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Abstract

Human rights have been taught at universities in Sweden since the late 1990s. Thousands of students have earned university degrees through cross- or multidisciplinary human rights education. While the programs are substantively advanced, like most university educational programs, they are delivered in a traditional academic manner. However, the scholarly field of Human Rights Education critiques transmission models of education, advocating for more evolved teaching and learning methodologies that require academic educators to embody these principles. In this thesis, the author—an associate professor in human rights law and a human rights educator for thirty years—conducts an inquiry into the perspectives of nine human rights scholars responsible for cross-disciplinary human rights programs at five universities in Sweden. The research question examines how educators' views on university human rights education can be problematised using theories of student subjectivity, criticality, activism, and transformation. The findings centre around these themes. Based on this analysis, the author contributes to developing Human Rights Education as a field and proposes a specific model for University Human Rights Education. Examining the relationship between human rights education theory and practice facilitates a deeper understanding of the inherent conflicts within university human rights education.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of thirty years of teaching and learning in higher education, encompassing human rights instruction in Sweden and internationally at universities and government agencies. It is driven by the belief that teaching and learning are essential for upholding humanity, fostering more just and humane societal structures, and promoting peace and compassion among all living beings. First and foremost, I acknowledge the hard work and determination that have propelled me toward this goal. As inscribed on my doctoral ring: Az Embereknek - For Humanity. Science holds its value only when it serves humanity. This pursuit has evolved into a new beginning in educational theory and practice. My second acknowledgement goes to Malmö University and the generosity of former Vice Chancellor Kerstin Tham, who enabled our participation in this Master's Program. I also extend my gratitude to the dedicated colleagues at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CAKL) for their commitment to this invaluable program—thank you! I want to thank the Head of Department, Ola Fransson, for providing the space for my studies, thank you Ola!

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Introduction

Some, if not all, educators and scholars teaching at universities have experienced that moment when a spark of insight ignites in a person's eyes, creating a mutual and simultaneous learning experience between educator and student. In Human Rights Education, this spark pertains to humanity—the recognition of humanity in oneself, followed by the recognition of humanity in others. While seeking these moments, this sense of life and freedom of mind may appear straightforward; there is no simple formula for their occurrence. Instead, it requires a conscious and determined approach to teaching, learning, and self-reflection as integral to the learning process. This involves an educator's meta-reflection and self-awareness regarding their assumptions about students, their positionality, and the dynamics of subject and object in the learning situation. As Paulo Freire (1970) asserts, it is essential to break the teacher-student dichotomy, fostering a collaborative inquiry where the teacher relinquishes the teacher-centric position to engage in a joint exploration with students. The scholarly field of teaching and learning in higher education provides the necessary guidance and components for these insights—and the transformation of one's inner life—to manifest. This thesis addresses how educators facilitate this transformation, not in the conventional academic sense but in alignment with a universal human rights culture (UN, 2011) central to Human Rights Education (HRE). The inquiry explores how educators' perspectives on university human rights education can be problematised through theories of student subjectivity, criticality, activism, and transformation. It is argued that educators in human rights courses are responsible for thoughtfully designing curricula, actively reflecting on how they integrate the scholarly fields of teaching and learning and Human Rights Education. A human rights curriculum must adhere to the very principles underpinning international human rights standards, which parallel the educational perspectives on the responsibilities of teachers and students as framed in critical pedagogy.

This inquiry is motivated by four circumstances: 1. the pursuit within HRE to educate in a manner that facilitates a transformation grounded in human rights values; 2. the knowledge gap concerning teaching and learning methodologies in university human rights education (UHRE); 3. the dearth of research on the role of educators in UHRE; and 4. thirty years of teaching and learning experiences in human rights at universities, for professionals, and in civil society organisations, highlighting the need for greater awareness among educators regarding transformative teaching and learning methodologies.

Regarding the first circumstance, the quest within HRE to identify the type of teaching that enables a transformation toward a human rights-based society is informed by the lessons of the Second World War. In the immediate aftermath of the war, world leaders convened under the auspices of the newly established United Nations (UN) to deliberate on how to prevent the atrocities that occurred when states turned against their own citizens, stripping them of human dignity, equality, and life (Johnsson, 2015). They adopted a set of human rights intended to limit state power over individuals, representing a delegation of authority to individuals in areas where state interference is prohibited. These rights also obligate states to prevent poverty and deprivation and to ensure, among other things, the right to education. The initial intent was for all individuals to be educated about their rights; without such knowledge, they cannot claim them (UN, 1948, preamble). In addition to individual human rights, there is a right to exist within a ‘social order’ governed by human rights (UN, 1948, Article 28). For such a social order to flourish, individuals must be aware of their rights and actively engage with them. Education about human rights must lead to both individual and societal transformation, moving from oppression to freedom, ultimately fostering free societies. The primary focus of HRE is to disseminate knowledge and action regarding human rights as enshrined in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Andreopoulous & Claude, 1997; Zajda, 2020a), adopted as a result of the international dialogue following the Second World War and subsequent human rights conventions.

Despite this intent to educate on human rights, momentum for Human Rights Education only gained traction in the 1990s (Zajda, 2020b, p. 2), following the collapse of dictatorships in the Eastern Bloc. In 1993, 171 states gathered in Vienna at the World Conference on Human Rights to revitalise international human rights. The concluding document reflected a renewed commitment to education and human rights (UN, 1993). This led to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) declaration and the subsequent World Program for Human Rights Education in 2005 (Zajda, 2020, p. 2). Since then, human rights education practices have proliferated globally, and HRE has emerged as an established scholarly field within educational theory (Bajaj, 2011, 2017; Zembylas et al., 2016). Researchers in this field concur that for human rights education to be effective, it must incorporate transformative learning (Ahmed et al., 2020; Bajaj, 2011; Foley, 2021; Rankin & English, 2022; Tibbitts, 2017; Tibbitts & Katz, 2017; Zajda, 2020b), critical pedagogy (Tibbitts & Katz, 2017; Woldeyes & Offord, 2018; Zembylas & Keet,

2019; Zembylas et al., 2016), critical reflection (Foley, 2021; Woldeyes & Offord, 2018; Zembylas, 2017), transformative agency (Bajaj, 2019), and activism (Babacan et al., 2013, p. 205; Tibbitts, 2017; Zajda, 2020b). However, regarding the second circumstance and the knowledge gap, much of human rights education practice has relied on transmission approaches (Coysh, 2014; Celemajer, 2017; Tibbitts, 2002; Vissing, 2020) until recently, when more interactive methods have begun to prevail (Mihir, 2009; Tibbitts, 2017). Nevertheless, tensions persist between educational theory on human rights education and its practical application (Coysh, 2014; Zembylas et al., 2016; Tibbitts, 2017; Garnett & Suárez, 2017). There remains a knowledge gap in the pedagogical practice of HRE, necessitating further exploration of how to educate individuals about human rights to foster a universal human rights culture, as proposed here, for transformation, student subjectivity, criticality, and activism. As Tibbitts (2017) highlights, little attention has been devoted to the pedagogy of HRE and the design needed to effect change. Many scholars focus on the content of human rights education, critiquing its epistemology (Adami, 2021, 2024; Zembylas & Keet, 2019; Zembylas, 2018). While some practical methods for human rights education are discussed in the 'Human Rights Education Handbook' (2000) by Nancy Flowers and in 'Educating for Human Dignity' (1995) by Betty Reardon, much of the literature addresses school settings, with less focus on HRE in universities.

The third circumstance that motivates this study is the need for more research on educators involved in university HRE. HRE in higher education is an emerging research field currently characterised by inventory contributions (Cargas, 2018; Vissing, 2020), surveys of law and policy (Cargas, 2018; Tibbitts, 2024), case studies experimenting with pedagogical methodologies (von Berg, 2023; Blanchard & Nix, 2019; Skadegård, 2024), and organisational analyses (Kotzmann, 2018). However, these contributions rarely address pedagogical practice or university educators' role as human rights curricula designers. This represents another knowledge gap. Integrating higher education theory and practice is essential for HRE. Academic teachers who are also human rights scholars are expected to know how to integrate research and teaching in the Boyerian sense (Boyer, 1990). They possess the theoretical knowledge necessary to illuminate the values underpinning human rights in their teaching and learning activities. The question then arises: how do they translate this into practice?

As an academic educator of human rights in university settings—this being the fourth circumstance motivating this study—I have observed scholars discussing critical issues such as human rights, democracy, feminism, racism, and ableism. At the same time, their actions,

behaviours, or words often contradict these principles. Thus, this inquiry emerges from the desire among human rights advocates for university human rights education—and indeed all university education—to adhere to ethical principles of human dignity, equality, and accountability, translated into pedagogical practices that foster transformation through educators' capacity to design learning experiences that promote student subjectivity.

The thesis focuses on educators' pedagogical approaches in University Human Rights Education and their roles as critical actors in educational design within higher education. It investigates their implicit or explicit perceptions of student subjectivity, criticality, activism, and transformation. The aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of teaching and learning in university HRE, along with its inherent dilemmas and possibilities. It is posited that educators' pedagogical awareness, their views on students, and their educational design are crucial for facilitating students' transformation into critical human beings (Davies, 2015)—knowledgeable, skilled, and actively engaged in fostering a universal human rights culture. Although the number of universities involved in this study is limited, the analysis paves the way for further inquiry into the pedagogical approaches of human rights scholars and educators. The thesis commences with an overview of the scholarly field of HRE based on two literature reviews, which highlight Paulo Freire's theories on the pedagogy of the oppressed and transformation. Freire's theories of transformation in education serve as the theoretical framework in the subsequent chapter, informing the research question, methodology, and methods detailed in the following chapters. The empirical material, data analysis, and concluding discussion comprise the final two chapters of the thesis.

