at least in theory. The declaration has inspired many national constitutions, such as the one in South Africa.

The UDHR was directed to ‘ordinary men and women’. Human rights was seen as a means with which people could claim their rights against oppressive regimes, and the respect for human rights was, after the two world wars, seen as a prerequisite for lasting peace in the world. If the explicit aim of the UDHR is educational<sup>7</sup>, for everyone to learn about one’s human rights, then *who* is that ‘everyone’?

This outline of the conceptual territory of human rights and the question of the addressee of HRE brings me to the aim and outline of the thesis.

## Aim

The aim with my thesis is to reframe HRE by making two significant shifts, to learning and to narrative. I seek to explore how a learning subject can emerge in the presumed dichotomy between the universality and particularity of human rights and how narratives can inform this inquiry.

## Research Questions

- 1) How is it possible to think about Human Rights Education as Human Rights Learning?
- 2) How is it possible to think of social justice in terms of ‘universality’ and ‘uniqueness’?
- 3) What happens to our understanding of Human Rights Education if we challenge its so-called Western origin?
- 4) What grounds are there for Human Rights Learning if we acknowledge the philosophical critique of the idea of social justice in education?

The first research question is taken up in the first article “Toward Cosmopolitan Ethics in Teacher Education: An Ontological Dimension of Learning Human Rights”. Recent policy developments in Sweden have increased a focus on human rights in educational policy. The Swedish Na-

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<sup>7</sup> The UDHR reads as follows: ‘The General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.’ (UDHR, 1948, preamble).

tional Curriculum stresses the need to include knowledge of human rights in all social subject plans<sup>8</sup>. At Stockholm University, for example, this change has meant that at the teacher education level, courses on rights are given at the faculty of law. In the paper, I explore how teachers can advance their critical awareness of how human rights are enacted through the teacher profession, and in the community at large, as a cosmopolitan skill, which cannot be reduced to knowledge about human rights as legal entitlements. My turn here is towards an ontological dimension of learning human rights that encompasses emotions and personal experiences.

The second research question is explored through the second article “Re-Thinking Relations in Human Rights Learning: The Politics of Narratives.” The paper makes a shift from a particular notion of the subject, as ‘the other’, towards a ‘unique you’. In this article, I am placing narratives at the centre of relations in education, as the in-between of learners and teachers. The question may be raised as to why narratives are crucial here when what we narrate, in HRE, may be our experiences of human rights in our lives, why not focus on experience? The reason is the in-between that I want to explore, and drawing on Hannah Arendt, that in-between is not filled by experiences, but by narratives through which we re-tell fragments of experiences, where narratives are created relationally, not in isolation. Traditionally in HRE, the focus in relations are that of overcoming exclusion and discrimination and the question raised has been that of ‘what are you?’ in order to be able to respond: ‘no matter you’re social belonging, you are equal in rights and dignity’. In this article, I draw on Arendt and her question ‘who are you?’ which instead points to the uniqueness in persons’ life narratives<sup>9</sup>.

The third research question is explored in the third article “Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights”. The archival study at the UN Archives on the historical drafting of the UDHR in 1946-48 sparked my critical awareness that the dominant thinkers in the field of human rights studies, who held that the concept of human rights was based on a Western hegemony, may be questioned since the findings revealed conflicting historical narratives on the philosophical and ideological origin of human rights. It was especially intriguing to read the written contributions to the UNESCO Committee, coming from leading thinkers from different parts and religious and political contexts. These findings exposed new, until then unknown parts of the drafting process that shed a different, more conflict-oriented light on human rights, as not based on consensus, but on conflicting ideological values. The universality of human

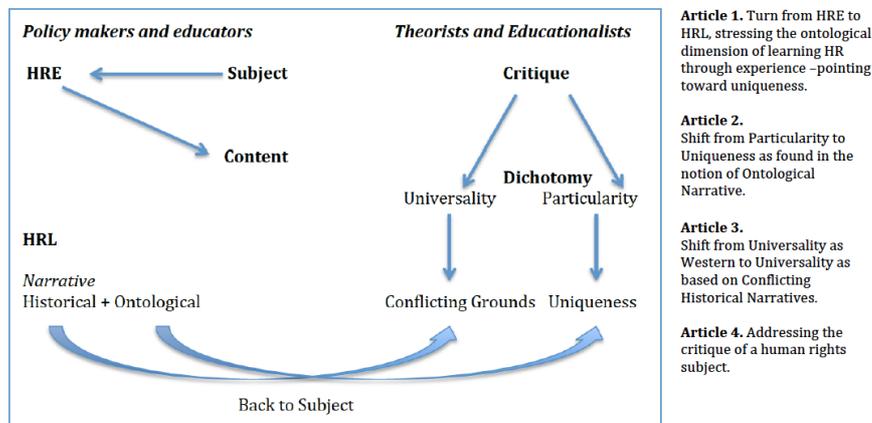
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<sup>8</sup> The Swedish National Agency for Education 2013a; The Swedish National Agency for Education 2013b.

<sup>9</sup> We can see here a parallel to Axel Honneth’s work on recognition (1996) where he argues that we need recognition, not just on a basic physical level (love), or on a moral level (where we are all equals), but we also need recognition on a third level: as solidarity, because this is where we become recognized as unique beings.

rights, the agreement on a common proclamation of universal human rights after the Second World War, needed not have been forced by pressure from Western colonial powers, but equally argued for by newly independent countries, who had their delegates selected by their governments on the basis of individual expertise. There were the delegate from India (Hansa Mehta) who had fought for India's independence along with Mahatma Gandhi, and there was the delegate from the Philippines (Carlos P. Romulo) who was a strong advocate of human rights. Another delegate was Shaista Ikramullah, a lawyer from Pakistan, who won an important argument in the UN Nuclear Committee against the Syrian male delegate. Hence, the first article deals with the third question: What if we challenge the claim to universality as of Western origin?

The fourth research question is dealt with in depth in the fourth paper "Learning Human Rights Through One's Life Story: A Narratable Self as Addressed by Human Rights". The paper takes in the critique posed by educational philosophers of the idea of social justice in education, in light of a more what I would describe with Sharon Todd (2010) as a 'realistic' or maybe 'dystopian' view of our social condition. This criticism raises challenges for HRE, for example: Can we speak of universal human rights in education when suffering and wars are a concrete reality for millions in particular contexts and for whom human rights are an utopia? And how can we speak of human rights in education as universal rights claims raised by Westerners in the place of so called others, whose voice and right to be political subjects in community is taken from them, due to discrimination, marginalization and legal exclusion? Such issues have been posed as critiques against human rights mainly by poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial thinkers, who question how fruitful it is to ignore the violence and inhumanity of human relations when dealing with questions of human rights and justice in education. This critique can be visualized as a proposed dichotomy between the supposed 'universality' of human rights and the 'particularity' in people's lives (particular contexts, particular value systems, particular social relations and social categorizations, particular legal and political contexts) as a posed challenge to HRE. This philosophical critique is hence urgent to HRE, since it questions those policy makers and educators who speak of human rights in education in isolation from the social reality we face. In this fourth article I am re-claiming a relational and unique subject through the notion of a *narratable self*, as addressed by human rights. Through the notion of a narratable self, whose life story is political, I address the critique above.



**HRE:** Human Rights Education  
**HRL:** Human Rights Learning

*(figure illustrating the argument in this thesis in relation to the articles)*

In the figure above, I illustrate how this thesis makes a move from HRE, where there is a focus by policy makers and educators on the content of HRE, but a neglect of a unique subject. Theorists and educationalists in philosophy of education have pointed to a critique of a dichotomy of a seemingly Western universality and a cultural relativistic trend towards particularity that shakes the ground for HRE.

Through my four papers, I question the universality of human rights as based on ‘one history’ by turning to Jon Levisohn and his notion of conflicting historical narratives. Additionally, I shift from particularity to uniqueness, by turning to political theorist Hannah Arendt and her notion of narrativity, and to feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, whose core concept in questioning the particularity of what someone is, reconceptualized in the notion of a ‘unique who’.

The thesis ends up in HRL where I bring back a focus on a unique subject in human rights. Ontological narratives emphasize the ontological process of learning, as becoming. Historical narratives enable for learners to relate to human rights, without being forced to adopt a Western notion of the universality of human rights. Through this philosophical argumentation, human rights become arguably based on conflicting ideological grounds, and find their political meaning in the lived experience of unique individuals.

## Outline of Chapters

In chapter one, “Human Rights Education: Missing its ‘Target’?” I give an overview of earlier research in the study of HRE, divided into four distinctive fields: 1) as related to cosmopolitan citizenship education; 2) as non-discrimination and as the right to education; 3) as legal education in human

rights and humanitarian law; and, 4) as projects, programs and workshops by NGOs and UN bodies for special ‘target-groups’. I question if HRE is ‘missing its target?’ since I argue that there is a gap in this earlier research, in which the addressee of HRE needs to be explored through the philosophical critique of the idea of social justice in education. From this overview in earlier research, I find a need to move from its focus on content and its missionary tendency in teaching in order to bring into the field of study an exploration of the subject in learning human rights.

In chapter two, “From Instruction to Learning *In Relations*” I make a turn from education to learning, by discussing how educational philosophers Gert Biesta and Sharon Todd treat the concept of learning differently and how a notion of learning that Todd introduces, as an ontological process of becoming, becomes the basis for my exploration of HRL. Here I argue that HRL entails neither a ‘learning about’ (as Martha Nussbaum suggests), nor ‘learning from’ (as Sharon Todd argues) but rather ‘learning through narratives *in relations*’.

In chapter three, “A Narrative Turn in Human Rights Learning”, I further elaborate on the way in which I suggest to understand learning human rights through narratives. I explore ontological- and historical narratives in this turn to narrative. The concept ‘ontological narrative’s is taken from the work of political theorists Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero and I discuss two characteristics of ontological narrative, namely relationality and uniqueness since they inform the way I suggest to re-think both human rights and HRL. The notion of historical narratives is drawn from the work of historian Levisohn. The notion of ontological narratives fits well with the notion of learning as an ontological process of becoming, where the uniqueness of subjects is exposed through life narratives. Historical narratives fit well with the questioning of human rights as Western in origin, pointing to the conflicting narratives upon which human rights rest. Historical and ontological narratives coincide in HRL since a multitude of historical narratives enables the unique subject to relate parts of her life narrative to different, and sometimes conflicting historical narratives.

In chapter four, “The Theme of Universality and Particularity: A Posed Challenge to Human Rights Learning”, I discuss how the supposed dichotomy between universality and particularity in terms of human rights and learning has been dealt with by thinkers who try to take into account both universality and particularity, though either minimalist or particularistic views on human rights. In this chapter, I argue that it is through ontological and historical narratives, in expanding notions of universality and particularity towards uniqueness and a universality as based on competing historical narratives, that we find grounds for HRL in the future.

## Human Rights Education: Missing its ‘Target’?

In 1948 the UDHR was proclaimed in which it is stated that the cornerstone in spreading an awareness of Human Rights is through information and education. From that time onwards information and education on human rights and intercultural communication have been high priorities for UNESCO, but 2011 became an important point in history when the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education was declared universal. The right to HRE opens up the possibility to claim and make use of all other rights.

The adoption of a United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education in December, 2011 represents the most distinct event to signify the growing international consensus on the importance of Human Rights Education (HRE). This declaration follows the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004) by the UN General Assembly (Res. 49/184), and the subsequent resolution 2004/71 of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on a World Programme for Human Rights Education, which is now in its second phase. Thus, now more than ever, HRE is in need of critique and renewal. (Keet 2012, 8)

HRE lies at the heart of the discourse on human rights. Leading up to this declaration, many voices stressed the need to discuss HRE on an international educational arena; the Pergamon Comparative and International Education Series (1987), for example, published its third volume on Human Rights and Education. Educators in the field discuss in the volume the dual perspective of education as *a human right* and education *about human rights*, arguing that ‘education is not only encompassed within the concept of human rights, but that it is the ultimate sanction and guarantee of all others’ (Shafer 1987). This means that educating about human rights is the very foundation for all human rights. Already in the preamble of the UDHR (1948) this importance of education for ‘spreading the word’ and for the realization of human rights was highlighted,

Now, therefore, the general assembly proclaims this universal declaration of human rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms. (UDHR, preamble, 1948)

The importance of education was repeated in the 1993 UN World Conference of Human Rights as well as the UN Decade of Human Rights Education from 1995 to 2004. The *right to education* and *education on human rights* has been articulated as the core for all other human rights, both by Kofi Annan and Mary Robinson, former presidents of the UN and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, respectively.

As Mariit Halme argues in *Human Rights in Action*, ‘the decisive performative account [of human rights] has been education’ (Halme 2008, 5). This primary role for education of realizing human rights is reflected by the numbers of educational initiatives (by NGOs, UN bodies and governments) on human rights and through policy priorities where political debates increasingly emphasize the need for people to learn about human rights in diverse contexts.

In light of the importance which the concept of ‘human rights’ has gained in educational policy debates and in policy documents at the international, regional (EU) and national levels<sup>10</sup>, the lack of research on the pedagogy of HRE comes as a bit of a surprise. What we find instead is a large number of studies on ‘the importance of HRE’ for some *other* higher good. It is my intent to substantiate this claim in this chapter. I outline below the extent to which HRE has been seen as contributing to moral and political projects and agendas while not being investigated enough in its own right.

## Four Fields of Study in Human Rights Education

What has been written in the field of HRE, can be thematized into four distinctive fields of study: as part of citizenship education; as moral education and multicultural education; as legal education; and, as non-formal education and projects run by international bodies in schools:

- 1) HRE seen as part of global/international or cosmopolitan citizenship education
- 2) HRE seen as non-discrimination and as the right *to* education
- 3) HRE seen as legal education in human rights and humanitarian law, directed towards either law students or legal professionals in interna-

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<sup>10</sup> The Swedish National Agency for Education, *Slutbetänkande från Delegationen för mänskliga rättigheter - Ny struktur för skydd av mänskliga rättigheter* (SOU 2010:70). See also DARE, Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe, a network consisting of 48 member organizations from 26 countries in Europe, publishing policies and recommendations on Human Rights Education (HRE) <http://www.dare-network.eu/>

tional organizations, UN bodies or regional and international institutions or courts

- 4) HRE seen as UN- and international non-governmental organizations' (NGOs') programs for so called 'target groups' or 'vulnerable people'

## HRE Seen as Central to Global/International or Cosmopolitan Citizenship Education

The first and major strand in HRE is concerned with how to teach students (and teacher students) to think in globalized terms on their situatedness and political engagement in the world (Osler and Starkey 1994, 2003, 2005; Osler 2011; George-Jackson 2010; Turner 2002; Richardson 2008; Shultz and Abdi 2008; Dower 2008; Pike 2008; Todd 2010; Heater 2002; Rizvi 2008; Merry and de Ruyter 2011; Cheah 2006; Servincer and Biseth 2013). In the literature on global-, international- or cosmopolitan citizenship education, human rights are seen as a vital part for a globalized citizen to 'create an awareness of rights beyond borders' (Shultz and Abdi 2008), to 'act in solidarity and empathy with people in other countries' (Osler, 2011) and to 'act politically on an international level' to increase the political rights and freedoms of all (Heater, 2002).

Even though HRE is not in all cases used as a term in citizenship education, human rights are treated as a vital part in education on citizenship in a global context. Lynn Davis (2000) takes this a step further and argues that HRE and citizenship education should be seen as synonymous, where human rights are to be seen as key concepts in citizenship.

As a key concept for active citizenship, Derek Heater (2002) argues that in terms of global citizenship, one needs to acquire awareness 'related to a universal ethics' (Heater 2002, 154). What is needed in this kind of education, according to Heater, is information about the world in order to 'furnish' the mind of the world citizen. He argues that the content of such education needs to focus on two types of *skills*, intellectual and practical skills, which formulates into *skills of judgment*. This includes the intellectual skill of 'critically judging the coverage of world issues by the news media' and the practical skill of 'lobbying politicians' of global problems (Heater 2002, 155). Heater wants to reform the *content* of education from patriotic towards cosmopolitan concerns.

The basic objective with 'education for world citizenship', 'education for international understanding' and 'global education' is, according to Heater, to 'cultivate in the younger generation an understanding of global issues and other peoples, 'understanding' to be taken to mean both comprehension and empathy' (Heater 2002, 163). We see here that Heater stresses the content

knowledge of citizenship education for world citizens, whereby human rights are seen as central to this content.

In 'Cosmopolitan Virtue, Globalization and Patriotism', Bryan S. Turner discusses the promise he sees in the role that cosmopolitanism and human rights plays in education for the global citizen. Turner writes that global citizenship 'as a theory of membership' has been discussed in order to provide an ethical critique of political institutions, where both Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum stress the need to develop cosmopolitan virtues to 'cultivate' global citizens (Turner 2002, 47). In his discussion on education for the global citizen, Turner distinguishes between three theories of citizenship that have shaped our understanding of the scope of citizenship: 1) political theory that is liberal and minimalistic, with an emphasis on individual sovereignty; 2) British welfare theory of citizenship as social citizenship, providing membership for workers against global exploitation of workforce and; 3) educational theory (with its basis in three traditions: classical Greek political theory; Rousseau's educational theory; and the cultural legacy of the German *Bildungsroman*) to educate the 'perfect citizen' (Turner 2002, 47).

Turner notes that educational theory on citizenship 'says that the education of the citizen in the virtues is essential if that individual is to achieve personal autonomy, and if society is to remain free of corruption' (Turner 2002, 47). There is a risk here that Turner oversimplifies the tradition of educational theory regarding citizenship and that he is simultaneously too specific in suggesting general aims of the wide range of theories on citizenship, as they certainly are not all aimed at educating virtues to achieve personal autonomy to free the society from corruption. For example Martha Nussbaum's (1998) argument for the 'narrative imaginary' extends the scope of citizenship to feelings of compassion towards others who may live in remote parts of the world. Or Derek Heater (2002) who suggests that human rights, as part of citizenship education, have the potential to be used critically against neo-liberal tendencies in citizenship education - tendencies that merely seek to increase citizens' human capital.