The Scholarly Field of Human Rights Education

This section provides background information on the empirical study. Firstly, it establishes the theoretical foundation upon which the analysis of the empirical data is based. Given that the scholarly field of Human Rights Education (HRE) is relatively new, particularly in the context of university education, it is essential to relate it to the broader field of teaching and learning in higher education. It is assumed that the reader of this thesis may be unfamiliar with HRE, at least as a scholarly field, if not with the practice of education and human rights more generally. Consequently, this section begins by defining the concept of HRE and its implications. It then presents the findings from a narrative review that illustrates the geographical landscape of the HRE scholarly field. The section concludes by framing a

conceptual basis consisting of theories on transformation, subjectivity, and criticality, which together form the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Briefly on the History of Human Rights Education

As briefly described in the introduction, human rights education (henceforth referred to in lowercase) is as old as the first human rights declarations. However, it was only in the 1990s that it began to spread globally. The historical events surrounding this development are well documented by Andreopoulos (1997b), Bajaj (2017a), Baxi (1997), and Cargas (2020) and need not be elaborated upon in this context. Instead, one way to understand the emergence of human rights education is through Felisa Tibbitts' (2002) typology, which identifies three categories of HRE: one targeting schools and schoolchildren, another aimed at professionals working within government agencies, and a third focused on civil society organisations and victims of human rights violations. At that time, most educational activities offered by these organisations, institutions, or agencies employed 'transmission' models—traditional one-way communication styles in which specialists lectured audiences about the UN system, the protection of rights through UN committees, and the content of human rights treaties (Tibbitts, 2017; further discussion on this follows). In 2017, Tibbitts revisited her model and incorporated teaching and learning methodologies into her three categories (Tibbitts, 2017). Her revision demonstrates that HRE has evolved as a field over the nearly two decades since her initial typology, revealing that it is no longer sufficient to discuss human rights alone; it has become essential to reflect on how these topics are taught. This shift is also evident in the various definitions of human rights education that have emerged over the past fifteen years.

Defining of Human Rights Education

There are several definitions of human rights education. Mihr, for example, defines it as a set of educational and pedagogical methods aimed at informing individuals about their human rights and training them to exercise them (Mihr, 2009). In an earlier article, Mihr and Schmitz (2007) differentiate between three 'levels of individual development' (p. 978). They assert that HRE is not 'primarily about the creation of specific knowledge and skills in the context of national laws but aims at a holistic and universal concept of human rights' (Mihr & Schmitz, 2007, p. 978). By the latter, they refer to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). Human rights education encompasses a cognitive

level ('knowledge'), an emotional level ('awareness of human rights and their violations'), and a level of 'active skills' ('to prevent and combat violations effectively') (Mihr & Schmitz, 2007, p. 978). Similarly, Smith (2013) states that human rights education involves knowledge, skills, and attitudes, often metaphorically referred to as 'head, heart, and hands/feet'. Knowledge, or engaging the head, is an essential component of all academic educational activities, as is the acquisition of skills that are 'generic in nature' and pertain to 'critical analysis, reasoning, oral argument, and numeracy' (Smith, 2013, p. 340). Attitude, Smith argues,

is a more marked deviation from traditional teaching and nurturing of academic knowledge and skills'; it is about 'changing hearts and minds' and 'requires an adjustment in teaching methodology and recognition of higher education as part of a process, in which attitudes frequently shift beyond the formal education process' (Smith, 2013, p. 341).

Thus, there is more to HRE than the transmission of knowledge or learning about human rights. The most widely accepted definition of HRE (Tibbitts, 2017; Cargas, 2020) is found in the 2011 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN, 2011, hereinafter UNDHRET). According to Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Declaration, HRE encompasses:

- (a) Education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- (b) Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- (c) Education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.

The keywords in this definition are 'about', 'through' and 'for'. These prepositions reveal that HRE requires a certain pedagogical design. According to the Declaration, this design must prevent 'human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills, and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours'. This empowers them to 'contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights' (Article 2, para. 1). Accordingly, educating human rights must be more than talking 'about' human rights conventions, i.e., the cognitive level in Mihr & Schmitz (2007) understanding; it must also revolve around emotional levels and skills ('through') - and it must motivate for action ('for') when human rights are violated.

Coming back to the aim of this thesis, it is assumed that for transformation to occur, all these criteria of the UNDHRET must be complied with. Hence, transformation requires

knowledge about human rights, an individual experience of the value base that human rights emanate from, and urgency to act against the state and its agencies when not complying with international human rights standards. This occupies the scholarly field of human rights education, which focuses on understanding human rights in theory and implementing them into practice, as is shown in the subsequent section.

An Overview of the Scholarly Field of Human Rights Education

Andreapolous and Claude (1997a) published the first anthology on ‘Human Rights for the Twenty-First Century’ in 1997, in which many of those now seniors in the field paved the way for further research on HRE. It displays the field as it was then—a second anthology, ‘Human Rights Education. Theory, Research, Praxis’, by Bajaj (2017a) came in 2017. Together with Zajda’s (2020a) anthology 2020 ‘Human Rights Education Globally’, they enclose the current active researchers in the HRE field and the major theories, dilemmas and interests in HRE research. This year, in 2024, two other anthologies on HRE were published, one on ‘Nordic Perspectives on Human Rights Education. Research and Practice for Social Justice’ edited by Osler and Goldschmidt-Gjerløw with one article on higher education (Skadegård, 2024). It criticises the Nordic position on human rights as part of Nordic culture, scrutinising educational measures to implement human rights in education. The second anthology is ‘Emancipatory Human Rights and the University. Promoting Social Justice in Higher Education, edited by Tibbitts and Keet (2024). It revolves around theoretical questions, the legal background of HRE at universities, criticism against HRE, teaching human rights at universities and bringing university HRE to society. One article is particularly relevant to this thesis and concerns ‘Emancipatory Pedagogy’ (Durako Fisher & Gilbert, 2024).

Besides these anthologies, there are two international journals: the Human Rights Education Review (HRER), established in 2018 with two issues and extended in 2021 to three issues a year, and the International Journal on Human Rights Education (IJHRE) from 2017 with one issue a year. Many of the editors and members of the editorial boards of these two journals are active scholars publishing articles in the field. Other regular human rights journals have published articles in education on human rights before or still do.

In Zajda’s research overview 2020 of current human rights research, he concludes that the HRE research can be divided into three broad perspectives: humanistic, progressivist,

and reconstructionist (Zajda, 2020b). The humanistic perspective ‘focuses on knowledge, the enhancement of human development, autonomy, and values’ and is grounded in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights. He sees this as closely connected to citizenship education (Zajda, 2020b, p. 7). The progressivist perspective stresses individual and experiential learning, as presented by Dewey, and its fundamental principle is ‘learning by doing, or experiential learning’ (Zajda, 2020b, p. 7), denoting ‘knowledge acquired from experience, rather than from formal schooling’ (Zajda, 2020, b p. 7). In this perspective, Zajda includes Paulo Freire since experiential learning is relevant to his critical and transformational pedagogy (Zajda, 2020b, p. 8). The third perspective, the reconstructionist, ‘focuses on improving people’s lives in their cultural settings’ (Zajda, 2020b, p. 8). This third perspective is, in Zajda’s view, the most relevant to HRE since it examines ‘the existing economic and social conditions, defining inequality’ whereby ‘individuals become more aware of factors responsible for it, and engage in social actions to change the conditions perpetuating economic and social inequality’ ((Zajda, 2020b, p. 8). Thus, like many scholars, Zajda promotes a critical, transformative HRE, addresses real-world problems, and leads to action. In Felisa Tibbitts’ ‘seminal work’ (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 3) ‘Understanding What We Do: Emerging Models for Human Rights Education’ from 2002, she categorises, as mentioned earlier, human rights education based on target audiences for initiatives or projects. Tibbitts’ revised model from 2017 and her teaching and learning methodologies are referred to by many researchers as a baseline for understanding the field (Ahmed et al., 2020; Bajaj, 2011; Foley, 2021; Rankin & English, 2022; Simpson, 2021; Tibbitts & Katz, 2018; Zajda, 2020b; Zembylas & Keet, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous section, Tibbitts' original focus was on the educated, the target audience. She divided these audiences into three categories: schools, professionals, and civil society organisations (Tibbitts, 2002). In her reasoning, these three audiences, or layers in her model, received different kinds of education, mainly depending upon the purpose behind it. Later 2017, she revised the model but maintained the categorisation into target audiences, adding more criteria. The revised version, thus, consists of a Values and Awareness /Socialisation Model. This layer is characterised by state-funded education, usually has involuntary learners, is part of the formal education sector, educates content of human rights, and the teaching and learning strategy didactic to interactive/participatory (Tibbitts, 2017). The two other models, the Accountability/Professional Development Model and the Activism/Transformation Model, target professions, such as law enforcement staff, teachers, social workers, medical doctors, etc., and civil society organisations and victims of

human rights violations (Tibbitts, 2017). The methodologies employed in educating professions are participatory or instrumentally empowering, aiming at agency and application of human rights within one's professional role (Tibbitts, 2017). The methodology for educating civil society organisations is empowering and transformational, aiming for 'integration within one's analytical framework, taking action to reduce violations in both public and private domains, participation in collective action and creation of social change' (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 84).

As can be seen from this description of Tibbitts' (2017) model, she identifies four teaching and learning methodologies: didactic, interactive/participatory, empowerment, and transformation (Tibbitts, pp. 75-77). These methodologies are seemingly categorised after Tibbitts' experiences from educational activities, and the idea is supposedly that they lead to different outcomes. In her conceptualisation, didactic methodologies are 'oriented toward the delivery of content to learners', as in schools and other such 'traditional' cultures of education upholding distance between the educator and the learners (Tibbitts, p. 75). Learners are not allowed to influence their learning, and critical thinking is not encouraged (Tibbitts, 2017). In Tibbitts' understanding, the methodology reflects Freire's 'banking' model (Freire, 1970, see below), which aims to socialise learners. Tibbitts is critical of this educational approach, arguing that it is 'incomplete, and potentially counterproductive' and focuses solely on teaching 'about' human rights. She is not alone in her criticism. Other HRE scholars such as Coysh (2014), Keet (2017), Monaghan, Spreen and Hillary (2017), and Zembylas (2016, 2024), many of them engaged in Critical Human Rights Education (CHRE) share her criticism against education about, or 'transmission', 'traditional', or 'declarationist' teaching methodologies. It is also evident from UNDHRET (UN, 2011) that teaching and learning in this field must be more than 'about' human rights.

In Tibbitts' understanding, the participatory/interactive methodologies have become dominant in current HRE in the education of professions and civil society organisations. These methodologies help learners better apply human rights values in practical situations. However, as Tibbitts argues, they do not foster agency in the learner. 'Critical reflection on human rights values and standards and social problems may be addressed, but more as an analytical exercise, perhaps one aimed toward values clarification' (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 76) rather than criticism against power structures. In that sense, the criticism against didactic methodologies is also valid for interactive and participatory methodologies. They instead target education 'about' human rights and focus on the cognitive, with an opening for emotional reflection and skills in addressing real-world problems within a (by the educator)

given frame. Mihr (2009) provides further examples of what activities these methodologies, which are ‘taught and learned through a bottom-up approach in which the needs and interest of learners are part of the training concept’, are concerned with (Mihr, 2009, p. 185). For one, the programs are evaluated with a bottom-up approach to help develop the program further. Educators are encouraged to ‘design their programs to be target group oriented and conduct needs assessment of their classes prior to the start of courses’ (Mihr, 2009, p. 186). The training has moved from a ‘hypothetical training concept focusing on international human rights mechanisms and norms and taught mainly at law faculties and expert seminars’ to civil society organisations and the nonformal education sector (Mihr, 2009, p. 186), thereby abandoning the didactic methodologies traditionally used at universities.

The empowerment methodologies go further than the participatory/interactive and are more profound. They are oriented towards the ‘cultivation of agency in learners’ related to certain topics, such as non-discrimination, and the ability to apply these topics in one’s role (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 76). The ‘learning process is instrumental for individuals having increased capacities to influence their environment’, separating it from participatory/interactive methodologies (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 76). In her understanding, participation in the learning process is important since it builds professional skills through reflection and sharing experiences. Tibbitts does not offer a detailed definition of the concept, but it seems the operative notion for empowerment methodologies is ‘agency’ and ‘reflection’. Monisha Bajaj (2018) differentiates between four components of agency, or transformative agency. One component corresponding well to Tibbitts’ ‘empowerment’ is called ‘sustained agency’, meaning that learners are prepared to transition ‘into other contexts where norms may be different’ and that creates ‘mechanisms for self-reflection, group insights, and shared problem-solving even beyond the protective education setting’ (Bajaj, 2018, p. 10). This kind of group reflection may develop skills and, as Tibbitts suggests, is therefore common when educating professionals. Coysh (2014) writes that ‘empowerment is not straightforward’; it can be seen as a movement out of constrained places, widening the ‘scope for action’ and ‘an organic growth in confidence, in capacity, in well-being’ (Cornwall, 2002; cit. Coysh, 2014, p. 106). On the other hand, it can be an “instrument for managed intervention” rather than a process through which people discover their own potential [...] participation then becomes another way of relocating them within the prevailing order’ (Cornwall, 2002; cit. Coysh, 2014, p. 106).

According to Tibbitts, transformative methodologies involve learner agency. Still, they differ from the empowerment ones because they aim at ‘social transformation through

human rights activism,' fostering personal transformation' or what she calls 'intrinsic empowerment' (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 77). Both emancipatory and transformative learning approaches 'invite a critical reflection on power and oppression in one's local environment' and 'can result in action to combat one's oppression' or social change in a society (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 77). By activism, she refers to 'collective action undertaken to influence the behaviour of governments so that laws, policies and practices are consistent with human rights standards' (Tibbitts, 2017, pp. 72-73). There are, thus, no clear line in her conceptualisation between emancipatory and transformative methodologies. Still, transformation is connected to activism, activities to scrutinise power and to act on injustice.

Researchers within HRE are, as has been mentioned in the Introduction, to a large extent agreeing that for human rights education to be effective, it must entail transformative learning (Ahmed et al., 2020, p. 206; Bajaj, 2011, p. 486; Foley, 2021, p. 79; Rankin & English, 2022, p. 364; Tibbitts & Katz, 2018, p. 33; Tibbitts, 2017). It must rely on critical pedagogy (Tibbitts & Katz, 2017; Woldeyes & Offord, 2018), allow for critical reflection (Zembylas, 2017; Woldeyes & Offord, 2018; Foley, 2021) and motivate activism (Babacan, A. & Babacan, H., 2013, p. 205; Tibbitts, 2017). Yet, much of human rights educational practice does not involve these elements but rather relies on what may be called transmission approaches (Celemajer, 2017; Tibbitts, 2002; Vissing, 2020). Little attention has been given to the pedagogy of HRE (Tibbitts, 2017), meaning *how* education is designed to be transformative and critical. As also mentioned, there are some examples of practical methods for human rights education at schools, as developed in the Human Rights Education Handbook (2000) by Nancy Flowers and in Educating for Human Dignity (1995) by Susan Reardon. Still, the pedagogical approach *per se* has yet to be overly developed.

Theories about HRE, as Garnett Russell and Suárez (2017) argue, are missing a link between discourse and practice. Coysh (2014) stresses that the link between theory and practice is essential. Referring to Freire (1970), she calls this meeting point between them 'praxis'. Praxis means 'reflection and action on the world to transform it, where theory becomes a political and transformative activity'. Hence, theory and action are

inter-reliant in praxis, meaning there can be no theory without action and no action without theory. This is based on the idea that no reality will transform itself and transformation requires the "critical intervention of the people in reality through praxis" (Freire, 1970; cit. Coysh, 2019, p. 108-109).

It could be noted that transformative methodologies conform with the requirements of UNDHRET (UN, 2011) and teaching ‘through’ and ‘for’ human rights. Thus, research and policy/rules agree about the position of transformation in HRE. A particular strand in HRE research is occupied with transformation, relating it to critical theory, critical educational theory, and critical human rights education.

Critical Human Rights Education

As mentioned in conjunction with didactic methodologies, there is a criticism against teaching and learning focusing on education ‘about’ human rights. This criticism is like that against human rights in general, but this concerns education in human rights specifically. Baxi writes in 1997 in what could be argued to be a still relevant criticism:

There exists in the North a rights weariness and in the South a rights wariness. [...] Human rights and HRE knight-errantry can lead only to a Quixotic enchantment, leaving the world untransformed at its core. [...] Rights weariness is an ethical stance that doubts whether the liberal traditions of individual rights can be the privileged bearers of human transformation, especially when the ideals of rights seem to be squandered by an excess of rights talk. (Baxi, 1997, p. 151).

Baxi summarizes the wariness of the South in a long list of shortcomings, from being ‘hegemonically “western”’, carrying ‘the legacy of the original /justifying/recycling colonialism/imperialism’, masking the ‘ends of power and dominance (political and economic) by the North, and the North being ‘unable, despite its proud boast, to make the world safe for democracy and rights’. The North is ‘unwilling to create conditions within its own jurisdiction to eliminate practices and circumstances that encourage massive and flagrant violations of human rights’ (Baxi, 1997, p. 151-152). This criticism is shared with other scholars (Adami, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2020; Al-Daraweesh & Snauwaert, 2013; Babacan A. & Babacan H., 2013; Celemajer, 2017; Keet, 2017; Rankin & English, 2022; Regmi, 2017; Tibbitts & Katz, 2017; Zembylas, 2017; Woldeyes & Offord, 2018; Foley, 2021) as the risk of reproducing the Western hegemony of power dominance: the North over the South, the international over the local, resulting in a risk that the human rights violations by the state (and public employees) continue, or even occur anew, and therefore no real change is reached contrary to the purpose behind human rights education.

Zembylas and Keet (2019) belong to those who are critical of HRE and have established an idea of Critical Human Rights Education (CHRE). Their book, *Critical Human Rights Education* from 2019, encloses their previous articles on CHRE, but here in

a merged and deepened version criticising HRE. The book aims to develop various theoretical aspects of their notion of CHRE (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 11). Their central assumption is that

the acceptable “truths” of human rights are seldom critically examined, and productive interpretations for understanding and acting in the world are soaked in the violence these rights try to address (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 11).

They continue saying that most ‘HRE curriculum programs and pedagogical practices struggle to express the “critical” that must accompany any educational endeavour’. They ‘are incapable of critiquing the categories they work with and struggle to create the conditions to advance “new” understandings of their own knowledge base’ (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 10). Thus, their criticism concerns HRE as ‘pedagogical formations’ and ‘subject matter and content’ (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 11). However, they also criticised the university for being a product of Western hegemony and for being established during times of colonialism, and they built on those mental structures (Zembylas & Keet, 2019). That means a colonial epistemology permeates Western university organisation, structure and approach to knowledge. Their writing mainly focuses on the subject matter, and that education needs to be critical content-wise.

Another critic who has received recognition, not the least from Zembylas & Keet (2019), is Joanne Coysh (2014). She criticises the dominant discourse of human rights education for being legalistic and reproducing centralised power at the expense of the local. In her view, ‘human rights education is important because of its transformative potential’, but at the same time ‘, it is problematic in the way it can ignore and sustain the political conditions of justice’ (Coysh, 2014, p. 89). To balance this dualist edge, she suggests a list of remedies, relying on Freire (1970) and critical pedagogy: HRE need to be connected to the local community and consider that society is ‘plural and diverse and circulates in a society of difference, rather than in a homogenous state’. Human rights should be ‘learned in terms of different contexts, cultures, people and experiences - as an important part of pedagogic practice’ (Coysh, 2014, p. 110-111).

As this overview shows, CHRE deals with content and pedagogical practices, advocating for critical pedagogy and transformative teaching and learning that leads to action. However, it is predominantly occupied with education in schools, professionals, and civil society organisations, not specifically with universities.