However, what both Heater and Turner share, is a 'belief' in human rights to create 'better world citizens' for the future, where the role of HRE is to 'cultivate' the new generation to deal with political challenges on a global level.

When identifying the universal values that should be 'cultivated', Turner turns to human rights as closely connected to cosmopolitanism, but argues that the debate around the universality of human rights has been based on its allegedly Western, elitist and interventionist pretexts. Turner presents human rights instead as a kind of global ethics:

Human rights discourse has emerged as a major example of globalization and despite its strong Western vestiges, it holds out the promise of a global lan-

guage that is capable of commanding loyalties in a post-national political environment. (Turner 2002, 46)

Human rights as an integral part of cosmopolitan- or global citizenship education are seen as a global or universal ethics, or norms of conduct, that students should acquire as skills one can interpret as a political project. Human rights serve here as a normative moral code, through which people in diverse parts of the world are supposed to interact and relate to each other in peaceful ways, but which does not provide any philosophy of how to learn or teach in HRE.

### HRE Seen as Non-Discrimination and as the Right *to* Education

The second field of study treats HRE as a kind of ‘inclusive education’ aimed at non-discrimination, discussed in terms of ‘inclusion’, ‘gender and education’ (Kelly 2000), ‘disabilities and rights in education’ (Cole 2006), ‘creating equality in classrooms’ (Ellis and Forrest 2000) and in terms of sexual rights and education (Becker 2012; du Perez 2012; Roux 2012a; ter Avest 2012; Blair and Cole 2000; Cole 2006; Ellis and Forrest 2000; Rieser 2000; Forrest 2000; Kelly 2000; Courey and LePage 2013). The right to education is another face of non-discrimination in education. The same groups of people who are targeted in inclusive education and in multicultural education are being targeted in projects that aim at *education for all*. For example, girls in poor areas are usually excluded or discriminated against in their right to education and equally discriminated against *in* education, for example through a silencing of women and girls in history studies. HRE can be interpreted here as playing an important part in combating discrimination *in* education and in emphasizing the importance of education *for all*.

This field in HRE shows important similarities to the literature on multicultural education and diversity teaching, with a focus on the rights and inclusion of voices from traditionally discriminated groups of people (Parekh 2006; Sleeter and Grant 2007; Adler 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh 2012; Sunnari and Räsänen 2000; Lynch, Modgil, and Modgil 1992). As Ida Sabelis puts it ‘In some instances HRE and diversity have such a huge overlap that the two should be considered intertwined and complementary’ (Sabelis 2012, 159).

Mike Cole (2006) focuses solely on the notion of non-discrimination in relation to education. Such an emphasis on non-discrimination in education encompasses the right *to* education, and there is a diverse literature on the right to education for ‘marginalized people’ through non-formal education in rural areas (du Perez 2012; Arnot, Pinson, and Candappa 2013; Dávila and Naya 2013; Panigrahi 2007). Katrien Beeckman argues for the need of human rights indicators instead of educational indicators in order to measure the implementation of rights in education (2004) and Katarina Tomaveski,

former special rapporteur on the right to education, made annual reports to the UN Commission on Human Rights on the situation on the right to education in the UN member-states in the world.

There are critical voices in this field who indicate that the notion ‘right to education’ is very elusive for three reasons: its moral and legal nature is often uncritically intertwined; what is meant by education is vague; and the conceptual underpinning of rights is often disregarded (Gynther, 2011; McMillan, 2011; McCowan, 2010; Du Preez & Roux, 2010).

When it comes to non-discrimination and the right to education, marginalization due to economic disparities, gender and disabilities are highlighted as hindrances towards the right to education for all, and critics are also concerned with the right to an education that does not discriminate, neither in content, nor instruction, but introduces a more inclusive curriculum. Questions regarding having education taught in one’s mother tongue, issues of bilingualism, and concerns about infrastructure that can create access to educational institutions are highlighted here, as are the means and efforts to create classrooms where everyone is welcome and feels appreciated and acknowledged in one’s difference.

## HRE Seen as Legal Education in Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

The third distinctive field of studies in HRE is situated in the field of law education directed towards either law students or legal professionals in international organizations, UN bodies or regional and international institutions or courts. This legal perspective of rights has become very influential and dominant in formal education, especially in higher education on legal training and instruction, stretching from humanitarian law, European law, international law, human rights and rule of law. The literature in this field is directed towards a growing profession of ‘international lawyers’, ‘human rights experts’, ‘human rights agents’ (in voluntary organizations) and ‘human rights professionals’ (in UN bodies and agencies). This approach to HRE emphasizes legal competence, knowledge of UN legal bodies and International Conventions, monitoring functions and clashes between different rights and obligations (Jennings 2006; Meckled-García and Cali 2006; Wilson 1997; Kaufman 1997; Lillich 2006; O’Brien 1997; Sieghart 1983; Dratz 1958; Marks 1997). As Ida Sabelis states:

Increasingly, it seems, juridification of society presents an image of protecting human rights on the one hand, but risking solidification, i.e. a lack of flexibility and further, situational and context-driven development on the other hand. Obviously, this idea is not new. Habermas coined it the ‘duality of human rights’ pointing at the inherent tension between morality and legitimacy of human rights. (Sabelis 2012, 259)

A legal perspective on human rights stresses the need for educators to gain knowledge about human rights as legal entities and knowledge on how human rights ‘work’ through international legal frameworks (Osler 2011; Dratz 1958; Jennings 2006; Lapayese 2004).

The framing of HRE as legalistic can be seen in the work of Anja Mihr (2009) who defines it as ‘a set of educational and pedagogical learning methods to inform people and to train them in their human rights. HRE aims to provide information about the international or regional human rights norms, standards, and systems and to give people the skills and attitudes that lead to the protection and support of human rights.’ (Mihr 2009, 177) Another scholar, Todd Jennings (2006), gives a more content oriented definition of what HRE could mean for teacher students.

Human rights education routinely includes teaching the various types of human rights (civil, political, economic, social, cultural), the legal basis of human rights (e.g., human rights instruments), historic and contemporary human rights violations, historic and contemporary human rights advocacy efforts, how human rights principles and concepts can be implemented in classrooms and beyond, and how one can design opportunities for students to engage in actions that promote and protect human rights. (Jennings, 2006, 289)

We have seen a shift in HRE from being taught primarily at law faculties, toward an increasingly stronger role of NGOs in creating educational programs and projects on HRE.

Prior to the 1990s, HRE was predominantly practiced at law faculties or in private seminars of NGOs and their teaching methods were based on normative concepts and international human rights documents (...). It ‘left the law faculties’ when NGOs started to develop programs based on their experience in the field and when they introduced them to the non-formal education sector. Consequently, HRE has become more local and community based and also more target group oriented. (Mihr 2009, 186)

A legal approach to HRE focuses on legislative measures at an international level in the UN system, and in regional systems such as the European Union and the South American Convention on Human Rights, as well as the African Convention on the Rights of Peoples. A legal approach to HRE deals with human rights in times of war or internal conflicts, in times of migration and displacement of people. A legal approach is equally concerned with the limits of ‘the responsibility to protect’ (RTP) and the justifications for intervention. Through a legal perspective the human being is often treated in terms of individual petitioner to national, regional and international legal bodies, as victim of human rights violations and as perpetrator of international law and crimes against humanity. The ‘human rights expert’ as conceptualized within this field of study is concerned with the number of ratifi-

cations to different international conventions, and is critical of the refusal of the US, along with Somalia, of not ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would strengthen the means of pressure from media and NGOs on states to protect the rights of the child against abuses, imprisonment and forced labour. From a legal perspective, there is a gap between national legislation and human rights protection, where migrants and non-citizens are neglected basic rights. From these studies we see how HRE can enhance the political project of building an international legal framework, but with very different conceptions about who the addressees are in HRE than what I aim for.

### HRE Seen as Empowerment Projects for so Called ‘Target Groups’ or ‘Vulnerable People’

The fourth field of studies in HRE has become more and more influential with the rise of international NGOs and other ‘civil society agents’ that promote and develop HRE (both as formal and non-formal education) through projects run by NGO’s and UN bodies, such as UNESCO. These projects are targeted towards so called ‘vulnerable groups of people’, such as women in non-Western countries, children in war-zones, marginalized indigenous people and discriminated minorities. The groupings are made by Western international organizations and agencies in order to ‘promote’, ‘implement’ and ‘raise an awareness of’ human rights throughout the world (Huaman and Koenig 2008; Pierre Claude 1997; Unesco 1968; Amnesty International 1994; Brown 1996; Åkermark 1998; Faye Jacobsen 1999; Cleven, Inglander, and Halvorsen 1996; UNESCO 1994; Douglas 1994)

As an example of this target group orientation in HRE, UNESCO held a congress before the Vienna Conference, with the aim of discussing different pedagogical tools for HRE<sup>11</sup>. The report mentions special ‘target groups’ within UN projects, as well as the importance for member states to implement HRE within their national curricula. The Montreal Congress in 1993, which focused on these issues, was corresponding to a new context; the end of the Cold War between East and West and the wave of democracy that came in its wake.

Within this framework, the objective of the Montreal Congress was to a) highlight the achievements and identify the obstacles to overcome in the field of Human Rights Education; b) introduce education for democracy as a complementary aspect; c) encourage the elaboration of tools and ideas, in particu-

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<sup>11</sup> The International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy was held in Montreal, Canada, from 8 to 11 March 1993, convened jointly by UNESCO and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, in collaboration with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Two hundred and fifty participants attended the Congress, coming from more than 60 countries from all regions of the world.

lar educational methods, pedagogic approaches and didactic material, so as to give a new impetus to education for human rights and democracy. (UNESCO, 1994, 6)

The report mentions ‘difficult situations’ for HRE, such as armed conflict, internal tensions, and periods of transition from dictatorship to democracy, foreign occupation and natural disasters. The report does not present any philosophical discussions on human rights as it has a more pragmatic tone of practical implications of HRE. The drafters proclaim to defend particular values by stressing the concept of ‘cultural diversity’ in the introduction but the report does not exhibit varying standpoints regarding human rights based on particular values.

In HRE which is target group oriented we find a focus on adult education, on community learning and on collective learning in groups. This field of study is very influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (2000) and critical pedagogy (Lohrenscheit 2006). Educators are often employed or volunteering in NGOs, either foreigners who go abroad to teach about human rights in southern countries, or ‘local people’ who educate about human rights. Education is here treated as ‘raising awareness’ about human rights and the knowledge about human rights has the aim of creating action, enabling oppressed people to demand their rights or creating new conditions for co-living.

Target group oriented projects that aim at empowerment of vulnerable groups share with the other themes presented here an interest in crafting a viable political and ethical future. Nevertheless, these four areas of HRE do not directly address a philosophy of teaching and learning human rights even when they do provide philosophical justifications for human rights.

## Two Teaching Tendencies in HRE

There are of course as many ways to teach human rights as there are individual teachers in the world. Whether as legal rights, as universal ethics, as educational entitlements or as moral arguments for marginalized people against oppression, HRE has been treated as a prescription for creating peaceful co-existence in a world of difference and cultural conflicts. Such lofty promises seem inadequate in light of the actual conditions in which education is contextualized, for example in schools within national borders where economic imperatives set measurable standards of high achievement for ‘international competitiveness’ in terms of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other standardized tests. A question posed more than forty years ago remains a relevant touchstone for my inquiry today:

The world-wide observance of the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1968 – designated by the United Nations General Assembly as International Human Rights Year – has stimulated renewed attention by many teachers to the question: How can better understanding of the principles of human rights be promoted through education in school? (Unesco 1968, 1)

The above question was posed in a pamphlet by UNESCO and it strikes me as indicative of the field of HRE that specifically pedagogical issues are of less concern than the promotion of human rights. Marie-Bénédicte Dembour is sceptical and critical of HRE, calling it a 'system of persuasion', a 'kind of rhetoric', an 'expression of the will to power – even to domination – of those making the human rights truth-claims over those who are being addressed by them' (Dembour 2006, 275). She argues that human rights have become a secular religion.

The danger in considering HRE without questioning any moral or political claims being made 'in the name of human rights' has been criticized by Miia Halme (2008), who observes a colonial and imperialistic tendency of so called 'human rights experts' in the Scandinavian Network of Human Rights Experts (SCANET) as being generally white and Western, whereas the targeted learners are from Southern parts of the world. Halme asks in her study what consequences a legal emphasis has in the educational activities of SCANET. Her first observation is that the 'asymmetry of expert and student profiles' (2008, 184) is highly problematic. Her study shows that 'whereas SCANET experts are predominantly legal scholars, SCANET higher education students hold varied backgrounds, including international relations, theology, linguistics, anthropology and sociology among others' (2008, 184).

Due to the SCANET learning curriculum, this discrepancy establishes a hierarchy between these disciplines: it forms a pattern where knowledge flows from legal scholars to a multidisciplinary audience. (ibid., 184)

Her examples from these educational activities illustrate domination by legal experts where 'the insights of non-legal participants, 'laymen', are marginalized'<sup>12</sup> (2008, 185). Halme gives an illustrative example of how a legalistic presentation of human rights was given within the educational network (which is focused on knowledge content that references articles and paragraphs from international conventions and treaties, but without any reference to learners' experiences from different fields and lives): 'This article of the CESCR has been discussed in Paragraph 5 of the Concluding Observation

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<sup>12</sup> The same tendency of placing HRE within the field of law can be found at the Department of Education at Stockholm University, where the part of the teacher education that deals with rights and duties of teachers is given by the Department of Law, not by the Department of Education, (as the course *Law and Ethics in Schools*).

number 4 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states...’ and so it goes on with references to paragraphs and articles in different international conventions (2008, 187).

From the four themes described earlier in HRE, I raise some points of concern first, to the way that these emphasize *content* and *instruction* over *learning*, and secondly, to the focus on the ‘expert’ or ‘human rights educator’, who are supposed to empower people for social transformation. According to one human rights educator,

When people ask me: ‘How do you define human rights education?’ I sum it up as follows: a human rights educator is a person, a woman or man, who is capable of evoking critical thinking and systematic analysis in a gender perspective about political, civil, economic, social, and cultural concerns, within a human rights framework that leads to action. No more, no less, because we have no other option but human rights. (Koenig 2008, 18)

From my reading, there are hence two main tendencies in HRE in terms of teaching. The first is preoccupied with ‘a mission to enlighten’ people with the knowledge of human rights that will ‘transform’ their lives, and society as a whole. The second is focused on the content of HRE, of how to ‘frame’ and ‘define’ the concept of human rights in terms of legal discourses on non-discrimination, laws and conventions.

## The Missionary Tendency

As my portrayal of the previous themes has shown, we can delineate certain common tendencies in what I refer to as a missionary approach in HRE. In this discourse educators are mere ‘promoters’ of human rights, ‘transmitting’ human rights from abstract wording in the UDHR to the particular context in which the ‘beneficiary’ is situated. The missionary tendency as I see it, is characteristic for HRE when seen as part of global, international or cosmopolitan citizenship education as well as in HRE in projects and programs by NGOs and UN bodies to ‘promote’ and ‘raise awareness’ of human rights ‘in the world’. The ‘missionary tendency’ that I have distinguished in HRE has been criticized by Dembour (2006) who argues that an uncritical belief in human rights is dangerous because it overlooks the imperialistic and colonial structures of such education. The missionary tendency in HRE assumes a Western view on human rights as a static notion of universalism<sup>13</sup> that

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<sup>13</sup> See Adami and Schumann (2014) ‘Towards a Critical Cosmopolitanism In Human Rights Learning: The Vienna Conference in 1993’; in *Philosophy as Lived Experience. Navigating through Dichotomies of Thought and Action*. Berlin: VDM Verlag.

needs to be put into question. Secondly, the missionary tendency assumes a categorization of the other in particular terms that seem static, where there is a need to open up for a unique 'you' in HRE.

### The Content Tendency

A content approach in HRE emphasizes instruction on the 'right' content of HRE, of legal expertise on human right treaties and conventions. The content tendency to HRE on the other hand is characteristic for legal education on human rights and humanitarian law as well as in HRE when seen as non-discrimination and as the right to education. The content tendency has been critically examined by Halme (2008) who notes that such emphasis on a legalistic framework of human rights is part of creating 'legal experts' who, according to Halme's study, are in majority white, Western and male. The asymmetry in the educational relations is not reflected upon in such legal education on human rights, neither are the kinds of positions of agency and power which these unequal relations are part of creating.

My main concern is whether we can even talk of an 'empowering' and 'transforming' potential in HRE from these two approaches: 1) the content approach seems to miss the very complex function of relations in education; and, 2) the missionary approach risks being blind to the possibility that learners may already know what they need in order to live as political subjects with others. It might be blind to the uniqueness of the *who* which is not seen behind the *what* that the learner represents (in terms of 'oppressed', 'marginalized', 'discriminated', 'vulnerable' and as 'victim' of human rights abuses).

This is essential for my theoretical turns in the thesis towards narrative and learning. Through these theoretical turns, I aim at taking into account the uniqueness of the individual as well as shedding light on the pedagogical relations and the inherent vulnerability of the learner in HRE.

### Human Rights Education as Part of a Larger Trend in Education from Nationalism Toward Globalization

When we speak of human rights we speak of something abstract, of words that were written down as political commitments by government representatives more than half a century ago. Can we make human rights meaningful, only through reading more about the inter-national legal system of rights? Can we as educators make more of HRL as being something other than mere instruction about the legal dimension of rights, of *inter-national* relations

(diplomatic relations between states) and legal entitlements between the individual and the state?