University Human Rights Education (UHRE)

Most human rights education revolves around education in schools, professionals, and civil society organisations. Lately, there has been an increase in literature on human rights education in higher education, as touched upon in the Introduction. It deserves to be reiterated that there are inventory contributions on where and what UHRE is concerned with inventory overviews (Cargas, 2020; Vissing, 2020), policy and law surveys (Cargas, 2020; Tibbitts, 2024), case studies experimenting with pedagogical methodologies (von Berg, 2023; Blanchard & Nix, 2019; Skadegård, 2024), regular case-studies (Lakshminarayanan & Thomas, 2022; Olsson, 2020; Smith, 2013), studies on professors ideas on content (Aldawood, 2020) and organisational analysis (Kotzmann, 2018). These contributions rarely address pedagogical practice nor the role of university teachers as designers of human rights curriculum and their practice. A few exceptions exist, like Durako Fisher & Gilbert (2024) with their emancipatory pedagogy, or Blanchard and Nix (2019) with their radical pedagogy, which addresses pedagogical practice.

In a recent book ‘Emancipatory Human Rights and the University - Promoting Social Justice in Higher Education’ from 2024, Felisa Tibbitts and André Keet (2024) wrote about the ‘emancipatory’ potential of university HRE. They recognise that ‘human rights simultaneously as law, values, and vision [...] can potentially reflect and influence higher education’s purpose to transform society through a social justice lens’ (Tibbitts & Keet, 2024, p. 3). This requires, as many of the authors in the book write, that universities engage in critical self-reflection and renewal of pedagogy and practice in university education and programming (Tibbitts & Keet, 2024). Jane Kotzmann (2018) comes to a similar conclusion. In her book, ‘The Human Rights-Based Approach to Higher Education’, she separates the market-based and rights-based approaches to higher education. In her conceptualisation, the market-based approach is driven by market incentives and sees students as customers. The rights-based approach is concerned with the quality of educational offerings, which ensures the potential for individual transformation and facilitates the development of morals and values that accord with the concept of human rights. For education to be rights-based, she argues, the educational system may need to be reformed and ‘higher education institutions will need to review course content and pedagogy as well as institutional processes and policies to ensure that they are rights respecting’ (Kotzmann, 2018, pp. 75-76).

Regarding transformation, a few contributions deal explicitly with the context of higher education. Rhona Smith (2013) writes about law education and the link between

teaching and research in higher education. In her argumentation, UHRE must be transformative, and that is, as she suggests, facilitated through the integration of research and teaching, where students are presented with forms of research-based teaching, thus obtaining sustainable research skills. Piers von Berg (2023) argues along similar lines and advocates pedagogical action research design for students, involving ‘transformational learning, authentic reflection, and participatory theatre to stimulate “becomings” in civic identity and agency’ (von Berg, 2023, p. 30). With these methods, certain goals of transformative HRE can be met: ‘such as nurturing citizens with empathy for different others and solidarity with peers against injustice’ (von Berg, 2023, p. 45). These contributions involving transformation also focus on the education, the design and the students, but not on the educators' approach.

To summarise this overview of the scholarly field of HRE, they point to Freire (1970) and critical approaches to teaching and learning content of human rights. Most of the literature concerns schools and how to educate human rights as a subject and content. The traditional academic role appears uncontested; the academic scholar is untouchable, and changes in the object of teaching, human rights, and research-based teaching are suggested as ways forward. It reveals a gap in HRE and UHRE concerning educators' knowledge and ideas on pedagogical methodologies and what leads to HRE transformation, such as the view of students, criticality and activism. This gap defines the theoretical foundation, the research question and the analytical framework with which the empirical data is analysed.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter describes the thesis's theoretical framework, beginning by positioning human rights education in the scholarly field of teaching and learning in higher education. As the literature overview showed, much of the HRE research points to Paulo Freire (1970). For that reason, and because I, from my scholarly background, find Freire especially relevant as a foundation for human rights pedagogy at universities, attention is given to a few aspects of his theories. Many scholars in HRE and CHRE agree, as mentioned, on transformative learning as the way to educate human rights. It is also the approach that, as I suggest, UNDHRET (UN, 2011) requires for human rights education, regardless of the target audience. Therefore, specific attention is given to transformation and its preconditions, as understood in this context. Since much of the research in the field does not include higher education and not the role of educators, a few theoretical notes on academic scholarship are made. This enables a more profound analysis of the empirical material.

Positioning Human Rights Education

The theoretical framework in this inquiry is based on teaching and learning in higher education and Human Rights Education. Human rights education is what Cleaver, Lintern and McLinden (2014) call a disciplinary approach within educational theory, or, metaphorically speaking, a recently emerged geographical area in the 'archipelago of the scholarly field of teaching and learning in higher education'. McFarlane (2012) maps the scholarly field of teaching and learning higher education in a 'higher education research archipelago', a sort of mind map over research in the field, but in the form of a geographical map. This landscape has two significant islands: the 'Policy Island' and the 'Teaching & Learning Island'. On the former, he places various geographical areas corresponding to themes such as 'equity & access', 'globalisation', and 'internationalisation'. On the latter island, there are 'scholarships for teaching and learning', 'curriculum design', 'gender, culture & learning', and 'learning theory'. A small island in the north is named 'Philosophy Reef'. It is probably accurate to say that Human Rights Education emanates from the policy island but has, through the development into an autonomous scientific field, anchored on the shores of the teaching & learning island, close to the philosophy reef. This thesis is a contribution that, by exploring education in human rights at universities, contributes to

placing U/HRE research on more solid ground on that shore and to a deeper understanding of its geography and geology.

Having said this, this thesis embarks on the territory of critical educational theory, or at least it is within that ambit. The motive for that is the HRE field pointing towards critical pedagogy. As was shown in the previous overview of the HRE research field, current human rights education suggests that a critical approach to teaching human rights is necessary to have the liberating effects humans require for a universal human rights culture. Another route could get another result when analysing the data, but this thesis is limited to testing the map that the field suggests. The reason for that is that this is scientific knowledge that human rights educators could be expected to have, and the UN documents in the field of HRE proscribe an approach to human rights education.

According to Cohen et al. (2011), critical educational research is an emerging paradigm, which in turn regards the positivist and interpretivist paradigms “as presenting incomplete accounts of social behaviour by their neglect of the political and ideological contexts of much educational research” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31). They write that ‘[p]ositivist and interpretative paradigms are seen as preoccupied with technical and hermeneutic knowledge’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31). Critical educational research’s “intention is deliberately political – the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31). It ‘is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour’, but understanding situations and phenomena is not sufficient, but it is necessary to change them (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31). It seeks to emancipate the disempowered, redress inequality, and promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31). Thus,

critical theory seeks to uncover the *interests* at work in particular situations and to interrogate the legitimacy of those interests, identifying the extent to which they are legitimate in their service of equality and democracy. Its intention is *transformative*: to change society and individuals to social democracy (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31).

Brazilian philosopher, lawyer, and pedagogue Paulo Freire is the originator of critical pedagogy. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lays the foundation for a critical stance towards education. Many other educational theorists have since written in critical pedagogy and criticised Freire for various reasons, such as bell hooks (1994), who developed them

further in different directions. A few of them are referenced below in conjunction with Freire's conceptualisation description.

Aspects of Freire's Theory on Education

In this section, some aspects of Freire's theories on education are brought forward. The aim of Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed is freedom from oppression - for the oppressor to stop oppression and for the oppressed to be free. However, what emerges from this freedom must be something new. The oppressor and the oppressed must be transformed into liberated persons. Based on that, another society is founded where people are liberated from oppression and the structures that bear with it, mentally and for society. Education is central to Freire's conceptualisation. However, education is a double-edged sword. It can maintain oppression and reproduce power structures or liberate it. Freire separates a 'banking-method' of education and a 'problem-posing method. A few characteristics separate these two methods. The most important one concerns the relationship between the teacher and the student: the 'teacher-student contradiction' where the student is an object and the teacher the subject. In the banking method, students are objects, whereas in the problem-posing method, 'students' are subjects working with the teacher in mutual learning. This, the latter, is the only way to facilitate true critical thinking and transformation. Freire's writing is rich and permeated with depth and meaning. Still, these five notions have relevance for this context: 'banking methods of education', 'teacher-student contradiction', 'problem-posed methods of education', 'subjects', and 'critical thinking'. They are chosen primarily based on the findings of the literature reviews but also because they resonate with my experiences as a human rights educator and scholar. Other educational theorists' reasoning supplements Freire's conceptualisation to give a foundation for the subsequent analysis of the empirical material.

Banking-Methods of Education and the Teacher-Student Contradiction

The relationship between teachers and students is of a 'fundamentally *narrative* character' (Freire, 1970, p. 44). Central to the banking method is that the teacher is the 'narrating Subject', the 'knowledgeable' upon whom the gift of knowledge is bestowed. In their view, students know nothing. Teachers project 'an absolute ignorance onto others' as characteristic

of the ideology of oppression, thereby negating 'education and knowledge as a process of inquiry' (Freire, 1970, p. 45). The teacher controls the object of learning and "fills" the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge' (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Students' actions are limited to 'receiving, filing, and storing deposits' in the 'bank' that is them (Freire, 1970, p. 49), hence the notion of 'banking'. Students remain passive when employing transmission models; they "receive" the world as passive entities' and education makes them 'more passive still, and adapt them to the world' (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Students may at most 'have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store' (Freire, 1970, p. 45). However, 'it is the people themselves who have filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system' (Freire, 1970, p. 72) because 'apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970, p. 45).

When the teacher is the Subject, students are objects: 'The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence' (Freire, 1970, p. 45). This constitutes what Freire calls the 'teacher-student contradiction'. As examples of activities maintaining the teacher-student contradiction, he mentions:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the acting of the teacher;
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Freire, 1970, p. 46)

The teacher-student contradiction leads to the dehumanisation of both teachers and students and the reproduction of oppressive systems (Freire, 1970, p. 48):

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more the students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their interventions in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them,

the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (Freire, 1970, p. 46)

Thus, the 'educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better "fit" for the world'. Freire establishes that the 'adapted person' is less critical and that 'this concept is well suited for the oppressors, whose tranquillity reasons on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and on how little they question it' (Freire, 1970, p. 49). He argues that 'education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students' (Freire, 1970, p. 45). This is where he advocates problem-posed education and students as subjects.