Today, societies face problems of cultural conflicts in schools, of racism and segregation. They are challenges faced by education, and presumably dealt with through education. In such trends towards emphasizing 'universal' rather than 'national' values in educational documents, human rights are emphasized as a 'cure' to cultural conflicts and racism. HRE, in this sense, is seen as an answer to the problems with globalization, where HRE 'solves' challenges faced with increased demographic changes across national borders.

We also see a trend towards increased nationalism and emphasis on national cultural values as a defensive response to globalization – as can be seen in several European countries, like Germany, where there has been renewed importance of knowledge on national history, culture and values (in citizenship education) (Faas 2011).

Although there are trends of moving beyond nationalistic agendas towards global concerns in education, this move has been largely consumed through neo-liberal influences. As Paul Standish (2007) writes, 'education systems now routinely acknowledge questions of globalization, but these rarely go beyond gestures towards the knowledge economy or the somewhat haphazard adoption of web-based learning' (2007, 33). A more moral dimension of global concerns in education has been the stressed in citizenship education or European and global citizenship education. 'There are obvious debates to be had about how far public education should foster loyalty to the nation-state and how far cosmopolitan values, and about how far these are incompatible' (2007, 34). The tension that Standish mentions in the trend toward including international or cosmopolitan values in citizenship education is the presumed incompatibility between 'fostering national citizens' and cosmopolitan or global citizens. Human rights are positioned as universal values, and hence possibly threatening national values of ethnicity and homogeneity in populations. HRE is hence situated in the midst of this conflict, between national and international aspirations, and its preoccupation has been how to learn locally and yet in a more global context.

The increased focus on HRE in educational policy and political debates has been followed by critical voices of its dual pretence to face both universality and locality where locality is in fact a criticism against a blind universality and the proposed universality of human rights its very basis of legitimacy.

The tendencies in HRE of focusing on either legal content, or of taking a missionary stance both lose sight of locality as a crucial condition for education. However, a too strong emphasis on locality, risks overlooking that individuals are much more complex than any social categories, or multiple categories, can grasp. Additionally, the focus on non-discrimination, followed by a long and ever-extending list of belongings may hinder individu-

als from feeling addressed by human rights, as even specific categories become abstract and not personal.

The problem identified here in HRE, through the two tendencies of the missionary and the content approach, lies in how these approaches are grounded in 1) a dominant notion of the history and philosophical origin of human rights as Western; and, 2) a colonial, patriarchal way of seeing and conceptualizing ‘the other’ as disadvantaged, in need, as a member of an oppressed, marginalized and ‘underdeveloped’ group.

## Re-Thinking the Subject in Human Rights Education

Since 1994 the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (HRE) has urged all UN members to promote “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights”<sup>14</sup> Yet human rights educators themselves still struggle with how to define what they do. (Flowers 2003, 1)

HRE lacks a clear definition and an agreed upon theoretical basis (Flowers 2003, 2). According to Nancy Flowers, the lack of definition is due to conflicting views of what human rights are, held by different actors such as governmental bodies, NGOs and academics. For governmental bodies, the main role of HRE is to create peace and social order by educating about international and regional instruments and to stress the responsibility of governments to ‘promote and ensure through teaching, education and publication, the respect of the rights and freedoms’<sup>15</sup>. NGOs on the other hand emphasize ‘violations, stressing the potential of HRE to enable vulnerable groups to protect themselves and challenge their oppressors’ (Flowers 2003, 5) and education is seen as a means for claiming and demanding rights that historically have been denied. Academics and educational theorists, on their part, according to Flowers, emphasize the ‘values that create and inform’ (2003, 8) the outcomes with which the governmental bodies and NGOs are concerned.

Beatty Reardon (1995), for example, defines HRE as a framework of principles and standards that help cultivating students’ ‘moral and intellectual integrity’ (Reardon 1995, 3).

J. Paul Martin (1998) writes that HRE focuses on norms and values where human rights are the common standard in a world of difference to ‘ensure justice’ (Martin 1998). This notion of human rights as a ‘common standard’

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations, The UN Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004: Lessons for Life (Geneva, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1998) 3.

<sup>15</sup> Article 25 of the African Charter of 1981.

has been criticized by postmodern scholars, such as André Keet, who argues that HRE is under-theorized and bases its legitimacy on a perceived consensus on human rights as universal<sup>16</sup>: ‘Despite being under-theorized, HRE has evolved into a burgeoning pedagogical formation that sources its currency from a perceived consensus on human rights universals’ (Keet 2012,7). Keet writes that studies in HRE construct HRE as ‘declarationist, conservative and uncritical framework, which ‘limits the pedagogical values of HRE’ (2012, 7).

It follows then that HRE carries a pedagogical responsibility that is negatively disproportionate to how the HRE field is organized. That is, pedagogically speaking, HRE does not have a dynamic, self-renewing, and critical orientation towards human rights. (Keet 2012, 8)

HRE is a field that has been fairly under-theorized, although the poststructural critique of human rights has been overwhelming, a critique mainly concerned with the human rights project losing sight of particular voices in the call for a universalism based on humanity perceived in terms of sameness.

For example, when Jacques Derrida delivered the Oxford Amnesty International Lecture in 1992, he deconstructed the human subject in whose name human rights are proclaimed. This deconstruction of the subject could have been an insightful path for HRE to engage in self-criticism and renewal, but ‘instead of working with this critical lens, it opted for a conservative reading in the form of a declarationist<sup>17</sup> affirmation’ (Keet 2012, 13).

As Keet states, the postmodern critique has for the most part been ignored by HRE, with the loss of a critical renewal of HRE.

Following this review, the thesis explores HRL, facing both its contested universality and the critique of its underlying modern conceptions of ‘human beings’ that exclude difference and diversity in any definition of a shared humanity.

The poststructural critique points to some of the normative aspects of HRE, but their critique has not been taken up enough by human rights educators in the field.

The critique points to 1) a mission to ‘export’ rights to ‘vulnerable groups’ through NGOs and UN bodies, without a critical examination of

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<sup>16</sup> In my third article, ‘Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook’, I question this perceived consensus by studying the drafting of the UDHR in 1946-48, where I conclude that human rights were agreed upon on conflicting ideological grounds. In this way I question a perceived Western project of universalizing human rights, since the declaration represented another form of agreement than one of uncritical consensus.

<sup>17</sup> André Keet coined this term to refer to the almost dogmatic belief that all human rights truths are generated and consummated within human rights instruments such as declarations, conventions and covenants. HRE, according to this understanding, focuses on transmitting the provisions in these instruments. The associated tendency is called declarationism.

power relations and a critique of the post-colonial underpinnings of such a project; 2) an understanding of a universal human subject that negates difference and uniqueness and; 3) a critique of the universalism of human rights (can we learn human rights in diverse, cultural contexts?) that points to a Western hegemony and refers to a Western historical narrative of the origin of human rights.

The thesis meets these points of critiques through a critical philosophical study of HRE that takes two turns, firstly to learning and secondly to narrative.

## From Instruction to Learning *In* Relations

Both the *Swedish National Curriculum of Education*<sup>18</sup> and the *Swedish National Education Ordinate*<sup>19</sup> stress the need for teachers to integrate human rights in their teaching and professional practice (encompassing social and ethical skills). A pre-assumption about learning that I explore in the first article<sup>20</sup> and elsewhere<sup>21</sup> is that skills and attitudes are acquired through the voicing of emotional experience. Learning human rights is not solely a provision of information, but encompasses emotional and relational aspects of learning as a process.

In this chapter I will argue for a need to turn to learning, where relationality and plurality are essential. This turn to learning I see as a useful contrast to the increasingly legalistic discourse in HRE where there is a focus on so called ‘expert knowledge’ on human rights as legal entitlements, as rights claims in relation to states. We have seen how there is a focus on instruction and content in legal approaches to HRE and a neglect of the subject in target-group oriented HRE as well as in cases when there is a focus on people in vulnerable contexts (such as war or displacement). In this chapter, I will clarify what I mean with ‘learning’ in contrast to ‘instruction’ by discussing how these concepts are used in relation to thinkers who problematize a ‘turn to learning’ in educational theory and philosophy (Olsson, Petersson, and Krejsler; Säfström 2011; Biesta 2012; Biesta 2010; Simons and Masschelein 2008; Carlgren and Marton 2002). Secondly, I distinguish my use of the term ‘learning *in* relation’ from Martha Nussbaum’s notion of ‘learning about’ and Sharon Todd’s notion of ‘learning from’. But first I will sketch out my motives for such a turn.

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<sup>18</sup> Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time center 2011

<sup>19</sup> Swedish Higher Education Ordinate (1993)

<sup>20</sup> Adami, R. (2014). Toward Cosmopolitan Ethics in Teacher Education: An Ontological Dimension of Learning Human Rights, *Ethics and Education*, Vol. 9, No.1, pp. 29-38

<sup>21</sup> See ((Moeschlin) Adami 2009) “Breaking Points in Life Stories Leading to Learning Processes” In *Dyskursy*, 99–107. Zielona Góra: Dyskursy Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski

## The Inconceivable

The need for a shift from a focus on content in HRE to the significance of relationality in learning human rights will be illustrated by the following example that captures a core challenge in learning Human Rights - that moral considerations are hard to assess through a focus on information in traditional schooling. In other words, assessing acquired knowledge says little or nothing about how students' ethical and moral considerations relate to their knowledge<sup>22</sup>. When the Swedish institute 'Forum for Living History' (*Forum för Levande Historia*) conducted a survey in Swedish schools related to a project initiated by the government in 1998 to keep the history of the Holocaust alive in the minds of younger generations, they faced a challenge when confronted with questions concerning what they had assessed. The intended learning outcomes of the campaign were assessed with a questionnaire related to knowledge content about the Holocaust. The problem was that teachers could not judge whether high scores corresponded to an increased moral awareness of the effects of the Holocaust, or whether high scores were related to pupils being highly knowledgeable, while still having racist views of others.

In 2008, Forum for Living History followed up their initial survey, this time focusing on teachers' experiences and understanding of their own teaching about the Holocaust. The result showed that ninety-eight per cent out of a total of 5081 teachers found this type of teaching important (Lange 2008, 78), although only two out of five thousand had answered correctly on all questions (Lange 2008, 81). What is more surprising is that thirty per cent of the teachers who responded to the same survey (that also posed questions on teaching in multiculturalist societies) were against female students wearing headscarves, which demonstrates that the moral considerations of intolerance today did not correspond to teachers' understanding of past human rights atrocities against minorities. Even in this study, we see that there was no direct link and correlation between either knowledge or good intentions of the teachers and the actual moral considerations that such education can give rise to.

In the thesis *To Teach about the Inconceivable*<sup>23</sup>, Ylva Wibaeus also explores teaching about the Holocaust, where teachers are interviewed about

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<sup>22</sup> I have explored an ontological emphasis on learning elsewhere, see further 'An Ontological Dimension of Learning: Human Rights Learning in Teacher Education', *Ethics and Education*, 9(1), pp. 29-38.

<sup>23</sup> Wibaeus, Y. (2010). *Att Undervisa om det ofattbara: en ämnesdidaktisk studie om kunskapsområdet Förintelsen i skolans historieundervisning*. Stockholm: Pedagogiska Institutionen, Stockholm Universitet. The thesis is based on an empirical study with interviews and observations of teachers in two upper secondary schools in Stockholm who teach about the Holocaust in History lessons.

the expected outcomes of such teachings and their own pedagogical practices. A tension that Wibaeus raises is the hidden intentions of teachers, that are connected with efforts to ‘teach about democratic values’, but which are not verbalised with the students. Wibaeus writes that ‘the connection that the teachers want to communicate to the students, that between historical knowledge on the Holocaust and the importance of fundamental democratic values, is hidden from the students’ (2010, 249). This is a tension equally pressing for HRL, to be met within the field of knowledge concerning historical and present events concerning injustice, human violence and suffering, since the intentions of teachers may be hidden. These may include intentions of creating critical awareness in students or intentions of developing in the students’ ability to make ethical judgements based on knowledge about human rights violations. There may be a gap between such good intentions and what students perceive when confronted with accounts of human suffering and social injustice. As Wibaeus writes, the moral intentions behind the teaching are more or less hidden behind historical ‘facts’ and ‘accounts’. If knowledge on human rights cannot be given to students and if the knowledge they possess says little about their moral reasoning, we might need to turn our attention from instruction and information to the relationality of learning and its social practices<sup>24</sup>.

I find it important to recuperate the relational dimension of learning as essential for learning human rights. I draw this from the notion that Roger Säljö (2000; 2005) has put forth, that knowledge does not exist as information that we as educators can instruct the students about, but that knowledge exists in and through social practices. I am not pursuing a socio-cultural perspective here, but I draw on Säljö’s argument that, ‘learning, thinking and other human capabilities are part of activities, substantive in character and situated in social practices’ (2005, 67). This, as I see it, further stresses the need to look at the relationality in learning, rather than focus on the legal information on rights in HRE.

(...) knowledge is not something that the individual has in the shape of packed units stored in a locker. This is in any case not a successful image. All the information which is stored in books and which the individual may have absorbed is not knowledge in itself. Even if one possesses information, the step to knowledge is far. Knowledge is something that one uses through action in daily life and as a resource with which help one can solve problems,

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<sup>24</sup> I have chosen these examples on teaching related to the Holocaust because it was precisely to the background of the Holocaust that the human rights were defined in the UDHR in 1948, as a safeguard to never let such atrocities happen again. This ‘birth’ of the notion of human rights in international documents, as *through* human suffering is what provided the urgency for a discourse on human rights and dignity on an international arena. This urgency, born in violations, is also what creates ethical and moral dilemmas in HRE, since what it points to is human vulnerability and cruelty in human relations.

handle communicative and practical situations in an appropriate way. (Säljö 2000, 125, my translation)

If knowledge is something that we use through action in daily life, it should be essential to draw a connection between knowledge and relations in education, since acting and speaking become meaningful in relation to others who interpret, receive and respond to us.

## Relationality: A Call of Ethics and Justice

The pedagogical and moral nature of human rights require that community relations and the relation of the 'self' and the 'other' should receive priority, since it shapes how we construe teaching-learning praxis. (Roux 2012a, 41)

The relation of the self and the other should receive priority in HRL argues Cornelia Roux (2012), due to the pedagogical and moral nature of human rights. I believe that the teaching-learning praxis that Roux mentions is crucial in understanding how good intentions, or a critical view of pedagogy, is not enough in trying to teach about human rights without continuing to replicate the social injustice in society. In courses on feminism, post-colonialism and queer studies, how are students supposed to voice their opinions on issues that may be coupled with their very sense of being? As educators, how do we raise issues of social injustice and human rights violations in ways that are not harmful to the essential feelings of self that the students bring into the classroom? These two questions are underpinned by academic conceptions of knowledge and epistemological assumptions of what we can learn and who is a knower.

The moral nature of human rights does not automatically lead to a teaching-learning praxis which is not harmful, on the contrary, since human rights are sprung from the social reality of injustice and human violations, the feeling of self in relation to human rights may be the experiences in life that individuals are most eager to hide from the public eye. How can a student give her/his perspective on oppression in ways that do not violate her/his sense of being in a social learning context where the majority can lean back against 'taken for granted' assumptions that question the very experiences the student may have? As Elisabeth Ellsworth (1989) argues in her paper 'Why doesn't this feel empowering?', just because we call it 'critical pedagogy' or 'empowering' does not mean that is how students perceive such pedagogical and social practices.

To the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were “working through” us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression. (Ellsworth 1989, 298)

What Ellsworth is critical of is the way we use concepts such as ‘dialogue’, ‘voice’, ‘critical pedagogy’ that might seem empowering in theory, whereas when put into practice, we seem to lack the pedagogical tools to actually create learning atmospheres that are not reproducing oppression, upholding dominant power relations and silencing already marginalized students. If relations in education limit students’ knowing and if such relations can be potentially harmful for the students’ sense of self, how can we work through this potential tension?

That the knower is limited by a particular context (time, location and culture) and by power relations that may oppress certain kinds of knowing has been proposed in feminist scholarship. As Claudia Schumann writes ‘broader understandings of objectivity and rationality are highly instructive if we want to adequately discuss questions such as which knowledge, epistemic skills, abilities, or character traits should matter in 21<sup>st</sup> century education’ (2014, 4). Which means that if we broaden our understanding of objectivity, to include the feminist critique of what is regarded as knowledge and of who is seen as a knower, than we may face plurality in education in more enriching ways. I want to situate HRL in this broader context of social injustice in society at large and globally, since education is not isolated from the power relations and structures that create oppression, marginalization and silencing of voices in the world, but works within such structures. Hence HRL works constantly within the paradox of proposing empowerment and notions of rights, while at the same time reproducing social patterns of injustice.

Clarence Joldersma (2012) argues that ‘because of its social setting’ education orients one to the ‘call of justice’ (2012, 13). Joldersma joins *understanding* to the idea ‘that an originary relation with others calls one’s understanding to account’ (ibid., 13) He calls this type of relational understanding ‘ethics’ (ibid., 13).

What I have been demonstrating here is that the tension between epistemology and power-relations calls for ethical commitment, in the sense that human rights knowledge is not based solely on knowledge *about* human rights, but instead that ethics and human rights are ‘acted knowledge’ through social practices and relations.

A ‘turn to learning’ in HRE is quite different from the general discourse on education since the content is moral and ethical in its very ‘nature’, therefore, one does not talk simply of skills and attitudes, but of moral and ethical ethos, which is not something that the students learn by themselves, but acquire socially *in* relations. The call for ethics and justice, that Joldersma (2012) sees in education, as a social setting, is envisaged in how knowledge

interacts with power-relations. According to Jay Drydyk (2013) empowerment is a relational concept. He gives two strong arguments for this; 1) that empowerment, in contrast to agency, is a social concept which is dependent on or dominated by others, and 2) ‘if empowerment no longer refers to social relations, it loses its direct relevance to the transformation of those relations’ (2013, 249).