Problem-Posed Methods of Education and Subjects

In the problem-posed method, the teacher-student contradiction is broken (Freire, 1970). For this to happen, it necessitates a liberating approach to education for students and teachers. When the teacher-student contradiction breaks through dialogue, 'the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). The characteristic of this educational mode is that the 'teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). This enables students and teachers to become 'jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' and arguments 'based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). In this way of approaching students, they are no longer 'docile listeners' but instead 'critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher' (Freire, 1970, p. 54). The dialogue involves the teacher presenting 'material to the students for their consideration, and re-consider her earlier considerations as the students express their own' (Freire, 1970, p. 54). This is how students become subjects in their learning. The role of the teacher is altered to a fellow subject with a certain responsibility: 'The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of *logos*.' (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

Freire separates between 'adaptation' and 'integration': 'Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform

to that reality' (Freire, 1974, p. 4). An individual may lose their 'ability to make choices and [become] is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he has adopted. He has "adjusted"' (Freire, 1974, p. 4). In Freire's conception, an integrated person is a Subject (Freire, 1974, p. 4). An adapted person is an object; if reality cannot be changed, a person adjusts.

Subject and subject-ness are central concepts for the educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2022). Although he is from a different school than Freire, his criticism of the educational system is relevant in this context. He sees education as a question that is 'fundamentally existential', 'about how we try to exist as human beings, how we try to live our life in and with the world that is not of our making' (Biesta, 2022, p. 9). This positions the student's subject-ness as central and how the student is allowed to discover and explore this within herself. He says, 'teaching that matters educationally – is never about controlling the student, but is precisely about alerting them to the possibility of their subject-ness' (Biesta, 2022). Biesta separates this from individualism. This subject-ness does not exist

in a vacuum but always "in" and "with" the world, which means that education needs to provide the student-subject with orientation and needs to equip the student-subject with knowledge and skills, so that the student-subject can find its way in the world and can act in the world (Biesta, 2022, p. 8).

This mutual relationship and co-dependency between being a subject (to oneself) and in the world, aware of others and one's responsibility (requiring action) that these two belong together is, in Biesta's view, essential for education: 'without a concern for the subject-ness of the student, that is, for the possibility for the student to exist as a subject, education ceases to be educational and becomes the management of objects, effective or otherwise' (Biesta, 2022, p. 8). This notion of the student as a subject and a relational being and teaching as a relational process is central to relational pedagogy (Ljungblad, 2021). Relational pedagogy 'has evolved as part of a drive to enhance effective teaching and learning in educational settings and to ensure that learners are recognised as active participants in the knowledge creation process' (Owusu-Agyeman & Pillay, 2023). As Aspelin alleges:

A teacher who meets the student as "Thou" is not occupied by the student's abilities, but is concerned by the person as a whole. Through "inclusion", the teacher becomes directly involved in the student's encounter with the world, and the gap between the two is bridged. Such encounters with "someone other than who I am" are at the heart of the pedagogical relationship, and thus of genuine teaching. It is in the moment that the teacher and the student meet each other

from their different positions as “thou” that the teacher can influence the student in depth’ (Aspelin, 2021, p. 594)

From Aspelin’s argument, it is possible to deduce that relational pedagogy is central to transformation, criticality, and liberation. Many researchers in critical thinking and criticality mention students as subjects who are fully human and exist and who are discovering this freedom and responsibility within themselves.

Critical Thinking and Transformation

Freire calls for critical thinking because, without it, the oppressor-oppressed dichotomy is upheld, as is, analogously, the teacher-student contradiction, instead of resolving it (Freire, 1970, p. 25-26). Humanist education must actively create conditions for critical thinking. From the outset, it must 'coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization'. Educators 'efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power'. For critical thinking and mutual humanisation to happen. Teachers 'must be partners of the students in their relations with them' (Freire, 1970, p. 48). However, Freire is cautious about transformation as it must lead to liberation. Transformation may, if used for purposes other than freedom, have the effect that 'it transforms students into receiving objects' (Freire, 1970, p. 77) instead of active agents and subjects in the world: 'The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves”. Such transformation would undermine the oppressors’ purpose’ (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Thus, critical thinking and transformation are vital notions to Freire and freedom for the oppressed.

There are a few demands on an educator to facilitate this kind of holistic, comprehensive, mutual transformation process. Jack Mezirow, the founder of transformative learning, writes that a 'successful educator works herself out of her job as an educator and becomes a collaborative learner' (Mezirow et al., 2000, p. 15). Hence, also he argues that teachers and students need to collaborate for transformation to occur. This need is well illustrated by the educator, theorist and feminist scholar bell hooks:

When everyone in the classroom, teacher and students, recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful. In such a community of learning there is no failure. Everyone is participating and sharing whatever resource is needed at a given moment in time to ensure that we leave the classroom knowing that critical thinking empowers us (hooks, 2012, p. 11).

Thus, hooks argues that critical thinking is essential to the problem-posing dialogical approach to learning. Professors being ‘actively hostile to the notion of student participation’ undermine education for freedom’ (hooks, 1994, p. 14). Critical thinking is for freedom, Freire argues, and for critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, and 1974), or as hooks (1994) translates it: critical awareness and engagement (p. 14)

Critical thinking is a concept that, in this context, must be problematised. It can be defined as a truth-seeking endeavour, striving for epistemic goals, and as such, 'objectivity, generalizability and replicability, atomizes reality, and attempts to disentangle the person from the immediacy of the context-specific reality they are experiencing' (Dunne, 2015, p. 93). Critical thinking, and here lay the criticism, suppressing ‘the first-person experience in favour of a third-person perspective' (Dunne, 2015, p. 93). Thus, by imagining that the self does not impact one’s understanding of the world, the analysis holds a severe limitation. It may reproduce conformity by being 'dogmatically "uncritical" about [its] own major assumptions' (Davies, 2015, p. 74).

Brookfield (2012) defines critical thinking as ‘the process by which students become aware of two sets of assumptions’. The first assumptions concern those ‘held by scholars in a field of study regarding the way legitimate knowledge is created and advanced in that field’ (Brookfield, 2012, p. 157). The others are students’ ‘own assumptions and the way these frame their own thinking and action’ (Brookfield, 2012, p. 157). This definition is, according to Brookfield, generic for all education. Hence, in his conceptualisation, it is vital to question one’s assumption. Scrutinising one’s assumption is also to go further with critical thinking and moving towards criticality. Criticality embraces the person as a subject, not striving to distance the subjectivity from the experience. As Dunne argues, criticality

repositions the totality of the self[...] It begins with personology – in other words, what it means to be human – a unique being that is habitually in a context-specific situation, a sentient being continuously engaged in trying to critically understand their lived *qualia* experiences (Dunne, p. 93).

Criticality internalises, according to Davies (2015), all that is good with critical thinking.

That is, while a critical thinker can be disposed to think critically, in practice this assumes that he or she exhibits a trait to do so, and to act accordingly. [...] “Criticality” requires that one be moved to do something. [...] While skills and dispositions are critical for critical thinking, they are not sufficient unless action is added (Davies, 2015, p. 65)

Criticality holds on to the subject, the lived experiences and embodies a critical approach of being-in-the-world (Davies, 2015). It entails vital reason, self-reflection, and action (Davies, 2015). A critical person knows all dimensions of criticality (Davies, 2015) and masters critical literacy (Shor, 1999), which is awareness of knowledge and power. Thus, criticality is more profound than critical thinking as it relates to what Freire (1970) and Biesta (2022) call subjects or subject-ness. Criticality and subject-ness are consequences of and, simultaneously, preconditions for transformation. Transformation, criticality, and subject-ness are inherently connected to action and the will to change the conditions for the oppressed. Criticality is essential for all education stages; however, higher education holds a particular position. As we saw earlier in the critical human rights education section, which criticises the hegemony of HRE, critical thinking and criticality are essential for education aiming for liberation. Teachers and students must reflect beyond their assumptions and on their privileges. They are required to develop a more profound sense of response-ability, an ability to take responsibility for themselves as humans in the world, as Biesta (2022) expresses.

Higher Education and the Academic Scholar

Much of what has been written in this theoretical framework is valid for all levels of education, schools, vocational training and university education. It is probably fair to assume that the aspects of Freire's theories accounted for have similar importance in all these educational forms. Still, staying with higher education, there are a few additional points to make. First, criticality is essential for transformation and, as I suggest, necessary for the requirements in the UNDHRET (UN, 2011) and teaching and learning 'through' and 'for' human rights.

In another context (Johnsson, 2024a), I have written about inclusive human rights education and educators as 'duty-bearers', that is, those who bear the responsibility as public employees to implement the right to education for students. This means, for the reasoning in this thesis, that educators must be adequately equipped to design higher education for transformation, involving students' subject-ness, criticality and harbouring or developing activism. In other words, educators need to integrate human rights research, scholarship, and human rights education into their design of curricula and practice. Ernest L. Boyer writes about academic scholarship (Boyer, 2016) in his work 'Scholarship reconsidered. Priorities of the professoriate', from 1990. Boyer is critical of the priorities in academic scholarship

and the dichotomisation between research and education, where the former has a higher status. He writes that (already in 1958), ‘young faculty were hired as teachers’ but ‘evaluated primarily as researchers’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 63) and even though the ‘higher education institutions were becoming more open and inclusive, the culture of the professoriate was becoming more hierarchical and restrictive’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 65). Thus, the incentive for researchers/teachers (regardless of age) is to conduct research at the expense of teaching activities, a circumstance that still rings true. To move upwards in academic hierarchies still requires research achievements and not teaching. Boyer seeks to remedy this by introducing, instead of these two categories, four: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. The first, scholarship of discovery ‘comes closest to what is meant when academics speak about “research”’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 69). It is a scholarly investigation that ‘is at the very heart of academic life’, the ‘pursuit of knowledge’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 70). Scholarship of integration refers to interdisciplinarity and fitting one’s research into others in larger patterns (Boyer, 2016, p.72). Scholarship of application aims at engagement and how knowledge ‘can be responsibly applied to consequential problems?’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 73). Application ‘is not a one-way street’; instead, ‘new intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application’; ‘theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 74). Scholarship of teaching, finally, concerns the teachers’ understanding and the student’s learning, and ‘knowing and learning are communal acts’ (Boyer, 2016, p.75); they ‘stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 75). In Boyer's understanding, ‘good teaching’ means that faculty, as scholars, also are learners:

While well-prepared lectures surely have a place, teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well [...] In the end, inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive (Boyer, 2016, p. 75).