The possibility for students to know human rights, as *through* social practices, is dependent on the extent to which we can relationally increase a sense of empowerment and voice in learning contexts that are situated in ‘pluralist societies which continue to be shaped by sexist, classist, racist, ableist, heteronormative, and other biases’ (Schumann, 2014, 4).

In this exploration of how an awareness of how knowledge is acted in social practices and limited to power structures in learning we have focused on the relational significance of HRL. In the following, I will explore the subject in these pedagogical relations.

## The Pedagogical Subject

It is important in philosophy of education, according to Ingerid Straume (2012), to ‘offer a richer repertoire for describing the subject’s many dimensions’ (2012, 1) because such conceptualization would ‘allow teachers (and others) to recognize their own motives and reasons for being teachers as *meaningful*’ (ibid., 1).

In my use of the term ‘subject’ in HRL I am referring to a relational self. As Natalie Fletcher (2013) argues in her paper ‘Ethical selves, a sketch for a theory of relational authenticity’, there is no necessary link between notions of authenticity (of being able to reflect, think and act ethically) and the notion of autonomy or egoism. Fletcher (2013) proposes instead a notion of authenticity which is developed *in* relations (with the other, with one’s community and culture) but which does not diminish the individual’s capacity for self-reflection. This is crucial in exploring HRL as relational, since there is a strong connection between human rights, ethics and morality, which I want to read as relational, yet with the capacity for subjectivity. I do not dichotomize here between subjectivity, (of becoming a reflexive self) and human dependence. Rather I develop a notion of the learning subject that encompasses notions of uniqueness and relationality.

The learning subject has been conceptualized in the PISA discourse on learning as autonomous and as agents of their own learning, of which Biesta 2010 and Simons and Masschelein 2008 take a critical position. The use of terms such as the learning-subject, the above scholars argue, has been a way to show how students are supposed to set their own learning goals and strive

towards their own ‘possession of knowledge’, almost irrespective of the practices of the teacher. The ‘turn to learning’ has been described by Carlgren and Marton (2002) as a shift from a culture of *how* to a culture of *what*, by this Carlgren and Marton want to show that there has been an increased focus on the learning objectives and student results rather than on the teaching methods. Many scholars in philosophy of education have been critical of the way that the role of the teacher seems to have disappeared in this ‘turn to learning’ (Simons and Masschelein 2008; Biesta 2012; Säfström 2011). Simons and Masschelein (2008) hold a critical stance towards the ‘turn to learning’ as it presumably pressures the individual student with responsibility over her/his own learning and increases a possible feeling of exceptionality that has negative side effects of not being part of a ‘norm’, but left to one’s own devices. The term ‘exceptional’ is used by Simons and Masschelein in order to shed light on the way in which students are confronted with being treated as having needs and ways of learning outside of the ‘norm’, which makes them alienated from each other and hinders a process of creating a sense of belonging in classrooms and in higher education.

The concept of ‘uniqueness’ on the other hand (which will be explored further in the next chapter) according to Arendt, is ontologically coupled with plurality. Human beings make up a plurality in the world and through our words and deeds, which are relationally shared and given their political meaning, we expose our uniqueness in relation to others. We voice, not our particularity, but our uniqueness in relation to others, in the plurality that human beings create in inhabiting the world. By this, the notion of uniqueness in relation to learning does not mean that learning is a solitary process that only involves the ‘learning subject’ who is sovereign as a rational individual. Rather, uniqueness indicates here that we learn about ourselves and others *only* in concrete relations, between ‘you’ and ‘me’, seen as a process of becoming, which is relational.

If HRL, forces us to acknowledge the relational dimensions of learning, as acted knowledge, then we can visualize this learning process as one that is in constant relation to others. But this, I argue, is only what Straume (2012) refers to as the outer world of the learning subject, and we need a ‘richer repertoire’ to describe the inner world of the learning subject, since this process of learning ethics is equally based on individuals’ personal experiences<sup>25</sup>. I draw my notion of the learning subject from Cornelius Castoriadis (1997) who has developed a nuanced notion of what he calls ‘the pedagogical subject’. Following Castoriadis we find a conceptualization of the pedagogical subject as a project, who is in a constant movement towards freeing

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<sup>25</sup> I have discussed the role of life experiences through narrativity in developing a narrative ethos for making ethical judgments in the article with Hållander, M., (forthcoming) ‘Testimony and Narrative as a Political Relation: the question of Ethical Judgement in Education’, *Journal of Philosophy and Education*.

her/his capacity of doing and acting in the world (1997). Castoriadis talks about pedagogy or *paideia*, which is aimed at subjectivity, at becoming. Castoriadis argues that the most human quality is our ability for radical imagination, an imagination that has the ability to create something new. The pedagogical subject, drawing on Castoriadis, is a project of becoming, a process which is aimed at a certain autonomy, which for Castoriadis is always *both* individual and collective, as a coming into self-reflexivity.

Hence learning human rights needs to consider the ontological dimensions of learning, and not just the epistemological ones. My emphasis on the ontological dimensions of learning human rights has consequences regarding the content of HRE, where massive information on human rights violations in the world is not seen as the main path towards the capacity of making ethical consideration in relation to the notion of human rights. An increased knowledge of human rights atrocities in different parts of the world says little about how students relate to the notion of human rights, hence there is a need for illuminating the ontological dimension of learning human rights and how the life experiences of students feed into their understanding of human rights.

## Instruction, Education and Learning

In distinguishing between the concepts of instruction, education and learning in philosophy of education, it is helpful to contrast two different views of learning through the work of Gert Biesta and Sharon Todd, since one criticizes learning for being conflated with neo-liberal discourses (as Gert Biesta argues) where the other discusses how it enables critical reflection on our relationships with difference (as Sharon Todd argues).

Biesta bases his distinction between learning and education primarily on the need for discussing ‘content’, ‘purpose’ and ‘relationships’ in education. He criticizes the concept ‘learning’ as it has been used in the worldwide study of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) as part of an instrumentalized discourse on assessing students’ performance on mathematics, science and reading. Biesta argues that the ‘main problem with the new language of learning is that it has facilitated a re-description of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction’. Biesta is critical of the development in educational research of the increase use of the concept ‘learning’: ‘Over the past two decades, the word learning has become a popular concept in educational research, policy and practice’ (Biesta 2012, 35). He argues for the use of the concept of ‘education’ in

preference to ‘learning’ since he sees the discourse of learning as being conflated with a political discourse on life-long learning, where the responsibility for learning is with the learner who consumes knowledge and where the ‘learning relationship’ between educator and student is reduced to an economic transfer of knowledge.

He gives three reasons why learning has gained such a profound position as a core concept in educational research: 1) learning has been used as a ‘post modern critique of authoritarian forms of education’; 2) in adult education, a neo-liberal way of thinking has had an impact on the belief ‘that individuals should take their own responsibility for their learning rather than that it being provided for by the state’; and 3) ‘constructivist theories have shifted their emphasis away from the activities of the teacher towards those of the student, often referred to as learning’ (Biesta 2012, 37). He gives an argument for re-emphasizing the concept of education instead of ‘learning’:

The language of learning, particularly in its constructivist form, has repositioned the teacher from someone who is at the heart of the educational process to one who literally stands at the sideline in order to facilitate the learning of his or her ‘learners’. (Biesta 2012, 38)

Biesta does not argue for teachers to teach within a conservative view of the need for control and an authoritarian concept of teaching, which he thinks strips the concept of teaching of its pedagogical quality (Biesta 2012, 35), but instead emphasizes that education is about learning *something*, with a particular purpose *from* someone. The content that Biesta discusses as crucial for education implies an epistemological emphasis on knowledge that looks rather different when it comes to HRE, since here the content of ‘human rights’, as we saw in the introduction, has been under constant debate since the emergence of HRE and my aim is to question the emphasis in HRE on the legal dimension of rights, to encompass social and political dimensions as well.

This re-claiming of education as aimed at something other than that which is driven by economic imperatives is a valuable recognition of education as a platform where values other than economic ones may flourish.

Nevertheless, if one stresses the ethics of education, of moral education and of social justice education, which concerns human rights, democracy and justice, this same focus on content and instruction (that Biesta argues for in the notion of ‘education’) seems inadequate for addressing questions of rights - that is, if we do agree that human rights cannot be treated solely as information that educators can teach students.

The asymmetrical distinction between teacher/student that Biesta finds important seems to further increase a power gap that both Halme (2008) and Dembour (2006) criticise HRE for upholding. An increased focus on content and instruction that Biesta calls for does little to address and acknowledge

the subject, who, in Biesta's own words, brings something important and valuable to the learning situation.

As will become apparent in the following discussion on Todd's notion of 'learning from', her critical reflection on how our relations with difference can be seen to lie in contrast to Biesta's notion of learning *from* the instructor, where Todd focuses instead on learning *from* the otherness of the other, through attentive listening as an openness. But before I turn to this discussion I wish to explore yet another approach to learning that has had significance in cosmopolitan and HRE circles. That is, the notion as explored most directly by Martha Nussbaum of 'learning about' the other.

The notion of an 'openness to the other' is a theme in cosmopolitan thinking that has been influencing theory on education and learning, through thinkers such as Anthony Appiah (2005), Fazal Rizvi (2008), David T Hansen (2008), Marianna Papastephanou (2012; 2014) and Martha Nussbaum (1998).

In the following, I will discuss the influential work of Martha Nussbaum, and especially her work *Cultivating Humanity*, as it addresses learning in a wider, inter-cultural world, where she finds a need for 'learning about the other' as a cosmopolitan stance of openness, which has served as a source of inspiration in studies on education and human rights.

## Education in a Wider Context - as Learning *About*

Political philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2006; 1998) frames citizenship education in a wider, cosmopolitan learning context, calling for an expansion of the notion of citizenship towards, cosmopolitan- or world citizenship. In this broader context, HRE is a means towards peaceful co-existence beyond borders. It is about being concerned with global issues and of cultivating awareness and empathy towards people in different places, so that as a 'global citizen' one acts in solidarity with others.<sup>26</sup>

Nussbaum puts forward a notion of 'learning about' the other where reading literature can be seen as an 'expansion of sympathies' (1998, 111) that we cannot cultivate sufficiently in real life. 'Learning about' is, according to Nussbaum, to include studies of 'non-Western cultures' in curriculum in order to 'understand the situation of a group' (1998, 111) and we do so through reading that which 'has been written by members of that group' (ibid., 111). An aim of reading literature about others is to 'cross group boundaries in imagination' (ibid., 111). According to Nussbaum, by 'learn-

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<sup>26</sup> Citizenship education can in this regard be criticized for holding on to a kind of naïve notion of a state – neglecting the arbitrariness of what can be viewed as a 'good citizen' in cases of corrupt, totalitarian, or so-called failed states.

ing about' the other, through the narrative imaginary, we create a sense of empathy towards others in different life situations than ourselves.

(...) the great contribution literature has to make to the life of the citizen is its ability to wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted imaginations an acknowledgement of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion. (Nussbaum 1998, 111–112)

Nussbaum writes that 'becoming a world citizen is a lonely business' (1998, 83). Her reasoning is based on Socratic self-examination, where the individual interprets other cultural or religious acts in an empathic way. Still, her perspective is not based on a condition of relationality, rather, Nussbaum stands firmly on her modern recognition of the subject as autonomous in her appeal for reason as the ground for empathy. Nussbaum argues for a kind of intercultural education whereby the curriculum reflects diverse groups and knowledge about the history and traditions of 'others' who are 'different'. Such knowledge 'about the other' combined with Socratic moral reasoning, is what Nussbaum argues will develop and 'cultivate' the world citizen. The world citizen is hence lonely in that she/he has, through critical thinking, raised herself/himself above the identity ties of her/his closest group belongings, feeling not kinship with her/his co-citizens, but acknowledging that we are all 'world citizens'. This notion of empathy that Nussbaum stresses receives a colonial character when Nussbaum discusses Marcus Aurelius as an example of a world citizen.

The task of world citizenship requires the would-be world citizen to become a sensitive and empathic interpreter. Education at all ages should cultivate the capacity for such interpreting. This aspect of the Stoic idea is developed most fully by Marcus Aurelius, who dealt with many different cultures in his role as emperor; he presents, in his *Meditations*, a poignantly personal account of his own efforts to be a good world citizen. (Nussbaum 1998, 64)

To use the writings of an emperor, and his reflections on meeting 'many different cultures' is noteworthy, since it points to some basic assumptions about the notion of 'learning about' that I find troublesome. First, there is the notion of an autonomous individual who contemplates and interprets freely the actions and words of 'others', without being implicated by others. Secondly, there is the notion of power that is un-problematized in Nussbaum's account of the cosmopolitan citizen. Thirdly, from this account, it is highly questionable whether the feeling of 'empathy' and the Stoic idea can be interpreted as something for 'all humanity' (something that Nussbaum seems to suggest in the title of her book 'Cultivating Humanity') when in most parts of her text she seems to address privileged, white, middle class Americans. This is partly the case since her examples of educational settings

where she has detected this need for Socratic self-examination are all American universities, such as Harvard.

What I miss in Nussbaum's exploration of a reform in liberal education is an acknowledgement of the learner. Who is the learner? What experiences does she/he bring into the learning situation? Nussbaum mentions the difficulties of students at Harvard to expose their feelings and attitudes, which seems not that surprising given the context Nussbaum describes of having classes of more than a thousand students. Their lack of confidence, according to Nussbaum, is shielded behind a 'brittle sophistication' (1998, 45) where they 'hide behind cultural relativism or postmodernism' that the teacher needs to 'subject to Socratic scrutiny' (1998, 45). In this sense, I find two acute problems in the learning situation: 1) that the learners are kept anonymous through lectures where their only part is to listen to what the teacher has to 'bring' (to use Biesta's expression). And 2) that the teachers do not take seriously the opinions of the students, but seek to 'put these straight' through Socratic scrutiny. Even though Nussbaum talks about narrative and also of the need to learn about silenced parts of history, of women and indigenous people, she does not refer to narrative as the life narrative of students, or of a listening that involves the students to speak of and expose their life experiences in relation to 'justice', 'equality' and 'co-existence'. Thus, for example, the violence of adults towards children may continue to be silenced stories in the classrooms Nussbaum discusses. One of the basic assumptions held in this thesis is that ethics and human rights cannot be taught as instruction, but only learned through experience, recalling events and narratives in learners' unique life narratives. This learning is not a process of an isolated autonomous rationality, but a relational process of exposing oneself in relation to others, in words and deeds. For this reason, I move away from notions of 'learning about' that Nussbaum argues for, and look at other forms of learning that involve narrative and listening.

## Education for Justice and Learning *From*

Following Sharon Todd (2003) learning from the other is to see the other as our teacher. Through attentive listening, we attend both to what is said and to the person who is saying it. A 'learning from' is not 'learning about', since in 'learning from' there is not a pretext of 'understanding the other' but to be open to the difference in the other. In 'learning from' we acknowledge our ignorance of the otherness of the other, through an attitude of attentive listening. A pre-assumption in 'learning from' is that we cannot reach total knowledge *about* the other. This ignorance lets us be open, as responsive in being addressed by the other. We attend to what we don't know, hence a

failure of sharing or understanding what the other has to say is not a reason for shutting down the communication, or to stop listening.

In “Listening as Attending to the ‘Echo of the Otherwise’” Todd writes about suffering and justice in education. She argues that to listen and bear witness to stories of suffering and pain are in themselves responses to actions. Non-violent relation through attentive listening becomes in itself an ethical response to another’s narrative (2002, 405). How we listen is crucial for how speech comes about and accordingly narratives are conditioned by listening (2002, 406). In *Learning from the Other* (2003), Todd makes explicit the meaning of pedagogical relations and claims that ethics is implied in such relations. She warns us about enacting violence upon others when we fail to listen to their narratives of self-identification. According to Todd, education becomes a kind of rhetoric when one tries to teach ethics instead of critically reflecting on how we act in pedagogical relations, how we listen to students’ narratives. The ‘learning to become’ (2001) and ‘learning from’ that Todd puts forth entails that ethics has an ontological dimension to it. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, Todd introduces an ontological notion of difference where the subject is always subjected to others and acted upon in an ontological relationality. She argues that ethics and virtue cannot be taught but instead that ethics are implied in the educational situation. ‘This focus on learning *from* means having to consider not only what we learn when we learn – narrowly defined, this would simply place the emphasis once again on the content of learning’ (Todd 2003, 7). Todd makes a shift to investigate ‘what is at stake in the process of learning from, and what the Other signifies in such a relation’ (2003, 9).

So what are we saying when we insist on instrumentalizing education in relation to ethics as a programmatic moral code? Do we risk putting educators in the position of experts who are ‘in the know’ while ignoring the way moral relations transpire through the lived realities of everyday life, relations, which require no specialized knowledge, and perhaps no formal knowledge at all? And what does this say about experts’ attitudes toward the ‘ordinary people’ who, ostensibly, are awaiting for knowledge to be bestowed upon them so that they might then ‘become’ moral? (Todd 2003, 6)

Todd (2010) problematizes a content-based approach to HRE. She argues that we lose sight of the dilemmas students face in learning human rights when we only focus on how to introduce the list of rights from the UDHR in different contexts.