Boyer establishes that what ‘we need urgently today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar - a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 75). These four parts form an ‘inseparable’, interact dynamically and form ‘an interdependent whole’ (Boyer, 2016, p. 76). Thus, the university as an organisation must, in his view, allow for the integration of all these four parts, and the academic scholar needs to have an integrative view of these four interdependent parts of their work. This means, for example, that academic teaching and research must be connected and not separated; knowledge on how to teach and learn serves

research and practice since it facilitates mutual learning experiences between teacher and student. In my understanding, this is also true for HRE. Research on human rights, and research on human rights education, must guide educational activities' design utilizing values and principles.

As shown in this chapter, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed calls for transformative education, leading to the liberation of minds that reproduce oppressive structures and stereotypes. For education to be transformative, it must break the teacher-student contradiction and invite students to co-create learning based on real-world problems through critical awareness and engagement. Human rights education needs to facilitate transformation, criticality, and, accordingly, student subject-ness and action. UNDHRET (UN, 2011) requires this. Educators in HRE must be aware of this and design education for transformation for human rights. Hence, these four concepts - transformation, student subject-ness, criticality and action - are used to frame the research question and analyse the empirical material.

Research question

The literature overview reveals a gap concerning the role of educators in facilitating transformative human rights education at universities. The critical notions of HRE and transformation have been defined in the theoretical framework. Based on those, the research question has been formulated: *How can educators' views on university human rights education be problematised using theories of student subject-ness, criticality, activism, and transformation?* The idea is that with this question, the findings will display how educators think about pedagogical matters, students, and activism and how they, based on this, design their educational activities. It allows for an analysis of the findings on topical issues in human rights education and possible inherent conflicts of interest in higher education on human rights.

This research question has an analysing and synthesising perspective (Karlsudd, 2018). It enables ideas and notions to meet, generate new knowledge, and allow a deeper understanding of the problem (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is sharply formulated, understandable given the theoretical background, clearly connected to the content, and sufficient to establish a method for pursuing the inquiry (Frankel et al., 2007). The notion of 'approach' is possibly too open. Still, it corresponds to the method chosen, semi-structured interviews, insofar as it allows respondents to freely reflect on the core questions in the interview. The subsequent methodology section deals with any biases or conflicts of interest.

Methodology and method

In this chapter, I describe the methodology chosen for this thesis and for investigating the research question, the method I have used, and how I collected the data and subsequently treated it. The final analysis and problematisation of the choices of methodology and method are more elaborate (see Discussion below), but here, I evaluate and justify the choices I made and describe the problems that arose while employing the method.

Methodology

The methodology in this thesis leans in the direction of critical educational theory insofar as it seeks to uncover ‘the *interests* at work in particular situations’, evaluating their legitimacy and ‘identifying the extent to which they are legitimate in their service of equality and democracy’ as Cohen et al. (2011) defines it (p. 31). The intention is ‘*transformative*: to change society and individuals to social democracy’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 31), or qualified for this thesis, to social justice and a universal human rights culture. Thus, this inquiry seeks to uncover underlying ideas and preconceptions regarding student subject-ness, criticality, activism, and transformation. By analysing possible undercurrents in the empirical material, as influenced by the ‘hermeneutical circle’ (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014), the findings may - or may not - reveal inherent conflicts embedded in university human rights education. While ‘leaning’ on critical theory, the idea is not a deep critical educational theory analysis but only to envisage a strand of it in the data analysis. There is no search for truth, a true-or-false result, only for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by uncovering aspects that have been hidden’ in the respondents' views (Jones et al., 2014, p. 17).

The research question in this thesis opens for both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. However, the word ‘approach’ leans towards the former since qualitative methodologies open for understanding experience, ideas, and practices (Cleaver et al., 2014). As to the collection procedure and the data analysis, they require some elaboration, openly displaying factors which affect the trustworthiness of the inquiry (Cleaver et al., 2014). In this context, these factors are the choice of method, sampling criteria, and ethical concerns, summarised as empirical data generation and data analysis.

Empirical Data Generation

Qualitative studies must be consistent between the research question and the data collection (Cleaver et al., 2014). The data collection and analysis procedures ‘must be correctly and competently applied’, and the researcher ‘must be aware of the background knowledge of the topic’; furthermore, the researcher ‘must differentiate why some conclusions were embraced, and others discounted’ (Cleaver et al., 2014, p. 32). Initially, the idea was to employ mixed methods: semi-structured interviews and text analysis of curricula. The latter proved too extensive for this thesis, even though it would have provided additional data. Such data would, however, have been content-oriented and would not have added to the research question, targeting the approach and perception of educators. The choice of methods fell on semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, a relevant approach to the research question could be interviewing students about their apprehension of teachers’ teaching methodologies. This requires a careful selection of students from these nine educations or a general survey of all students, and that is an extensive study that is not feasible for this kind of work. The aim is instead to understand the attitudes and approaches of educators, who, in human rights language, are the duty bearers in relation to students’ right to education. Another path could also have been, in addition to interviewing teachers, observation studies. This was not feasible either in this context, travelling to five universities and spending time with observation studies.

Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in the interview space but have the component of direction, which makes it easier to compare and analyse several interviews. In semi-structured interviews, ‘participants are involved in constructing “the structure and process” of the interview’ (Cleaver et al., 2014, p. 135), a circumstance I found suitable for a human rights inquiry living the Freirean theory it relies upon. There was a need for broad data on the respondents’ approach to teaching and learning in higher education and HRE. In other words, I wanted to listen to their reasoning and to be involved in a dialogue, in a Freirean sense, enabling mutual learning as an effect of the interviews. For them, answering questions in a field where one has an intuitive, or no, inclination pointing at a practical ‘doing’ of human rights, they, as well as I, may open for further community reflections and change.

Cleaver et al. (2014) suggest devising ‘a loose interview protocol’ with ‘several open-ended questions utilizing a few clarifying questions’ for semi-structured interviews (p. 135). The interview protocol for this thesis contained five to six questions, which were altered

during the interviews. The core themes were the same, but, as reflected below, I found that the questions required different twists to receive more elaborate responses.

The study is limited to Sweden and universities with coherent cross-disciplinary human rights programs, with human rights as the main subject, leading to an exam in human rights. These are at Gothenburg University, Malmö University, Lund University, Stockholm University College, and Uppsala University. I chose Sweden. After all, I know those responsible for the programs because most of us have been part of the same human rights community for decades. I have been involved in most programs and seen the curricula design and primary approach to students. Those observations and the examples in the Introduction motivated me to engage in this enquiry. Thus, the delimitation to Sweden is due to my prior knowledge and the delimitation to these nine cross-disciplinary programs, excluding law faculties, where I previously had responsibility for master's programs in international human rights law, is because the latter have law as a subject, or the lawyer's exam has. Human rights are integrated but not the focus of attention. The same is true for other professional educations, such as those of teachers, social workers, police, medical doctor programs, communication, and media; many programs have human rights as integrated strands within them. The circumstances that the programs studied centre around human rights elevate the expectations and the responsibility of the pedagogical methodologies of these programs.

The selection of samples was based on snowballing and, to some degree, chain referral. In this sampling, 'researchers identify a small number of individuals with the characteristics in which they are interested' (Cohen et al., 2011). As elaborated on in the literature reviews, these persons may be used as informants 'to identify, or put researchers in touch with, others who qualify for inclusion' in a sort of 'chain-referral' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 158). Initially, 13 tentative respondents were contacted, but two referred to others with more responsibility over programs; one did not respond, and one responded and was interviewed. However, the interview was excluded before the analysis because the respondent did not meet the final criteria for participation. Thus, the final decisive criteria for selection were past or current responsibility over a program, not only a course; active in a cross-disciplinary coherent human rights program where human rights are the focus of studies, emanating in a bachelor's or master's degree for the students. The final nine respondents are established human rights scholars conducting human rights research and are responsible for or have been responsible for the bachelor and the master programs and, therefore, have had substantial influence over their design. They are or have been professors (3), head of studies (3), head of department (1), and associate professors (9) with a background in law, ethics, philosophy, social science,

or political science. It would have been possible to interview more or all active teachers, but not all are human rights scholars, and their overview and responsibility over design would have been limited.

The interviews began in September 2023. I contacted the educators via email. They were held in Swedish, either digitally on Zoom or live, and they took between 35-40 minutes.

Table 1 University, programs, number of interviews and mode for interview

University	Programs	Number interviews	Mode
Lund University	BA, MA	2	1 Zoom and 1 live
Malmö University	BA	2	1 Zoom and 1 live
Uppsala University	BA, MA	1	Zoom
Gothenburg University	BA, MA	2	Zoom
Stockholm University College	BA, MA	2	Zoom

The interviews were transcribed, controlled, read, reread, and analysed using the conceptual framework described previously. I translated the sections used for this thesis' findings and the quotations in the subsequent chapter. In doing so, I aimed at keeping the essential content but writing in better English; thus, the translations are not literary to every syllabus, but to a large extent, the same. The questions in the interview protocol concerned the educators' position and assignments within the program, their view on the bearing pedagogical idea of the program, their view on student participation in the program, and the power of how they educate for critical thinking on the presence of local, regional, national and global human rights issues; on how students gain or maintain agency throughout the program; and what students contribute with to society, based on their academic exam.

Data Analysis

A deductive and open coding was employed; coding in the sense of 'categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43; cit. Jones et al., 2014, p. 165). By open coding, I refer to an open 'brainstorming approach to analysis' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160; cit. Jones et al., 2014, p. 165), putting aside any preconception of what was expected to be found (Jones et al. 2014). That means that I searched for categories such as 'critical thinking/criticality', 'activism', 'student participation', and for components of meaning, i.e. in how they expressed themselves talking about students, transformation or teaching and learning (Jones

et al., 2014, p. 160). The interviews were coded in 21 codes, all relevant to the key theoretical concepts. An additional theme emerged: 'pedagogical awareness'. It turned out to be crucial background information and a foundation for understanding the approach to the other themes, as well as the respondents' approach to teaching and learning in higher education. When analysing the material, it was concluded that transformation as a theme was all-embracing, and the other themes were preconditions for transformation. This affected the analysis and the conclusions.