Documents and policies dealing with human rights education place great emphasis on how to best instill and inculcate among children the values inherent in the UN Declaration as well as various Human Rights Codes. The calls for education to transmit the contents of the Declaration and to help students engage in an understanding of human rights that are found within the UN documents themselves, smooth over the very dilemmas that students face in com-

ing to grips with how abstract and apparently universal principles speak to the particularities of their own and others' life situations. (Todd 2010, 74–75)

Todd's exploration of rethinking HRE takes a critical stance towards our uncritical understanding of humanity, universalism and dialogue. Todd proposes that we, as educators, face humanity in all its violent and cruel reality, rather than taking refuge solely behind a notion of cultivating humanity. The question Todd wants to raise as important in HRE is how justice can become a promise in human relations 'beyond the letter of the law' so that HRE does not deal solely with striking a balance between talks of violations and rights. It is this promise that I read as a relational re-thinking of human rights and HRL, where what we do, what we say and how we listen to each other's narratives become part of this social imaginary of justice and human rights.

## Learning Human Rights *In* Relations

Where Martha Nussbaum treats narrative in the form of literature and of the 'narrative imaginary' as learning *about* the other, of creating empathy and understanding, Sharon Todd focuses on learning *from* the other, of listening as an activity. My route to learning human rights is through one's life narrative, which extends the emphasis on narrative in HRL to the *relationality* and *narrativity* that will be explored in the next chapter through the work of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero. In this sense learning human rights in relations is distinct from Biesta, Nussbaum and Todd.

In contrast to Biesta, learning in relations gives equal importance to the educator and the learner (the student, the pupil) though it's not a question of teacher/educator versus learner/student/pupil, but rather the relation in itself that is created between at least two. This relation is the foundation for learning human rights in relations, through narratives. In order to relate to the notion of rights and integrate this knowledge in one's daily life we need to hear these rights being articulated through our own voice, and through the voices of a plurality of others. This means becoming accustomed to the diversity of interpretations and meanings that each article in the Declaration may give rise to. Because it is in this diversity of meanings and through people's life experiences that we face both the uniqueness and universality of human rights.

Nussbaum raised a problem she had faced as a teacher at Harvard - that the students did not express themselves freely. She later discusses this as a probable lack of knowledge that would otherwise infuse a mature moral reasoning in different matters. But perhaps their silence can be read differently: as a lack of space in the relation where they can feel safe enough to

expose their life narratives, their experiences, in which their moral opinions become developed<sup>27</sup>.

Even though my view is closer to Todd's focus on 'learning from', I grapple with the weight on the *I* for the relationality that she seems to propose in her reading of Levinas (Todd 2002). This weight becomes problematic, I argue, since it can be interpreted as questioning the agency of both the listener and the one who exposes herself in narration. In my understanding, what is shared in a relation, through words and stories and acts, is equally dependent on both parts, or (if there are many relations working simultaneously in a classroom for example) on many. I draw on a similar notion that Todd explores, that we not only act upon others, but we are acted upon in an ontological relationality. What I do want to suggest, however, is that there is a need to acknowledge the possibility of the subject to speak, act and raise her unique voice in this relationality, in refusing or contesting the acting upon her that may violate her sense of self. Although the subject is bound by the unpredictability of acting, since she cannot predict the outcome of her actions, or how she will be identified *through* those actions, the actions and narratives of others do not nevertheless determine her. Todd's reading of Cavarero seems to suggest that it is only through the words of another that I can get a glimpse of myself (Todd 2011, 107).

The relationality that Cavarero conditions the subject with is borrowed in part from the work of Hannah Arendt. In Arendt, I read an opening towards change, where the subject acts in the world, in relations, and these actions and words receive their meaning (according to Arendt, a political meaning) in how they are interpreted by others. What is interpreted is neither *you* nor *me*; what is interpreted are the narratives *through* which we expose ourselves.

According to Arendt, we expose ourselves all the time, through what we say and what we do. In our words and in our deeds, we find a rationale through our life story. Hence, our ontological narrative is always present in the judgments we make and in how we relate to others and ourselves. Therefore, I find it difficult to explore HRL, as a relational process of becoming, without turning to the significance of ontological (and historical) narratives in this endeavour.

It is important to acknowledge the relationality of learning human rights and the bases upon which this relationality rest: on notions of uniqueness and of plurality. This means that it is in relations that we get a glimpse of the uniqueness of each one. Even though I may be referred to as 'a woman' this does not reduce me to the dominant notion of what it means to be 'a woman'. We are all complex and multi-layered, and our uniqueness is exposed in

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<sup>27</sup> For a more fully exploration of judgments as based on life narratives, read Adami, R. & Hällander, M. (forthcoming) 'Testimony and Narrative as a Political Relation: the question of Ethical Judgement in Education', *Journal of Philosophy and Education*.

and through our relations with others. In seemingly homogenous classrooms, or learning communities, there is nonetheless a plurality of voices that is central for my understanding of learning.

The concept of narrative, as will be explored in the following chapter, drawing on the work of Arendt (1958; 2006; 2005) and Cavarero (2000; 2005), carries ontological weight, in considering narrativity as a way of relating to others and our sense of self. As I explore there, narratives can be the historical narratives of how we create and re-create the past and involves the historical origin of the notion of human rights. Narratives can also be the life stories of each individual, through which we are re-born. Hence, HRL becomes a project, not so much of ‘understanding the other’ or ‘feeling empathy’, but rather a process of exposing oneself in relations, through the unrepeatable uniqueness of our life narratives.

## A Narrative Turn in Human Rights Learning

When I made a field study in Rio de Janeiro in 2005 as part of another research project, I visited a school in a *favela* (economically underprivileged neighbourhoods on the hills of Rio). A teacher there told me that she started each day of school with the pupils writing in their diaries. She did this as a way for them to write about their experiences of shootings and military riots that occasionally occurred in the *favelas* that risked contributing to post-traumatic stress from experiences that they might not feel comfortable in expressing openly in class and to the teacher. The writing, according to the teacher, made the pupils relax and able to focus better for the rest of the day. The diary writing, as I see it, was a strategy the teacher used in order for the pupils to voice their experiences of violations that caused emotional stress without increasing the risk for vulnerability and stigmatization. The exposure that comes with the sharing of life narratives in pedagogical relations is here seen in relation to the asymmetry between pupil and teacher and the power relations in class and between peers. I use this example here as a way of illustrating the sensibility with which we as educators can approach the relational complexities in learning through narratives.

Thus far, this thesis has made a turn from ‘education’ to ‘learning’, where the pedagogical relation is in focus. This relation is a condition, I argue, for sharing narratives. The second turn I make here is to narrative and is to be distinguished from a broader sense of the ‘narrative turn’ in the social sciences. The field of narrative research is vast and multidisciplinary where we find an increased interest in narratives in different fields. For example narrative appears in a variety of contexts: 1) narrative as structures for language in linguistic studies (Heinen and Sommer 2009; Perumal 2012; Toolan 1988); 2) narrative as stories about sickness and health in psychological research (Harter, Japp, and Beck 2005; Holloway 2005; Hurwitz, Skultans, and Greenhalgh 2004); 3) narrative as fiction in literature, art and film studies (Hogan 2013; Lothe 2000; Bal 2004); 4) narrative as life stories of historical people or historical events in history studies (White 1987; Levisohn 2010); 5) narrative in religious studies (Hauerwas and Jones 1989); 6) narrative on different levels in sociological research to study how action is influenced by narratives (Somers and Gibson 1994; Andrews 2007; Bamberg and Andrews 2004; Horsdal 2012); and, 7) narrative as biographical research in education (Hallqvist, Ellström, and Hydén 2012; Hesford 1999; West 1996; Merrill and West 2009; Bron 2010).

The negotiation and formation of identity and self as crucial in processes of learning has been explored in biographical learning and more recently in narrative educational research. This process of becoming is constrained and influenced by power relations in education, as Wendy Hesford argues in *Writing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy* ‘If we do not recognize how students must negotiate their identities in response to perceived power relations and teacher expectations, we run the risk of dismissing the complexities and struggles involved in writing autobiography’ (Hesford 1999, 56). Hesford (1999) writes that it is not as simple as including traditionally marginalized voices in curriculum in order to increase the repertoire of recognition and identification for students in classrooms where there is a diversity and plurality in terms of social class, gender, cultural and ethnic background, but that we need to acknowledge the ‘complex negotiation of identities, which are themselves affected by language and are in constant state of struggle’ (1999, 56). Whether we read narrative in the sense of writing biography, or in the broader notion of narrative as written, spoken, acted and embodied, what biographical learning tells us is that subjectivity is relational and hence shaped through constant power struggles and negotiations. This notion has been taken up in narrative research on HRE. As Cornelia Roux (2012) writes, ‘The significance of narrative inquiry is that narratives become relevant in terms of understanding the life world, values and belief systems of learners with diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions’ (2012, 212). Narrative research as a method of inquiry has been argued as being crucial for understanding what HRE can mean in different cultural contexts. In the volume *Safe Spaces: Human Rights Education in Diverse Contexts*, the contributing authors focus on ‘narrative inquiry’ to study as researchers/teachers the life narratives of students in HRE. Shan Simmonds (2012) for example, considers how narrative inquiry can be used by teachers ‘as a teaching-learning strategy in a human rights education classroom’ (2012, 231). Simmonds argues that narrative inquiry ‘requires reading narratives in the social, historical, political, moral and economical context in which the narrative was revealed. Narrative theory is here seen as a process of dialogical, communicative action, expressed in the form of voices or peoples’ lived experiences.

In narrating individual life-stories and experiences, every individual through his or her autobiography individuates himself or herself as an equal and dignified partner in constituting reality and constructing the world. (Becker 2012, 86)

In this chapter I will explore the relational aspects of the process of becoming, through narratives. Such an ontological exploration concerning identity and human rights has been articulated by Anne Becker (2012) who argues that ‘the right to an authentic identity premised on equality of differ-

ence depends on our appreciation of human rights protecting authentic life and not merely biological existence and human survival' (2012, 83). Authentic life describes humans living in shared spaces of togetherness, free to individuate themselves in their differences. This points to a relational view, both of human rights and HRL. In her search for understanding the meanings attached to identity, equality of difference, Becker (2012) draws inspiration from the work of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida. According to Becker, 'the ontological experience of belonging and sharing, carries both the risk of opposition (defining humans only as *what*) and the responsibility towards togetherness (defining humans as *who*)' (2012, 84). Becker argues that there is 'a distinction between claiming rights rooted in only what (belonging) we are and claiming rights protecting who (in togetherness) we are' (ibid., 84).

## Learning Human Rights Through Narratives

There are two spheres of narratives I explore in this chapter: 'ontological narratives' and 'historical narratives'. For me, narrative 'does' two things: it transcends the reification of words in discourses, shifting the focus from what is said, the spoken, to the *who*, to the one who speaks. And secondly, a notion of narrativity envisages that the *who* who speaks is not in isolation, as a sovereign individual, but she is a relational being, who emerges in relation (through listening) and in distinction to others, with whom she forms the political condition of human beings, that of plurality. These two notions of narrative and narrativity; of bringing in the unique subject who speaks and the relationality of her existence in a plural world, forms the premises upon which I wish to discuss HRL.

In the study of HRL, both ontological and historical narratives coincide. They both have a bearing on the process of becoming. For instance, a certain strand of thought within HRE will perhaps provide pupils with the feeling of either belonging, (or not), a Western conception of rights will address certain pupils and not others. Ontological narratives, when seen as counter-stories to the official one, allow for the possibility to challenge dominant historical narratives as excluding otherness. In my third article, 'Re-Thinking Relations in Human Rights Learning: The Politics of Narratives', I discuss how the notion of ontological narrative can be used as expanding the understanding of 'counternarratives' developed by Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear (1996) in *Post-structural Counternarratives*, as a way to name how not only particularity is voiced in diverse classrooms, but also how uniqueness is voiced through questions of who we are, rather than what our social identity

represents. In this sense, both historical narratives and ontological narratives in HRL illuminate how history as ‘a fact’ can be rethought as a constant process of negotiation and how social identities are only a part of the story. What if there is not only one single story of how the UDHR was drafted? What if people’s identities cannot be reduced to social belongings, but are rather fluid and relational? How do we re-read the notion of human rights and HRL through these questions?

A narrative approach to HRL provides a move away from questions of *what* we are, as posed in relation to non-discrimination in HRE, to focus more on questions of *who* we are and how human rights can be articulated through our lived experience. By contrast, a major field in HRE<sup>28</sup> focuses on overcoming exclusion in human relations, as raised through the question ‘what are you?’ in order to be able to respond: ‘you are equal in rights and dignity, even though you might be a woman, gay, transsexual, a child, a minority group member etc.’ A majority of HRE scholars has, due to the non-discriminatory ‘nature’ of the subject of human rights, treated HRE as politically neutral and/or intrinsically good, and thus paid little attention to the harmful asymmetry of its pedagogical relations and the potentially disempowering effects embedded in the discourse<sup>29</sup>. I argue that relations in HRE may actually increase feelings of exclusion and marginalization in the making of otherness (even though the intentions are to reach feelings of inclusion and dignity). Narrating human rights as experiences of violence can lead to increased suffering of learners in recalling injustices that may lay bare the discrepancy between the fixed and ‘neutral’ wording of Human Rights texts and the social reality of injustice and inequality experienced by the learners themselves.

This narrative turn in learning is a way of exploring the initial problem identified earlier in relation to the missionary and the content approaches to teaching. As we have seen, these approaches are grounded in: 1) a colonial, patriarchal way of seeing and conceptualizing ‘the other’ as disadvantaged, in need, as a member of an oppressed, marginalized and ‘underdeveloped’ group; and, 2) a dominant notion of the history and philosophical origin of human rights as Western. The missionary tendency assumes a categorization of the other in particular terms that seem static, whereas I see life narratives open up for a unique ‘you’ in HRL. Secondly, the missionary tendency in HRE assumes a Western view on human rights as a static notion of univer-

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<sup>28</sup> For further reading on HRE and inclusion of otherness as non-discrimination see (Andreopoulos 2002; Becker 2012; Claude 1996; Cole 2006; Ellis and Forrest 2000; Forrest 2000; Kelly 2000; Audrey Osler and Leung 2011; Audrey Osler and Starkey 2005)

<sup>29</sup> See Andreopoulos and Claude (1997); Douglas (1994); Huaman and Koenig (2008); Kaufman (1997); Pierre Claude (1997). These authors focus on content and instruction, instead of critically examining pedagogical relations in HRE.

salism<sup>30</sup> that can be put into question through the notion of historical narratives.

There are two challenges in relation to HRL that a narrative turn, which draws on philosophical and historical research, addresses. The first challenge concerns how a concrete, embodied other risk being lost in a focus on reconciling culture and religious group values with universal principles of human rights. The second challenge concerns the intrinsic contradiction between HRL and citizenship education; in that citizenship is and will continue to be tied up with national identity. This means that any questioning of national agendas in citizenship education (in terms of human rights that exceed such social and geographical borders) will fall on its imperative to create a better citizen. The end is already there, foreclosing the subject.

In the following, I use the concept of ‘ontological narratives’ that finds its philosophical support in the work of Arendt (2001; 1968; 1996; 2001) and Cavareto (2000; 2005) and the concept of ‘historical narratives’ as drawn from history studies in the work of Jon Levisohn (2010).

## Ontological Narratives

Issues of identity and ‘processes of becoming’ find a resonance in studies preoccupied with questions of the self. Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson (1994) write that scholars from a variety of disciplines (political philosophy, psychology, law, feminist theory, sociology, organizational theory, anthropology, and medical sociology) ‘are postulating something much more substantive about narrative: namely, that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life’ (1994, 38).

These studies into narrative are usually coupled with questions of social identity, in the question ‘what are you?’ rather than questions of the self, as in the question ‘who are you?’<sup>31</sup>. But Somers and Gibson state that ‘we

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<sup>30</sup> See Adami, R. & Schumann, C. (2014) ‘Towards a Critical Cosmopolitanism in Learning: The Vienna Conference in 1993.’, In *Philosophy as Lived Experience. Navigating through Dichotomies of Thought and Action*. Berlin: VDM Verlag.

<sup>31</sup> In sociological and cultural studies, we find many different types of narratives that operate on different levels and influence how people understand themselves as situated in the world. Narratives function here as collective stories on different levels that help shape peoples identities. These narratives ‘say something’ about what it means to be a ‘woman’, from a ‘minority’ or to be ‘marginalized’ in a certain context and particular setting. In sociology, there are different names for narratives that locate them on different levels, such as ‘master narratives’ (Somers and Gibson 1994); ‘public narratives’ (Somers and Gibson, 1994); ‘cultural narratives’ (Horsdal 2012); ‘political narratives’ (Andrews 2007); ‘ontological narratives’ (Somers and Gibson 1994); ‘counter-narratives’(Giroux et al. 1996; Bamberg and Andrews 2004).

must reject the temptation to conflate identities with what often slides into fixed 'essentialist' (pre-political) singular categories, such as those of race, sex, or gender – a tendency which has characterized a number of recent feminist theories in their efforts to restore the previously marginalized female 'other' (1994, 40).

Challenging this tendency, feminist Adriana Cavarero dedicates her book, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Self-hood*, to the effort of moving beyond fixed social categories in relation to identity, and turns to the uniqueness of a narratable self. The self is a *who* (unique, relational, contextual) and cannot be reduced to a *what* (into labels of "woman", "migrant" etc.). Uniqueness, as used here, can hence in a broad sense be seen as being distinct from a focus on particularity that has been dominating in criticism against human rights. This particularity in relation to identity presumes that we can say something *about* others by pointing out the particularities that differentiate individuals and collectives from each other. According to a particularist view of identity in relation to rights, it is fruitful to for example discuss Muslim women in regard to political freedom, as if 'Muslim' and 'woman' could say something revealing about another person and her subjectivity.

There are two characteristics of ontological narratives that I address here: 1) that ontological narratives occasion the emergence of uniqueness; and 2) that ontological narratives are based on a notion of relationality.

I will discuss the concept of *uniqueness* as relationally conditioned, following Cavarero who stresses a singular 'you' as a philosophical critique of collective identities and the *relational* and plural condition of ontological narrative following Arendt.

## Uniqueness

Uniqueness, says Cavarero (2000) is 'the ontological status of a *who*, which is always relational and contextual, for whom the other is necessary' (2000, 90). Cavarero rejects sameness and social categorizations, pointing instead to that we are relationally distinguished from each other in our uniqueness, through her notion of a relational self.

No matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life-stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*. (Cavarero 2000, 92)

Since the self is always external, our selves are exposed and distinguished from each other through narratives and actions. A kind of relatedness through narratives is not the same as sharing the same story; our life narratives are unique even if they may be similar. The self does not recognize

itself *in* the singular you, there can hence not be total sameness. And the self cannot dissolve into a collective us, where the uniqueness of the life story can become part of a dominant narrative of ‘who we are’.

I do not dissolve both into a common identity, nor do I digest your tale in order to construct the meaning of mine. I recognize, on the contrary, that your uniqueness is exposed to my gaze and consists in an unrepeatable story whose tale you desire. (Cavarero 2000, 92)

This notion that we cannot ‘construct the meaning’ of our own identity through another’s story stands in contrast to what has been discussed earlier as ‘learning about’ in order to relate through empathy, of making the other ‘myself’ or ‘putting myself in the shoes of the other’. According to Cavarero, there cannot be any total recognition in the sense of putting oneself in the shoes of the other by ‘digesting’ the other’s narrative, but the other’s story is unrepeatable, and it is through these ontological narratives that the uniqueness of the other is exposed.

The altruism of uniqueness is neither sacrifice nor dedication, nor mortification, nor renunciation. It is rather the ontological status of a *who*, which is always relational and contextual, for whom the other is necessary. (Cavarero 2000, 90)

The selflessness of uniqueness lies in its ontological status of being constantly relational, hence uniqueness is ontologically dependent on the other. For Cavarero the unique self is always relational and contextual, which means that there is not a fixed or permanent subject, but a fleeting and fluid self, who emerges through relations to distinct others. This self is a narratable self, because it is through the sharing of narratives, in relations, that *I* get a glimpse of who *I* am in relation to *you*, and where *you* get a glimpse of *me* in relation to a fleeting notion of who *you* are in relation to *me*<sup>32</sup>.

Within the general horizon of human relations that causes us to perceive one another as narratable selves, friendship is a specific horizon where this narratability can be meaningfully translated in the act of a reciprocal narration. (Cavarero 2000, 63)

Here Cavarero argues that in the case of friendship, narration becomes reciprocal, a giving and taking of stories of the self that feeds into each other, the

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<sup>32</sup> My reading of Cavarero, in stating that the act of narration, of exposing oneself is relational but still that I can narrate parts of *my* life story to *you*, can be seen in contrast to other readings of Cavarero that emphasize the need of the other to narrate one’s life story. For example Cathrine Ryther, in her dissertation *Equality, Uniqueness, Renewal* (forthcoming) writes that one’s life story can be ‘told for us’ or not, but we acknowledge that we are narratable selves in that we all have a unique life story (forthcoming, 86).

narratable self is hence shaped and constructed relationally. Cavarero presses this point of a relational self even further, in stating that the self is totally external and relational. We give ourselves over to others through our actions, through our exposition to the other and through the narratives we narrate.

The self – to the extent to which a who is not reducible to a what – has a totally external and relational reality. Both the exhibitiv, acting self and the narratable self are utterly given over [*consegnati*] to others. (ibid., 63)

Cavarero addresses here the ontological desire of the self to find the tale of her/his story. The story reveals the meaning of what would otherwise remain an intolerable sequence of events (2000, 129). The act of telling a story is repeatable, but the story itself is not. Hence, following Cavarero, there seems to be no need to first set up criteria for what parts a life story consists of, but rather to see each life-story as unique. Cavarero suggests that narrativity is not the confession of an identity, but rather the variations of a single cry from the heart, of a single question: who am I? (2000, 134) The question of *who* one is finds its response in the unfolding of the story, then, the identity turns out to be narrated.

The ontological condition of relationality for Cavarero is valuable in rethinking HRL, since it grasps something fundamental with the very notion of rights and how we perceive them: as dependent on others, not for realizing our rights, but that human rights cannot be understood based on a notion of human singularity and autonomy. Without the relational condition of human life, the notion of rights would not have any meaning, since this ethics and the notion of rights is always a question of an in-between. The narratives we share become part of how we relate to each other, how we act in relations, and these actions have political significance.

Cavarero's notion of uniqueness is also an ethical response to the notion of empathy and solidarity through an awareness of a 'shared humanity' since 'To recognize oneself *in* the other is indeed quite different from recognizing the irremediable uniqueness of the other' (2000, 91). Learning *about* will not, following Cavarero's argument, lead to an empathy of recognizing oneself in the other, instead, learning through narratives, implies the recognition of the other's uniqueness.

## Relationality

In the *Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) writes that 'men, not man inhabits the world'<sup>33</sup> who are different in their utter diversity, which means that our human condition is this plurality. Man does not inhabit the world as an au-

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<sup>33</sup> With 'Man' or 'men' Hannah Arendt refers to human beings.

onomous individual, but human beings are dependent on each other, not because we are necessarily weak and in need, but because we create the world as we know it through narratives, according to Arendt. 'We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human' (1968, 25). Every narrative is unrepeatable and creates an irreplaceable in-between of human beings. With every human being who decides not to take part in this ever recurrent narration, or whose voice is silenced, an 'almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place; what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men' (1968, 4–5). Our ontological narrative is dependent on others to be revealed, and the world becomes a 'whole' through the plurality of voices and narratives that create the world between us. The importance of how we speak of ourselves, others and the world is given ontological weight by Arendt in that she asserts that we come into the world twice, first as new-borns, and secondly through narration. Hence becoming is through our words, narratives and actions, in a world made up by plurality.

Arendt offers the argument that we can only speak of what we deem "truth" when what we think is scrutinized through discourse in relation to others. Hence we cannot come up with something, which can resemble "truth" in our own thoughts, that's why narration becomes so important. It is through narration that 'We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human' (1968, 25). Arendt puts forth narration, the sharing of narratives, as dependent on others; hence she sees narration as relational. When we speak of what has happened to us, we reveal this in relations, and we cannot say what we deem as "truth" based on our experiences, to ourselves, but in relation to a plurality of voices. Arendt argues that talk of "truth" and "rights" is 'impossible in solitude; it belongs to an arena in which there are many voices and where the announcement of what each "deems truth" both links and separates men (...)'(1968, 30). What we think and narrate in relations may separate us from others, since the relational and plural condition of narratives does not mean that narration creates a sense of sameness. Our ontological narratives through which our experiences are recalled, are exposed to others and belong to 'an area in which there are many voices' (ibid., 30). This is the relational and plural condition of ontological narratives.

And we who for the most part are neither poets nor historians are familiar with the nature of this process from our own experiences with life, for we too have the need to recall the significant events in our own lives by relating them to ourselves and others. (Arendt 1968, 21)

The need to relate ‘significant event in our lives’ (ibid., 21) to ourselves and others comes through the act of recalling experiences in relations where we reveal parts of our ontological narratives. Arendt situates the act of story telling higher than any philosophy or argumentation, in the sphere of creating poems.

No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story. (Arendt 1968, 22)

We have a desire for our life story. However, we cannot tell it ourselves; we need others to tell parts of our story or to listen to it as it unfolds, although it can never unfold in its totality. We cannot grasp our ontological narrative, that is, we are not authors of our own life narratives. The life narrative is complete only with the end of a life. The ontological narrative is bound to the process of becoming, of feeling of self, even creation of identity in relation to others.

This does not mean that others determine us; instead Arendt poses here a critique against a conflation of sovereignty and freedom. Arendt (1958) argues that ‘If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality’ (1958, 234). It is through our relations that our identity is confirmed, according to Arendt. There is not contradiction here between freedom and subjectivity, but between freedom and sovereignty. As Arendt argues, ‘No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth – and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because of man’s limited strength, which makes him depend upon the help of others’ (ibid., 234). According to Arendt, if sovereignty would become a reality, it would be at the ‘exchange of the real world for an imaginary one where these others would simply not exist’ (ibid., 234). Human rights, can be seen as an ethical promise we give each other, making the condition for rights a plurality and relationality. Both promising and forgiving according to Arendt ‘depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself’ (1958, 237).

According to Arendt, freedom is to move in the world in relation to a plurality of others who interpret and see the world differently, in this sense, we grasp a broader picture of how ‘human rights’, ‘justice’ or ‘equality’ can be understood through the multitude of specific ways in which people speak of and act in relation to these phenomena.

How tempting it was, for example, simply to ignore the intolerably stupid blabber of the Nazis. But seductive through it may be to yield to such tempta-

tions and to hole up in the refuge of one's own psyche, the result will always be a loss of humanness along with the forsaking of reality. (Arendt 1968, 23)

In *Men in Dark Times* (1968), Arendt reflects on her experiences of living under the Nazi regime and of how tempting it was for her to just hide in her own thoughts. Arendt reflects here on the consequences of what that might have brought. She discusses the loss of narratives and speech in-between people when a person decides not to take part any more. Arendt argues that with every withdrawal of a person into her own psyche, and the silence left is the loss of an 'irreplaceable in-between, which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men' (1968, 4–5). The in-between of human beings is what makes up this world, according to Arendt. And we create this in-between whenever we narrate something, drawing on the past or on the imaginary of the future. According to Arendt, we make meaning of what has happened through narratives. 'The meaning of a committed act is revealed only when the action itself has come to an end and become a story susceptible to narration' (1968, 21).

In her reading of Arendt, Kristeva (2001) explores subjectivity as relational, that life is lived in community with others who are different and our human condition is this plurality. We cannot decide who we are and then, by will, disclose ourselves in relation to others. Rather the narratives through which we get a glimpse of ourselves are fleeting and dynamic. Narratives, and consequently our sense of self, are relational creations.

This is at the heart of Arendtian thought; for a true history to become a narrated history there are two inseparable conditions. First, the existence of an *inter-esse* within which and through which the second condition is realized. The fate of the narrative depends on an 'in between' where we eventually see the resolving logic of memorization as detachment from the lived *ex post facto*. (Kristeva 2001, 16)

The relational act of exposing ourselves through story-telling, where we together with others expose parts of who we are through parts of our life narratives refers back to this ontological dimension of learning that Todd (2010) has developed and I am exploring here, of learning to become (Todd 2003), as *in* relations *through* narratives. Our narrative birth<sup>34</sup> is through the

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<sup>34</sup> Kristeva has explored the role of narratives and of sharing narratives through what Arendt calls 'narrativity' in Arendt's conception of 'natality'. Natality refers to a notion that we come into this world as newborns and there is a second birth, through narration. Natality should be seen here, not as referring to our biological birth, but to our 'second birth' when we come into this world through words and deeds. This second birth is premised upon narration, to voice our uniqueness in relation to others.

act of narration where others ‘receive and interpret the acts of each new arrival by addressing, implicitly, to him the question: ‘*who* are you?’’ (Kristeva, 2001, 58).

In order to take in the critique against an autonomous and rational subject that offers something tangible in educational research, where the universal is not dismissed but re-thought in terms of relationality and uniqueness, I turned to Cavarero and Arendt and the notion of *ontological narratives* and *relationality* in learning human rights through narratives. Both Arendt’s and Cavarero’s philosophical works share the idea of an ontological condition of life as lived in and through relations.

This uniqueness of the subject is not reconcilable with a notion of human rights as based on *one* cultural origin, since uniqueness cannot be grasped within such a static universality, as sameness. Instead, we need to re-think the universality of human rights, so as to meet the uniqueness of the subject, who is not reducible to a particular other, but who should always remain present to us as a unique other. Can the universality of human rights find its bearing on different, conflicting narratives? In the following, I will suggest a re-reading of the UDHR through the notion of historical narratives.

## Historical Narratives

Many scholars have criticized the universality of human rights due to alleged Western origins and delineations (Butler 2000; Mouffe 2005; Ignatieff and Gutmann 2003; Benhabib 2002; Benhabib 2004; Todd 2007; Todd 2010). Such delineations can be seen as ideological choices between competing historical narratives. According to Jon Levisohn (2010), historians, and educators, ‘tell stories about the past’ where Levisohn seeks to explore the ‘epistemic status of those narratives’ (2010, 1). He argues that there is an ‘inevitable ideological bias of historical narratives’ (ibid., 1).

The more we know about a particular topic, the easier it seems to construct multiple competing narratives – narratives that tell conflicting stories about a politically fraught event or set of events, as well as narratives that tell stories that emphasize divergent aspects. (Levisohn 2010, 2)

That we can construct multiple competing narratives of a historical event the more we know about it has been elaborated more pragmatically by Johannes Morsink (1999), Paul Gordon Lauren (2011) and Mary Ann Glendon (2001) who have researched the drafting process of the UDHR and scholars such as Elisabeth Bucar and Barbra Barnett (2005) have explored different ideological origins of such articulation of rights in terms of world religions.

In earlier research on the philosophical foundation and origin of human rights, the dominant narrative reifies a Western conception of human rights (Ignatieff and Gutmann 2003; Dworkin 1977; Donnelly 2003). One example of this reification can be found in Ronnie D. Lipschutz's 'People Out of Place' where he argues that if we look at the genealogy of human rights we will find its origin in natural law.

If we return to the origins of human rights in natural law, we find that they were asserted as against those limits imposed on the emerging European bourgeoisie by the divine laws of God and the divine rights of kings (--) (Lipschutz, 2004, 38)

In order not to dismiss, but rather extend the notion of universality of human rights, we need to question the dominant narrative of the history of human rights as Western. I do this in the first article 'Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights' by examining the drafting of the UDHR. This process exposes how the different delegates discussed human rights based on conflicting ideological frameworks<sup>35</sup>. Since 1948 Western scholars have reified this dominant narrative, both through the affirmation of a Western origin of rights, and paradoxically through the postmodern critiques of the Western origin of rights. Morsink (1999) argues that these claims of allegedly Western rights is due to the fact that very few scholars actually have insight into the actual drafting process of the UDHR. Since the UDHR was the first UN declaration on human rights and has gained customary law status in the world, it is the most translated document in the world and the first document most people think of when we speak of human rights in the UN system. The notion that these thirty rights were proclaimed from conflicting ideological and religious belief systems sheds a critical light on debates today regard the compatibility of human rights and certain religious traditions. Some of the most forceful delegates who argued for the universality of human rights were the Muslim, female delegates Shaista Ikramulah from Pakistan and Mehta Hansa from India.

If there are conflicting stories about the origin of the human rights declaration, how can teachers choose between which narratives to re-tell and reify and which to neglect? White (1987) has taken this argument to a relativistic extreme by arguing that all narratives are inventions in the mind of historians and educators, that the narrative is constructed in the mind of the narrator, hence he emphasizes creative imagination of historians (White 1987). Levisohn argues that White's 'picture of the invention of narrative in the mind of the historian is inaccurate' (2010, 11). Narratives do not come from

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<sup>35</sup> See the historical study in the first article of the thesis, Rebecca Adami, 'Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights', in *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*.

the spontaneous creative imagination of historians (ibid., 11). Instead, Levisohn argues,

Narratives come from other narratives. (...) the story has been told many times, in many ways, implicitly and explicitly, by those close to the event and by others more distant from it. The constructive work of the historical inquirer, then (...) is always a product of a negotiation among multiple narratives. (Levisohn 2010, 12)

Levisohn's argument that teaching about history is to choose between conflicting narratives captures my empirical findings in the UN archives: that the drafting of the UDHR was not driven by a consensus where the Western delegates were in domination, rather the drafting was characterized by conflict and negotiations, where different and antagonistic ideologies, religions and political belief systems founded the notion of human rights on plurality, drawing on the delegates' unique life experiences in culturally diverse contexts. Hence, following Levisohn, when human rights scholars today reify a historical narrative of human rights as Western, this reification can be argued as only one aspect of the actual historical event of the drafting of the UDHR, a choice which silences different narratives that might oppose this one-sided truth.

These 'invented' histories are converted into learning outcomes in curriculum materials, school and university textbooks and training manuals for a wide-range of professional groupings. (Keet 2012, 15)

Historical narratives are stories told about the past, different stories with competing truth claims (Levisohn, 2010 and Ricoeur, 2004). Historical narratives have 'an author' or many authors. Historical narratives draw their trustworthiness by being built on 'other narratives'. Historical narratives are epistemological narratives, they tell us what we can learn from history. They have a political dimension; the choice between different competing narratives on the same event is a political choice, silencing voices in the process of 'making history'. How dominant delineations of human rights were reinforced through certain strands of thought and certain accounts of events and history, has been criticized by feminist and post colonial thinkers, who advocate for the importance of lifting other, equally valid, but historically silenced narratives (Simmonds 2012; Hoover 2013).

In regard to human rights, the delineation of 'the story of human rights' or 'the origin of human rights' to Western meta-narratives of natural law, the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence, has silenced other narratives, in different parts of the world, recounting other, historical narratives of how the concept of human rights originated in certain cultural contexts and was formed by certain historical events.

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: based on Competing Historical Narratives

This past, moreover, reaching all the way back into the origin, does not pull back but presses forward, and it is, contrary to what one would expect, the future which drives us back into the past. (Arendt 2006, 10)

In asking how do we re-tell the historical narrative of human rights, without losing sight of new elements of this narrative in the present, ‘presses us forward’ as Arendt writes, in finding political imaginary for human rights in the future. According to Arendt, the past is always present and history has a place in formulating what is alive. To educate about human rights is to educate about selected parts of the history, to select with care between competing narratives from the past. The UDHR is read and interpreted differently by millions in the present in which students, as newcomers, become part of narrating it. Human rights violations and realizations in different parts of our common world colour our perspective of its origin, and casting a shadow for a future that wishes us to re-claim this past through narration.