An essential matter in this context is my role in interpreting the data 'as an instrument of the research' (Jones et al., 2014, p. 171). It has been made clear that I am an integrated member of the community (which may not see itself as a community, but by position and responsibility, can be seen as one), and my assumptions of what they may say and my preconception of how they did educate may influence the interpretation of the data. To remedy that and to enhance trustworthiness, many quotes are offered substantiating the interpretations, as are disconfirming meanings and categories when relevant (Jones et al., 2014, p. 170).

In interpreting the transcribed interviews, it was essential to embrace that educators are compelled to teach under certain conditions governed by the administration, time restraints, and culture, prioritising research over teaching. What happens in the room with students differs from talking with a colleague in an interview. There is jargon that one (regrettably) uses with colleagues but not in the room with students. That inconsistency between what is said and practice is unavoidable. On the other hand, it is likely that the respondents answered and reasoned to the best of their minds in the interviews rather than the opposite.

Another closely related matter in the interview context is confidentiality. It would be relatively unproblematic to find out who a respondent is for those familiar with Sweden's academic human rights community. Senior scholars holding leading positions belong to a limited set of persons. Therefore, the information in this article is coded (and kept coded in practice according to Swedish legislation) to maintain the respondents' integrity. Neither is the coding related to a specific university. All respondents were asked for permission to use the data, and they were informed, according to good research ethics, that they at any point may withdraw their data, that it would not be used if they did and that it would come without consequences. The quotes in the Findings from the respondents are referred to as R1 to R10 (where R9 has been excluded, as mentioned) and to 'them' as a noun. The quotes,

interpretations, and analysis of the interviews are only based on the respondents' subjective apprehensions.

Yet another issue concerning ethics is the author and respondents being part of the same – small - human rights community. However, the author anticipated this complicating matter regarding power relations between interviewer and interviewee and as a risk of tainting the interviews in a specific substantial direction. To some degree, it did, but it is not about the research question per se. Instead, collegial concerns played a role and a hesitancy of the author towards asking too critical questions. The interview protocol had to be altered twice in between interviews because the author, after self-reflection, perceived that she was too attentive to the relational aspects within the community, hesitant to pose openly critical questions related to the HRE discourse, at risk of maintaining status quo instead of providing a learning opportunity – and transformation - for both interviewee and interviewer in a mutual learning-oriented dialogue in a Freirean sense. A question is whether it would have been different if another researcher not from within the community had been employed for the interviews, and the response to that is probably optimistic. However, the benefit of being in a community, having prior knowledge of the conditions for running human rights programs in Sweden, and the accessibility to the respondents due to long-time professional relationships made the inquiry dependent on prior professional encounters, and as an effect, mutual learning possible.

Findings

In this section, the empirical material is displayed through five themes: Pedagogical Awareness, Student Subject-ness, Criticality, Activism, and Transformation, which is the concluding theme. Both the theoretical framework and the literature overview are employed in the interpretation. Before describing the thematic findings, a short introduction to the programs' general features is given. Further information in English can be found on the universities' web pages.

General features of the programs

Four universities in this inquiry are state universities; one is a private university college (but is henceforth called a university because it is governed under the same legislation). Here is an overview of the programs.

Table 2 Swedish Human Rights Education at Universities

University	Degree	Language	Disciplines	No of students*
Malmö (Faculty of Culture and Society)	BA	English	Law, social and political science, philosophy	100
Uppsala (Faculty of Theology)	BA MA	Swedish English	Law, ethics (religion), social science	40
Lund (Faculty of Humanities and Theology)	BA MA	Swedish English	History, law, philosophy	60 15
Gothenburg (Faculty of Social Sciences)	BA MA	English and Swedish	Political science, law, ethics	40
Stockholm University College	BA MA	Swedish English	Philosophy, law, history, political science	25 25

* Approximately according to the respondents

As indicated on the list, the programs are in Swedish and English. International students come from all over the world, and the country of origin varies at the individual university and over time. Some are full-scale programs, and others require that students add courses from other parts of the university to complete their degree. Courses offered within the programs are, besides basic introductory courses in the various disciplines, for example,

'Global Justice', 'Right to Life and Modern Conceptions of Life', 'Environment and Human Rights', 'Children's Best Interest in Theory and Practice' (Malmö); 'Human Rights and Democracy', 'Right to have Rights – Human Rights and Citizenship', 'Religion, Human Rights and Global Justice', 'Human Rights in Sweden and Europe', 'Current Racism and Human Rights' (Uppsala); 'Human Rights in History of Politics and Philosophy'; 'Human Rights and Religion', 'Human Rights in the Globalised World: Actors, Indicators and Institutions' (Lund); 'Human Rights and Democracy as Ideas in History'; 'Human Rights and Democratic Clinic' (UCS); 'Human Rights and Rights-Based Work in a Globalised World'; 'Work-Practice with Human Rights Perspective' (Gothenburg).

Pedagogical Awareness

Pedagogical awareness as a theme arose from the analysis as a precondition for the other themes, revealing explicit or implicit pedagogical strategies. The respondents were generally figuring out how to answer the question of bearing pedagogical ideas. There were even different answers within the same program. One respondent referred to bearing value principles formulated for an external audit (R1), and a colleague referred to the multi-disciplinary program as theoretical rather than practical (R2). At another university, one respondent answered 'cross-disciplinarity' (R8), and a colleague answered concerning the size of and communication within the teacher team (R10). At a third university, one respondent answered that learning activities are mandatory (R7), and a colleague said that there 'may need to be more discussion around the program's bearing pedagogical idea, but I believe that 'we all agree that we wish to give them as broad an experience as possible' (R6). The absence of an explicit collective pedagogical idea does not, however, exclude individual pedagogical ideas; on the contrary, academic freedom or individual professional discretion is referred to by many (R3, R4). Several respondents argue along the lines teachers 'may choose the pedagogy they believe in' (R8):

We have always had the tradition that individual teachers can, to a very large extent, practise their own pedagogical ideas. I think this is important because teachers have—they take courses in teaching and learning in higher education—an idea that works, they know their subjects best, and so on. [...] The teachers may choose the pedagogy they believe in (R8).

This statement, supported by others (R3, R4) where educators are free to 'choose the pedagogy they believe in', lays an expression of professional discretionary competence. It belongs to the professional university educator's competence to design according to the

didactic requirements of the topic. It can also reveal a resistance, or ignorance, towards meta-analysis of one's teaching and learning practices. There can be a lack of time, an academic culture where teaching is an individual endeavour or a research priority over teaching and learning development (Boyer, 1991). Regardless, the result is a lack of interest in or unawareness of the knowledge area of teaching and learning in higher education, which is not exclusive to HRE educators. Boyer (1991) argues that the incentive to focus on teaching is less than research. In this case, there may be an interest in teaching but not in the scientific field of HRE. Yet, recalling Freire's (1970) theories on the pedagogy of the oppressed, educators belong to a privileged group that has power over knowledge and examination. From this perspective, unawareness or the lack of a collective pedagogical idea for a program puts the program at risk of implicitly maintaining power structures and student subordination. Moreover, the criticality of educators is vital for modelling criticality to students (Brookfield, 2012). The responses are not critical towards their design of education or their individual or collective teaching and learning approaches.

When asked more about teaching and learning activities, all respondents mentioned working with 'traditional academic' (R2) structures: lectures, seminars, and written assignments as main activities (R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R8). One respondent says that the teacher team agree that seminars are 'the best form for learning':

That is when we sit in front of each other. We talk about texts we have read, and most of us are trained in that way and convinced that no other learning activity beats that. Then, sixty persons were at the beginning, which was challenging to facilitate. But in the first semester, we work with lectures and seminars. You have a few lectures every week, and at the end of the week is a seminar where the teacher divides the group into smaller subgroups and leads the same seminar several times. Then, the ratio between lectures and seminars changes the further into the program they are. There are almost exclusively seminars in the sixth semester: reading texts, seminars, and discussions (R8).

This progression from lectures to seminars, either within a course or generally within a program, is the rule everywhere. The teacher sets the initial tone of the program as the narrating subject (Freire, 1970), which increases the risk that students in seminars will remain passive or accept their subordination to the teacher-subject. Some respondents mention that they have more interactive or participatory approaches with 'mini-lecture, discussion, mini-lecture, discussion (R3), 'role play' (R3, R4), 'mini-research' (R3, R4), 'workshops' (R3, R4, R5), and 'individual case studies' (R3, R4, R5, R10). However, one respondent says that

From the beginning, the basic idea has been that students must work with different kinds of relevant skills and, therefore, in various forms of group work. It is not the bearing pedagogical idea that they work in small groups. However, it is still an important element to have collective learning, to learn in dialogue with others, and to work concretely with things in different ways (R5).

This response indicates that the educator regards students learning in a community as important, even if not as ‘critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher’ (Freire, 1970, p. 54). They also refer to dialogue as a method, indicating a problem-posed approach to teaching and learning.

These other irregular learning activities appear later in the program when students have received basic human rights knowledge from different disciplines. Instant learning activities or courses with interactive or participatory approaches are not changing the narrative nor the fundamental power balance between students and educators; there is no breach in the contradiction with only a few educational activities if students are not invited to co-create the learning community (hooks, 2012). The educator still defines the mini-research and workshops, and in the individual case studies, the educator supervises the format. Therefore, there is a risk that students will get the impression of agency through the teacher's acting (Freire, 1970). They remain objects in their learning process (Freire, 1970) and are adapted to a passive position by the educator.