The drafting process of the UDHR in 1946-48 involved people with different religious and cultural backgrounds and may tell us something about the challenge and complexity of HRL today. The post war period after the Second World War was a time when the faith in human reason and development had been shattered through the acknowledgement of the horrors of the Holocaust. During the process of finding hope and asserting a human dignity that had been destroyed by human cruelty during the Second World War, the delegates to the UN Commission (who had been appointed to the task of making a first draft of the UDHR that would later be negotiated and amended through different UN bodies) asked UNESCO to set up a Committee to discuss if there was any universal legitimacy of human rights in different philosophical and ideological strands of thought (cf. Adami 2012)<sup>36</sup>.

The UNESCO Committee collected written contributions from different parts of the world that would be discussed and later published in a report to the UN Commission, called *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*. In this report, which is available through the UNESCO archives in Paris, we find texts on the historical origins of the notion of human rights in Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Communism and many more. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the contributors. What is noteworthy is that the list of

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<sup>36</sup> These conflicting historical narratives on the universal legitimacy of human rights diverge where we find a range of different and conflicting ideological believes: between socialist and liberal perspectives, between Catholic, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Confucian and non-religious believes, between different political views and between claims for women’s rights, the rights of dependent people and of a dominant notion of ‘the rights of Man’. Cf. Adami, R. (2013) “Intersectional Dialogue: A Cosmopolitan Dialogue of Ethics” and (2012) “Reconciling Universality and Paritcularity Through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights”.

human rights in the UNESCO report was almost identical to the list of rights that the UN Drafting Committee presented to the UN Commission, which served as the first draft of the thirty articles in the UDHR (Cf. Adami 2012). Human rights were referred to as ‘practical principles’ in the UNESCO Committee. According to Jacques Maritain, French philosopher in the UNESCO Committee, ‘the goal of UNESCO was a practical goal’ and he said that ‘agreement between minds could be reached spontaneously, not on the basis of common speculative ideas, but on common practical ideas, not on the affirmation of one and the same conception of the world’ (UNESCO 1948, 5).

Unesco’s part was to consult philosophers and assemble their replies. (--) Many schools of thought are represented, each of which brings to the whole its particular view and justification of individual rights (--). The paradox is that such rational justifications are at once indispensable, and yet powerless to bring about agreement between minds. They are indispensable because each one of us believes instinctively in the truth, and will only assent to what he himself has recognized as true (--). They are powerless to bring about a harmony of minds because they are fundamentally different, even antagonistic; and why should this surprise us? (UNESCO 1948, 1)

In other words, human rights as practical principles were argued as reasonable within particular value systems that were presumed as in dichotomy with each other. The problem in the foreground, both in formulating human rights in 1948 and in HRE today, is the supposed polemic between ‘universal’ and ‘particular’ values. Yet, after the extensive political sessions and philosophical discussions in 1946-48 between individuals from different parts of the world, the polemic had shifted and was identified rather as between different particular value systems, not between universal practical principles of human rights and diverse cultural-, religious-, or ideological traditions (cf. Adami 2013). The declaration went through different UN bodies in the years between 1946 and 1948 where Confucian (China), Islamic (India, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia), Catholic (Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile) and non-religious value-systems (the Soviet Union) were represented by countries diverging in their ideological beliefs for how human rights should be understood. The UN delegates represented hence not only different governments and countries, but also conflicting cultural narratives (Adami 2012).

Problematizing contemporary assertions of consensus in the historical drafting process of the UDHR from 1948 pragmatically questions the presumed dichotomy between universality and particularity. If the ‘universality’ of human rights was originally claimed on conflicting grounds then it shifts the focus in our concern for equality when seen as sameness, away from the dichotomy between embracing plurality and holding on to equality (as justice) found in the notion of human rights, towards the need to take seriously

counter-narratives of human rights, since they act as political contestation to a dominant, male narrative of universalism and reify that we are still talking about the 'rights of Man'.

If the aim of HRL is not the reaching of consensus on a universal, philosophical and ideological foundation, then how are learners and educators supposed to keep an openness to conflicting and sometimes antagonistic historical narratives of human rights?

The drafters aimed at excluding particular references to faith, culture and tradition in the document in order to keep the text of the document open for different and antagonistic readings and interpretations. As an international policy document, the UDHR is today read through different and antagonistic cultural and religious narratives. As a circular learning process, human rights are read through particular and conflicting narratives in different cultural contexts, given meaning through people's uniqueness in speech and actions. I have therefore criticized static notions of particularity, stressing that we should not forget that it is unique human beings who interpret human rights through their unrepeatable experiences that are given meaning through narration.

I find a crucial connection between the importance of highlighting these competing historical narratives of the origin of human rights and the notion of ontological narratives, since a plurality of historical narratives on human rights enable the learning subject to relate or re-negotiate the cultural, religious and political implications of these historical narratives in relation to her own life narrative. In this sense, if human rights, as I argue, were based on conflicting narratives, they are part of not only one story, but of a plurality of historical narratives addressing a narratable self who, through her/his life narrative, retells parts of her/his history, situated in, but not solely determined by, a certain cultural, religious and political historical narrative.

I will in this last part of the thesis deal extensively with these bonds, tensions and sometimes dichotomies between the particular, the universal and the unique that relate one's life narrative to one's situatedness in particular cultural, religious and social contexts as well as to a universal notion of human rights.

## Addressing A *Who* in Human Rights Learning

Talk of 'rights' seem to mean nothing to Arendt because its instrumental focus on what rights can achieve: being a means to an end risks foreclosing the subject instead of disclosing it (Arendt, 1998, 189). For Arendt, speech becomes meaningful only in so far as it reveals life in a living and acting 'who',

which is why being with others in speech and action is something completely different from the kind of dialogue that seeks its motivation in criteria and procedures. (Bergdahl 2010, 153)

In her doctoral thesis, Lovisa Bergdahl challenges notions of what she calls 'rights talk' in her exploration of dialogue in new terms that capture antagonism and dissensus (2010). Bergdahl draws on Arendt in critiquing rights talk on the premise that the uniqueness of the subject becomes foreclosed, since talk of rights generally aims at certain outcomes, which are closed to the moments of surprise and critique that an ungraspable 'who' brings to the conversation. It is precisely the risk of foreclosing the subject in the talk of rights that motivates a turn to ontological narrative in HRL, since it invites questions of *who* we are in relation to human rights, in preference of *what* human rights can 'do' for us as women, children etc. Bergdahl's critique of rights talk is important, since it sheds light on the politics of HRE where otherness and difference are paradoxically smoothed over in its talk of equality for 'everyone', in the name of a common humanity. Instead of focusing on the irony in narrativity, that we expose a self who is never graspable even to one's own 'self' as Bergdahl explores further, I emphasize the strength Arendt sees in narration; of making sorrow and pain bearable<sup>37</sup>.

According to Arendt, narrativity on suffering transforms it into an event, a significant whole. So we can reconcile ourselves with our past by speaking about it and hence act in the present through recalling memories of situations when we were unable to speak or act. We can find meaning in suffering only when the action has come to an end and we narrate it. Arendt does not mean to suggest that narration 'solves' anything in our past but 'mastering of the past can take the form of ever-recurrent narration' (1968, 21). Arendt stresses our need to 'recall the significant events in our own lives by relating them to ourselves and others' (ibid., 21). This is what opens up for poetry as a human potentiality. According to Arendt, by 'the telling-over of what took place' we create narratives that will survive us (1968, 22). Through narratives we disclose our uniqueness in how we perceive our experiences. In this sense, we relate through narratives, although we may not feel identification because we may feel estranged. Nonetheless, we do relate, through our listening, which in turn enables the other to speak, to disclose.

It is through the acknowledgement of the uniqueness of life narratives that we expand or question static notions of particularity. Because, even though one may be faced with what seems as a particular other, we recognize that the other is another, that she is different from me, and particular. Thus, she might be 'a woman', 'a migrant', 'a child' etc. but she carries a

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<sup>37</sup> I have explored Arendt's notion of narrativity as a process of making pain and suffering bearable in the third article, 'Re-Thinking Relations in Human Rights Education: The Politics of Narratives'.

life story, which is unique to her and her alone. The fleeting notion of uniqueness in human encounters lies in this fact that Cavarero stresses: that even though we do not know a single word or fact of another person's life story, we know that everyone has a story to tell. Uniqueness lies in the ontological narrative.

Following Cavarero, ontological narratives can be seen as transcending multiple stories of belonging, where we can be both and many, depending on when, where and with whom we speak and depending on what trajectories of our past and expected future we choose to tell or ask to be told through our listening. The ontological condition of relationality for Cavarero's ethics is valuable in re-thinking HRL, since it grasps something fundamental with the very notion of rights and how we perceive them: as dependent on others and not based on a notion of human singularity and autonomy. Without the relational condition of human life, the notion of rights would not have any meaning, since this ethics and the notion of rights is always a question of an in-between.

The learning of human rights in local settings has been problematized for a lack of legitimacy in particular contexts. The problem has been formulated as a presumed dichotomy between a universal notion of rights and values connected to different cultural and religious group belongings. The notions of ontological and historical narratives provide useful conceptual tools for developing an understanding of HRL as a way to question static conceptions of human rights and to critique the notion that 'rights' have a single meaning or 'are' something, outside humans' narrating their unique experiences.

The problem we need to face is the apparent dichotomy of universality and particularity, since these two aspects of rights serve to legitimize HRL: the universality that upholds the notion of human rights and the locality through which human rights are read in educational contexts. As I am proposing here, HRL grapples with critiques of a Western imperialism, on the one hand, and of cultural relativism, on the other.

## The Theme of Universality and Particularity: A Challenge Posed to Human Rights Learning

The theme of universality and particularity runs through all four articles of this thesis since the difficulties of reconciling or thinking these concepts (in terms of human rights and learning in local contexts) pose a challenge for HRL. There have been many ways to explore and deal with the presumed dichotomy between universality/international/cosmopolitan and locality/particularity/difference in relation to human rights. In rough strokes we can distinguish between thinkers who: 1) emphasize the need for a universally accepted theory of rights, even though this would mean a thin or minimalistic list of rights; and, 2) thinkers who emphasize the importance of recognizing particularity and difference at the expense of any universality through translating/mediating or negotiating notions of rights.

In the following, I discuss critiques of universality and particularity in relation to human rights as these have a bearing on HRL and the presumed dichotomy between a universal notion of human rights and the specific, value-laden cultural context in which HRL presents itself. I present how earlier research has tried to face this dichotomy between universality and particularity through ‘translation’ (Butler 2000), ‘mediation’ (Benhabib 2006) and through ‘minimalist theories’ on rights (Cohen 2004). My position is to argue neither for universal nor particular notions of rights. The problematization of a dichotomy between universality and particularity in regard to human rights has been a valuable starting point for this thesis project, although I find the static notions that inform the presumed dichotomy of universality and particularity insufficient to grasp the tension in people’s sense of belonging in relation to a unique sense of self.

What I aim to do instead is to extend the notions of particularity and universality, by a) re-reading the drafting of the UDHR and hence questioning of the origin of human rights as Western and b) exploring particularity as in constant transformation through persons’ unique life narratives.

## Giving up on Universality: Facing Pluralism through Minimalism

Joshua Cohen (2004) among others has taken a minimalist view for examining human rights in balancing universality and particularity. Following Donnelly (2003), Ignatieff (2003) and Dworkin (1977), Cohen (2004) emphasizes the ‘value of toleration and an embrace of ethical pluralism’ and he then ends in ‘human rights minimalism’ (2004, 191). He argues that ‘human rights can command universal assent only as a decidedly ‘thin’ theory of what is right, a definition of the minimal conditions for any life at all’ (2004, 192).

And if we want them [human rights] to be acceptable to all, then – in view of the wide range of religious, philosophical, ethical, political outlooks that are now endorsed in different societies, and that we can expect to persist into the indefinite future – the content cannot be very demanding, perhaps no more than a statement of the protections required ‘for any life at all’ (Cohen 2004, 193)

Cohen deals with pluralism as a ‘problem’ for human rights. Cohen (2004) suggests, like Donnelly (2003) and Dworkin (1977), a minimal outlook on human rights in arguing that any universal claims should be kept to the minimum, in order not to ‘overtax the resources’ or ‘threaten to subordinate the political self-determination of peoples (--) to the decisions of outside agents, who justify their interventions in the language of human rights’ (2004, 194). Cohen justifies his minimalistic list of rights by neglecting particularism altogether in the name of universalism of rights. He argues that human rights should not find their moral rationale based on any particular value systems, and hence ends in a very thin list of rights: only what is needed to sustain ‘any life at all’.

The central idea of justificatory minimalism is that a conception of human rights – including an account of their content, role, and rationale – should be stated autonomously: independent of particular philosophical or religious theories. (Cohen 2004, 195)

He argues that this minimalism is founded on a commitment to toleration, since it ‘does not take a position for or against any particular foundational view, whether religious or secular, about the content and importance of human rights’ (2004, 202). Cohen continues:

Justificatory minimalism aims to avoid imposing unnecessary hurdles on accepting an account of Human Rights (and justice), by intolerantly tying its

formulation to a particular ethical tradition. It is left to different traditions – each with internal complexities, traditions of argument, and (perhaps) canonical texts – to elaborate the bases of a shared view of human rights within their own terms. (Cohen 2004, 212)

Whereas a minimalism approach in defending a universality of human rights articulates pluralism as a problem, an underlying thesis upon which the philosophical argument in this thesis rests is rather the opposite: that plurality is not a problem but the *very condition* for a concept of human rights. The diversity in the world, following this note, provides the human condition for the social imaginary of human rights through the multitude of narratives through which human rights are spoken.

## Recognizing Particularity through ‘Translation’ and ‘Mediation’

In order not to dismiss, but preferably to extend, the understanding of universality in relation to human rights, we can see philosophical responses to similar critiques of Western universalism in the work of Butler (2000) and Benhabib (2006), who have in common an argumentation for acknowledging how universality is articulated in different ways through particularity and cultural norms, with their notions of ‘translation’ (Butler 2000) and ‘mediation’ (Benhabib 2006).

In order for the universal to emerge, according to Butler (2000), there needs to be some alterity of culture. ‘And here we are not referring to one culture which defines itself over and against another’ (2000, 25). She sees the concept of universality as a problem of ‘cross-cultural translation’ (ibid., 25). With this ‘transcultural notion of the universal’ Butler wants to emphasize how universality is viewed and understood through the cultural norms that it is aimed at transcending (2000, 24). Particular claims to human rights, as women’s rights or minority rights is something that Butler mentions as failed attempts to synthesize universality and particularity.

When one has no right to speak under the auspices of the universal, and speaks nonetheless, laying claim to universal rights, and doing so in a way that preserves the particularity of one’s struggle, one speaks in a way that may be readily dismissed as nonsensical or impossible. When we hear about ‘lesbian and gay human rights’, or even ‘women’s human rights’, we are confronted with a strange neighboring of the universal and particular which neither synthesizes the two, nor keeps them apart. (Butler 2000, 39)

Butler does not neglect these particular claims for human rights, instead; she sees these as critiques of how the human rights subject has been conceptualized, as to exclude women, children and LGBTQs from such articulation. Hence, critique against a limited view of the human rights subject is simultaneously a critique of a limited scope of international law. Butler argues that claims for human rights based on particularity ‘expose’ the ‘limitations of the human’ as a term that ‘sets the limits on the universal reach of international law’ (2000, 39). These claims provoke questions for political theory: ‘What, then, is a right? What ought universality to be? How do we understand what it is to be a “human”?’ (2000, 41). Butler argues that when we speak of universality ‘we do not escape our language, although we can – and must – push the limits’ (ibid., 41).

Whereas Butler (2000) wants to see universalism *through* the eyes of particularism, hence coloring human rights through cultural norms and values, Benhabib (2006) argues for a *mediation* of particularity and universality in relation to human rights. Benhabib suggests a ‘strategy of mediation’ in order to reclaim a ‘dialogic universalism’ (2006, 20), with the intention of molding communicative ethics in a cosmopolitan framework that allows for a greater cultural sensitivity and political ambition. She envisions these mediations in terms of democratic iterations: ‘linguistic, legal, cultural, and political repetitions-in-transformation, invocations that are also revocations’ (2006, 47). Benhabib draws this mediation to the notion of sovereignty of national states. Reading Benhabib in this nationalistic-centered view, the tension that she explores seems to be rather between nation states and international bodies that are supposed to uphold a notion of universal human rights against national violations of these rights. Benhabib argues that: ‘The tension between universal human rights claims and particularistic cultural and national identities is constitutive of democratic legitimacy’ (2006, 32) and that the coherence of the laws of the nation state strengthens the legitimacy of the state’s sovereignty. From this, Benhabib focuses on a legal dimension of human rights. She articulates a dichotomy between particularity and universality and replies,

My answer to the question as to how to reconcile cosmopolitanism with the unique legal, historical, and cultural traditions and memories of a people is that we must respect, encourage, and initiate multiple processes of democratic iteration. (Benhabib 2006, 70)

Democratic iteration can be understood here as a kind of dialectics between rights and identities (2006, 67). Benhabib takes the example of Muslim women who ‘learn to talk back’ to the state and in becoming public subjects, they will start questioning the traditions of Islam. This is a very bold suggestion, that she, as a Westerner, anticipates a *certain* cultural transformation from ‘within other cultures’ and contestations that will lead to enhanced

rights and freedoms of women in these traditions. I have some qualms about this kind of position that Benhabib takes, in representing the other and speaking for the rights of another, who is subjected to certain interpretations of ‘good’ and ‘freedom’<sup>38</sup>.

What both Butler and Benhabib contribute to is an acknowledgement of how particularity feeds into universal notions of rights, either through ‘translation’ (2000) or ‘mediation’ (2006). However, what I want to suggest is a philosophical shift from particularity towards uniqueness. HRL that focuses on particularity is caught up in facing cultural and religious conflicts between seemingly static value systems, whereas a HRL that focuses on uniqueness draws on diverse understandings of human rights from life narratives that, although unique, carry a political significance in the human rights discourse that is nonetheless universal.

## The Universality of Uniqueness – Learning Human Rights through Lived Experience

Thus far we have seen how philosophical endeavours into human rights deal explicitly with particularistic and also relativistic critiques against universal claims of rights. Although these are fruitful responses, they are nonetheless inadequate for developing a critical philosophical perspective for HRL that takes into account, not only particularity and cultural narratives, but the uniqueness of a singular *you* in addressing the lived experience of human rights.

As long as we continue to formulate a problematization regarding Human Rights Learning in terms of how to reconcile or negotiate, or how to strike a balance between universal notions of rights (in terms of universal principles, laws, values or cosmopolitan virtues) and the particularity of people’s social contexts (in the form of public, cultural and local narratives, cultural values or group rights) we risk reifying both hegemonic notions of universality (that Butler warns against) and simultaneously in our same critique of such static universals we run the danger of appealing to collectives and groups in terms of sameness.

With this said, can human rights even have a bearing in diverse, particular contexts? Feminist and post-colonial thinkers, who question the universal validity of a subject that is presumed as male- and Western-centred, have

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<sup>38</sup> Gayatri Spivak (2004; 2010) in contrast to Shelya Benhabib raises the political and problematic aspects of speaking for the other. Spivak problematizes even further the notion of ‘who can speak’ in terms of power relations and domination.

taken up this criticism. There are other subjects in the world, other than those that sprung from an Enlightenment ideal, this critique insists.

If we see HRE as part of some other normative project, as creating ‘citizens of the world’, or as ‘combating discrimination and social injustice’, then the content of HRE shifts from being concerned with how we read the UDHR as addressing *narratable selves*, to include legal rights, inclusive curriculum and learning about other cultures etc. The notion of HRL that I have been exploring is rather an ontological dimension of learning, where one’s life story narrative already contains all the ‘content’ that one need in order to learn human rights as more than just words in the UDHR. The abstractedness of ‘everyone’ in the UDHR receives a different meaning in the face of a concrete and unique being, who is not reducible to social understandings of what one represents.

The learning is not steered here by any normative project that goes beyond the notion of human rights, but is rather seen as a relational project where we expose our uniqueness in the face of the other’s narrative and where human rights receive concrete meaning through one’s own life experiences. Still, my exploration has not been a cultural relativistic perspective on human rights, where the universal legitimacy of HRE is left for a relativistic acknowledgement of different and antagonistic cultural value systems. I have rather tried to think through the work on Cavarero and her ontological condition of plurality for uniqueness as a way of moving closer to the universality that human rights seek to defend. Or to use the more radical way of expressing this universality of uniqueness, in Arendtian terms ‘under the surface, we may all be alike’ even though we will never know if that is the case, since we can’t, according to Cavarero, know ourselves, but this total and radical difference of an other, who is ungraspable to the self, is not a pretext for discrimination, but for equality beyond difference.

Taking into account that we are unique does not mean that there is no language for universal rights; it merely means that rights will never grasp the unique experience of one’s existence. By extending the notion of particularity to uniqueness in ontological narratives, we are able to see that narratives are not solely particular, as in the eyes of others, but unique life stories that cannot be repeated or replaced by another.

I am not questioning the validity of a universal notion of human rights, neither am I trying to smooth over difference in the name of universal sameness. What I have aimed to do is to offer a new path of consideration, where the universality of rights addresses the uniqueness in people’s life stories. Here pedagogical relations are given ethical and political considerations in Human Rights Learning in particular contexts. This shift, I argue, can be made by expanding our focus to how we narrate rights through our life narratives, by reading them into our lived experience as the point of reference rather than referring to narratives about otherness and difference.

## Conclusion

In the thesis, I have made two significant shifts, to narrative and to learning, that enabled me to reframe Human Rights Education in building a concept of Human Rights Learning.

I have tried to re-think the supposed dichotomies between a Western notion of human rights history and other historical accounts that question which philosophical and cultural grounds human rights can be conceptualized on (article 3). I did this by introducing into the discourse on the origin of human rights the notion of historical narratives, by drawing on Levisohn who argued that in learning about history, we are constantly choosing between a multitude of conflicting narratives. This means that the origin of human rights cannot be argued as *one*, as if the Western historical narratives about human rights were the only ‘true’ account of how the drafting process of the UDHR was negotiated. Through my archival study, I have argued, against the notion of a dominant Western origin of human rights, that the UDHR was drafted on conflicting cultural narratives, which means that the UN delegates from different parts of the world who were part of the drafting process, argued for the universality of human rights, but on conflicting grounds. This means that there is a universal acceptance of human rights, but on conflicting ideological grounds.

I have also tried to re-think, what I find to be ‘static notions’ of particularity in relation to HRL, in terms of ‘uniqueness’ and ‘relationality’. By introducing the notion of ontological narratives in HRL, I wanted to demonstrate that the process of learning is equally a relational process of becoming. HRL and the acquisition of content knowledge take place within the social practices in education. The learning I developed in the thesis is a learning *in* relations, through narratives (article 2). What I have illustrated with this is that we learn human rights, both through the history that is presented to us, and by the way in which we can contest or question this presented history. And secondly, it is a learning through our ontological narratives, where we expose ourselves in naming human rights through our life experiences (article 1).

HRL will continue to grapple with universal aspirations of equality and particular struggles for recognition. Throughout the thesis, I have presented another path of consideration, one of relating beyond the impasse of dominant narratives of universality and cultural narratives of particularity. I have suggested that we may relate more easily through our uniqueness, through

the unique experiences we carry with us, rather than through the imposition of cultural representations (article 4).

Future research in Human Rights Learning may consider the impossibility of relating, caring and listening, under the burden of having to represent ‘all women’, ‘all Muslim’, ‘all Westerners’, ‘all white’ and the guilt such representation may inflict.

Indeed, our ability to actually relate to each other, I have suggested, is not in trying to learn ‘about’ the collective other, nor is it by being totally responsible of the other in attentive listening where I learn ‘from’ the other, but that we learn *in* relations, *through* narratives – a learning that calls for *who* you are, in the midst of everything that one is supposed to defend or defy.

Learning, following the notions I have presented in the thesis, is a process of subjectification<sup>39</sup>. Through the acknowledgement of historical and ontological narratives I wished to illustrate that this process of subjectification becomes distorted when we are not exposed to the plurality and uniqueness of the world. As the Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie says in her TED talk (July, 2009) there is a danger of a single story, which means that we start all history and accounts of subjectivity with only the dominant story. What she is stating is the way in which marginalized stories are supposed to represent otherness.

We are kept from learning *in* relations with a unique other as long as we continue to simplify the lived experience of others. As such, the thesis can be seen as part of research studies which seek to question the ontology of a single story and open up to a notion of ignorance, of curiosity concerning the question ‘who are you’? I think it is from when we say, ‘I do not know the whole story, but I am curious to know more’, that we find a starting point for both learning and future research in human rights.

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<sup>39</sup> In “A Narratable Self as Addressed by Human Rights” I discuss further subjectification in relation to Jacques Rancière and the notion of a human rights subject.

## Summary of the Articles

In the first article, “Toward Cosmopolitan Ethics in Teacher Education: An Ontological Dimension of Learning Human Rights” I draw on Hansen (2008) and Todd (2007) to explore the role of teachers to make judgments based on cosmopolitan ethics in their teaching profession, which can be found in the universal notion and internationalization of human rights. Both Hansen and Todd question cosmopolitanism as a dogmatic ‘ism’ and they see cosmopolitan ethics as already inherent in the teaching profession. What I am suggesting in the paper, is proposing a HRE standard in teacher education that offers teachers rights-dilemmas in larger social communities, valuable in making and creating ethical considerations that may lay ground for a human rights-based judgment in different classrooms situations. A cosmopolitan higher education integrating HRE standards could hence be useful in criticizing economic driven educational policies that do not value the provision of means needed by teachers in order to carry out teaching asked for in national curriculum policies. Thinking about human rights knowledge and what it does to the ontological dimension of learning is thinking about who we become as professionals when embodying and enacting human rights in the classroom.

In the second article, “Re-thinking Relations in Human Rights Education: The Politics of Narratives” I ask: how do we face dominant narratives in relation to human rights without estranging persons who might feel uncomfortable in being labelled as ‘the other’ in relation to a seemingly ‘universal’ subject? In order to explore narrativity as political action in Human Rights Learning and the relevance of uniqueness and plurality in this endeavour, the paper first makes a shift from particularity as collective identity of the other, captured in narrative literature of ‘Afro-American studies’ or ‘womens’ studies’, as proposed by Nussbaum (1998), towards the need for plurality in any conception of rights in cosmopolitan thinking, as argued by Todd (2010). What is hoped to be gained by this is a notion of Human Rights Learning that moves away from identity politics, on *what* we are/*how* we are perceived through social categorizations and discrimination by others, and instead engages with unique relations in plural classrooms, where the question of ‘who are you?’ is addressed through the notion of life narratives (see Cavarero, 2000). The paper then turns to Hannah Arendt and her recall of the dangers of not taking responsibility as educators to introduce students to

a world, which they are to transform, while at the same time keep an openness towards their unique narratives. In emphasizing that the notion of human rights is based upon a plurality of narratives I use the concept of counter-narratives, drawing on Peters and Lankshear (1996).

In the third article, “*Reconciling Universality and Particularity through a Cosmopolitan Outlook on Human Rights*”, I explore the drafting of the UDHR from 1948 in order to see how a reconciliation of particularity and universality was reached when human rights was claimed on an international arena when people from different cultural and religious context met to draft the first UDHR in 1946-48. In this study I use archived reports and documents from the UN Archives in New York and the UNESCO Archives in Paris in order to examine the actual drafting of the UDHR from 1948. The drafting process included over sixty delegates to the UN Commission, coming from different parts of the world. Both the UN Headquarters in New York with the Dag Hammarskjöld UN Library and UN Archives as well as the UNESCO Library and Archives in Paris have archived different parts of the drafting process. The drafting of the declaration included both the UN Commission as well as the UNESCO Committee, appointed by the General Assembly to conduct a worldwide ‘survey’ on the universality of the concept of human rights. Thinkers from different parts of the world were invited to send their written replies on how human rights could find its conceptual bearing in different religious traditions, philosophical strands of thought, different economical and political systems in the world. Most of these documents and reports have been digitalized and are available on line<sup>40</sup>. The UNESCO documents include the final report *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, meeting reports from the *UNESCO Committee*’s meetings in Paris in 1948, correspondence between the president of the UNESCO Committee, Jacques Maritain and others involved in the UNESCO Committees work. At the UN Archives there are meeting reports from the *UN Commission*, meeting reports from the *UN Third Committee*, meeting reports from the *General Assembly*. The paper hence question the static notion of the historical narrative of human rights as Western, through an empirical study of the actual archived reports from the UN during the drafting of the UDHR. The results show that delegates, and especially female delegates, from non-Western countries were strong advocates for human rights during the UN meetings, although, and this is important for my study, they argued for human rights on different, and sometimes antagonistic philosophical and ideological moral grounds. Hence, the UDHR was a document, not based on consensus on the origin of human rights, but based on conflicting ideological grounds, although claimed as universal principles or rights.

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<sup>40</sup>The UN Archives online: <https://archives.un.org/> The UNESCO Archives online: <http://www.unesco.org/archives/new2010/index.html>

In the fourth paper, “Learning Human Rights Through One’s Life Story: A Narratable Self as Addressed by Human Rights”, I re-formulate the paradox on who the subject for human rights is, which has been dealt with by Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière by turning to Cornelius Castoriadis notion of a pedagogical subject and to Adriana Cavarero and her notion of a narratable self. I chose here to expand on Jacques Rancière’s response to Arendt’s critique of human rights as limited to citizen rights in his counter-critique of a definite or permanent subject to whom human rights belong. Arendt and Rancière diverge in their view of human rights and their inherent possibility as a means for change. The paper develops Todd’s critique of human rights as excluding otherness and difference by introducing the work of Cavarero (2000) on a narratable self. A narratable self is a relational self and the formation of human rights is about the relations between different narratable selves, not just Western ones. Through the notion of a narratable self I re-think the binary of particularity and universality. Instead of focusing on cultural claims for human rights I focus on the subject for human rights, her speech and action in relation to others, as a relational project. This re-formulation questions some basic assumptions in earlier research, namely the assumption that ‘humanity’ is to be seen as a unified whole, and the perspective of ‘difference’ as collective and cultural other.

## Sammanfattning på svenska: Summary in Swedish

### **Lärande om mänskliga rättigheter: betydelsen av narrativ och unikheter**

I avhandlingen undersöker jag hur lärande om mänskliga rättigheter kan förstås om vi sätter mänskliga relationer och den unika livsberättelsen i centrum för lärandet. Utbildning i mänskliga rättigheter har definierats av olika aktörer på den internationella arenan, av statliga aktörer som ser utbildning i mänskliga rättigheter som en del av medborgarskapsutbildning, med syfte att skapa fredliga relationer mellan kulturer och länder. NGOs har definierat utbildning om mänskliga rättigheter i ljuset av kränkningar och våld, där information om och kunskap om mänskliga rättigheter är tänkt att skapa medvetenhet hos förtryckta och marginaliserade grupper (kvinnor och barn inkluderas ofta i termen 'utsatt grupp') att kräva sina rättigheter. I den akademiska kontexten har utbildningsforskare definierat utbildning om mänskliga rättigheter i termer om utvecklande av inneboende värden, etiskt tänkande och moraliska överväganden.

Beroende på vilket syfte som åläggs lärande om mänskliga rättigheter så skiljer sig de olika utbildningsinriktningarna åt. Som del i att utbilda fredliga medborgare, kosmopolitiska medborgare eller globala medborgare behandlas lärande om mänskliga rättigheter inom 'Liberal Education' som företräds av tänkare som Martha Nussbaum. Med syfte att skapa ett kritiskt civilsamhälle där kunskap om mänskliga rättigheter balanserar upp ekonomiska och neoliberala värden, står 'Critical Pedagogy' som en dominerande utbildningsteori inom NGO-världen, med Paulo Freire i täten. När lärande om mänskliga rättigheter behandlas som ett sätt att utveckla förmågor för etiska överväganden och moraliskt handlande sätt mänskliga rättigheter inom ramen för utbildningsfilosofi företrädd av bland andra Nel Noddings och utbildningsfilosofier som utvecklar tankar från Emmanuel Kant.

I avhandlingen görs distinktion mellan fyra fält inom utbildning i mänskliga rättigheter: 1) utbildning för medborgarskap; 2) juridisk utbildning; 3) mångfaldsutbildning och utbildning för icke-diskriminering; samt 4) utbildningsprogram och projekt som är riktade till 'utsatta' målgrupper.

Två typer av undervisning inom dessa fyra fält i utbildning om mänskliga rättigheter har identifierats: 1) undervisning som är fokuserad på innehåll; samt 2) undervisning som har en missionerande tendens.

Avhandlingen ställer sig kritisk till dessa två typer av undervisning, som i hög utsträckning fokuserar på vidlyftande mål med undervisningen där teori och analys kring pedagogik och lärande ligger i lä för juridiska termer om rättigheter och för ideologisk övertygelse om undervisningens goda innehåll.

Jag gör två vändningar i avhandlingen, mot lärande och mot narrativ, dessa vändningar finner sin kritiska motivering i Sharon Todd's problematisering av det universella subjekt som ligger till grund för projektet att skapa universella värden som gäller för 'alla' 'överallt', samt i problematiseringen av de imperialistiska och koloniala strukturer som underbygger relationer mellan 'expert' och 'student' i utbildning om mänskliga rättigheter, som identifierats av Halme och Dembour.

I bristen på utbildningsteori inom fältet för studier om mänskliga rättigheter som kan bemöta den ontologiska synen på olikhet i lärande, där subjektet är i konstant relation och påverkad, utom sin kontroll, av andra – så vänder sig studien till politiska och feministiska filosofer som Hannah Arendt och Adriana Cavarero.

Det är två dimensioner av narrativ som begreppsligörs i avhandlingen: ontologiska och historiska narrativ. Ontologiska narrativ fångar den ontologiska synen på narrativ som både Arendt och Cavarero delar, där narrativ och narrativitet är det talade ordet och den politiska handlingen med vilken vi förstås av andra. Genom ontologiska narrativ ställs frågan 'vem är du?' snarare än 'vad är du?'. Det unika i livsberättelsen är vad som skiljer 'dig' från 'mig' snarare än sociala kategorier som skiljer 'oss' från 'dom'.

Historiska narrativ har använts av Levisohn i syfte att påvisa hur all undervisning om historien är val mellan att lyfta olika, och ibland motsägelsefulla narrativ. Levisohn menar att lärare och historiker är 'story-tellers' men de skapar inte dessa berättelser i sin fantasi, som White argumenterar för, utan de väljer mellan olika berättelser som redogör för olika perspektiv av en historisk händelse eller persons liv, där narrativ byggs av tidigare narrativ. Historien om de mänskliga rättigheterna kan på liknande sätt lyftas fram genom olika berättelser, som återger skilda perspektiv på mänskliga rättigheter. I avhandlingen använder jag Levisohn's argumentation för att beskriva de empiriska resultat jag fångat i den första artikeln i avhandlingen, där jag lyfter de icke-västerländska delegaterna som var med och skrev den Allmänna Förklaringen om Mänskliga Rättigheter åren 1946-48 för att belysa hur denna process inte enkom kan förklaras i termer av konsensus, eftersom en sådan förklaring slätar över de konflikter och ideologiska meningsskiljaktigheter som den allmänna förklaringen inte 'löser' utan snarare bygger sin universalitet på.

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