From these responses, a few initial conclusions can be drawn concerning pedagogical awareness, which, as mentioned, bear on the other themes, subject-ness, criticality, and transformation. First, the respondents needed to integrate their academic knowledge with their way of teaching. They express a link between the content of courses and human rights knowledge rather than how they educate. No one referred to theoretical reasoning or thought behind the activities when asked for pedagogical ideas and their thoughts on the teaching and learning activities. They were motivated by being ‘traditional academic activities. Secondly, the baseline employing Tibbitts’ terminology is dominantly didactic or, as mentioned, interactive/participatory. Instead, transmission models or banking methods (Freire, 1970) seem unproblematic or even preferable in their perception, even though they highlight other teaching and learning activities that are interactive and participatory (Tibbitts, 2017).

Students' Subject-ness

This section focuses on the respondents' explicit and implicit reasoning on student subject-ness. They all express concern about the new students. Although the admission requirements are high, students are still perceived as unprepared for what they are about to meet (R8, R10). This, respondents say, may be due to the multi-disciplinary character of the program (R3, R4, R10), that they are still stuck in 'secondary school' (R2), or because they come from a different (international) academic setting (R5, R8, R10). Two respondents mentioned that students feel anxiety about the program's requirements (R3, R10), and one respondent adjusted their learning activities to make students more confident (R5). This respondent is also concerned about students' ability to manage their education and, therefore, offer

An abnormally long literature list on the first course, and not for students to read everything, but because when they come to this new field, they may only look at the list and see, "Wow, there is a lot that relates to human rights" [...] so that you can deepen your reading from the start without having to look for literature. [...] So one can enter deeply into a debate without being limited by what I thought was vital for them to read (R5).

Thus, they let students choose topics of interest and learn how to manage their learning. Dealing with new students in this way can mean respecting the world and curiosity of students, even if it does not necessarily break the teacher-student contradiction per se (Freire, 1970). They emphasise the possibility of students becoming subjects in their learning process (Freire, 1970). Students are allowed to explore their subject-ness when learning activities are designed for autonomous learning (Biesta, 2022).

One respondent has another approach to dealing with anxiety:

I experience that students appreciate it when they are adequately prepared. [...]M]any years ago, it struck me that when I prepare learning activities, I only prepare what I am supposed to do. I prepare my sessions and what will happen during these. But we know how it is; they have maybe six hours in the room, but what they do with the rest of the thirty-four hours, I do not know. /.../ There are old ideas at the university among the older teachers that students are supposed to structure their learning themselves, and there is a point to it, and there is pampering with students when one tells them what to do. And then I think, this must be rubbish. One could organise a course so that the students work full days where they know what to do and when there are quality gains. So, I reconsidered when planning courses; I do not only plan what I will do but also the students' work week so that even when I do not meet them, they work on instruction from me. Then, one would think I direct or help them too much. But I am their teacher, as I see it. They are here to learn from me and gain more from me when we meet in the room if all students have read the same thing, the same literature, and if everyone knows what will happen when we meet and what we will talk about. Then there are better results (R10).

This quote shows that the educator takes responsibility for students learning out of care and good intentions. However, the teacher risks remaining the narrating subject where the

educator is the subject and the student an object (Freire, 1970). It depends on whether the content is designed as collaborative or not, but when the educator chooses it and instructs students on what and how to study during the week, they uphold the contradiction. Freire writes that there is a risk of a teacher's confusion about 'the authority of knowledge with his or her professional authority', which can oppose students' freedom (Freire, 1970, p. 46). It may be more of a banking-method than the problem-posed method where the educator and students 'become jointly responsible for the process in which they all grow' (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Even if the seminars allow for free discussions, reflections, and even critical thinking and transformation of the kind, as we shall return to below, the narrative still belongs to the educator. This respondent also plays down the examination process with international students in a relational way:

This [stressful feeling], one must show great respect for and be available as a teacher, to be a human being in the room, laugh at oneself, and create safety in the room so that no one feels that they are making a fool out of themselves at any point, creating an environment where it is ok to test thoughts and ideas (R10)

This quote shows that the respondent employs a relational pedagogical approach to the situation and students' anxiety. They become a part of the group and abandon the position of narrating the subject, allowing for humanism in the teacher and the students to be visible. Downplaying and concern about students being human in the room is due to the experience that international students often are much more subordinated than students who have been through the Swedish school system (R5, R8, R10). Generally, those respondents active in an international program are concerned with the hierarchical expectations of international students, even though many of them are 'very engaged human rights activists in their countries' (R5). Many of these students

You come from a culture where you sit and listen, and then you are not used to speaking up. Then you come to a European or Swedish culture where you are expected to do that, where you are expected to speak about what you have read and what conclusions you draw. So, there is a starting distance (R9).

These educators reflect on the power relationship and the teacher-student contradiction in these more apparent situations, where students are unused to the Western scientific way of reading, analysing and presenting independent individual thoughts and ideas, but not necessarily about Swedish students. The awareness of power relations, or relational pedagogy, and upholding a teacher-subject role is less concerning for these Swedish

students, even though similar needs may be expressed presently. This relationship with the students, to be 'helpful' and give guidance, is also expressed in other ways by others. One says they must 'drill them in certain questions' and 'train them for the essay' (R3). When dealing with complex topics, however, such as racism, the respondent tries to 'play down' tension by 'telling from my own experiences and meta reflect and give of my best more than otherwise, not to lure something of them but to play the issue down a bit' (R3).

It is possible to detect a conscious or subconscious view of students in the interviews. One respondent said it is their 'personal basic idea that I have to knock that small idea out of their minds', that is, 'the solution to everything, that the good in the world is human rights' (R6). They recall a moment when students had read some critical texts and questioned "“why do we read this kind of education? It feels so hopeless”, and then I felt, “Yes”, now something has started in them' (R6). The task, this respondent continues, is to be 'a pedagogue, and I must make them pass the course. I am supposed to make them pass the exam at the end of the course' (R6). This respondent's idea was probably that students got to a point where they questioned their previous assumptions about human rights and began to be critical. However, their language expresses the opposite; 'to knock the idea out' of someone's mind is suppressing and not encouraging agency. It maintains the teacher-subject position, the teacher-student contradiction (Freire, 1970) and rejects the subject-ness of students in that the educator distances herself from them. Similar approaches to students are expressed in other responses. One respondent complained that students are unaware of their rights and organisational processes and, therefore, complain about the wrong matters (R1). The teacher complains about students but does not invite them to learn about the preconditions for their studies and own them together as feasible. They are also astonished when students 'manage to discuss' a problematic issue without being 'so emotional or quarrelsome' (R1). Another respondent remedies student uncertainty or worry by inviting students to organise a mentoring or peer system (R7) but not inviting students to be in a community with lecturers other than in representative bodies.

From the material, the teacher-student contradiction (Freire, 1970) is upheld, that there is a distance between students and teachers and that human rights education is presumably not different from other academic education. The respondents' language indicates a distance from students in a traditional academic way. They do not use notions as 'we', as in 'we learn together' or 'I as a teacher learn together with students about', but 'students-they' and are not, at least not as the responses display, involving and inviting students as equal human to ponder upon or reflect on societal injustices. When students write individual papers,

educators have a tutoring or examining function (R3, R7, R10). The progression is only intended to be academic, where critical thinking and possibly autonomous writing are introduced later, with one exception (R5), in the programs.

Criticality

The responses vary in detail and depth regarding the critical thinking question, but they all relate to the concept. One of the respondents refers to teachers' passion for critical thinking, understood as 'questioning fundamental assumptions, and to see different interpretations of things' (R1). Yet, as they continue, 'many of us try to transmit critical thinking and hope it works' and it is 'an essential part for many teachers, for students to understand [...] that human rights are not only a list but also hypothetical rights. That they can change, that they can be argued about' (R1). It is nonetheless challenging to work with critical thinking, and the respondent says:

We encourage it so that they get it in the best-case scenario. However, it is challenging at the same time. It is counterintuitive, true critical thinking. They learn methodological aspects, have been trained in legal and political science methods, and have independent writing assignments. Hopefully, they will acquire such skills and critical thinking skills, but we cannot guarantee it (R1).

This respondent's reasoning for critical thinking is detached from learning activities and sees it as an object that can be transmitted. This instrumental approach to critical thinking is not only detached from learning activities but also from the persons, the students, their personology and what it means to be human (Dunne, 2015)

As discussed in the previous section, many respondents talk about lectures and seminars as learning activities and about progressing from lectures to seminars at the end of a module or a course. The progression concerned academic skills and critical thinking, which were assumed to be suitable later in the program when students had trained their critical abilities. As one respondent said, students 'successively build up critical thinking' through the courses, and this is how 'the idea of progression is in the program' (R7). Another spoke about the importance of roleplays (also appearing later in the program) for exercising critical thinking: 'It is often an eye opener for them. [...] It is a seminar where almost everyone comes with the basic assumption that it is wrong to have religious courts, but they leave the are not so certain anymore' (R4). However, one of the respondents had a contrary approach in their reasoning:

It starts from day one. All students come with an idea that human rights is good, otherwise they would not have applied for the program. [...] So, from day one we talk about human rights [...] as ethics, politics and law [...] explaining why there is antagonism. So, already here critical thinking starts, that human rights is not only a black box, but that there are many views on what the black box is (R5).

This respondent differentiated between learning skills and being critical, and the scaffolding relates to skills and not to critical thinking. Thus, they reject the idea that students cannot be critical before they learn how to be critical. Freire's conceptualisation is contrary to the notion of students as blank sheets, where the educator acknowledges students bringing experiences and knowledge into the learning situation (Freire, 1970); in this respondent's view, students are subjects, a precondition for criticality to evolve (Dunne, 2015).

As mentioned, several respondents refer to students as engaged and critical when entering the program. This respondent explains why and how they work with students' critical approach as educators:

Many of our students are very ... critical of society because they see many injustices and are engaged in racism and discrimination, so they often have a critical approach when they come to the program. Sometimes, this is based on emotions, personal experiences, political ideology and engagement. I think that one assignment one has in a program like this is to take critical thinking and to make something constructive of it, to show that societal criticism may be the result of analysis and that there are tools to deal with it [...] So, to recognise the fact that they have a critical engagement but to use that, to make it, to show how one research-wise and academically can relate to it. So, hopefully, when they leave, they are just as critical but on a higher level. It is a challenge to make academics out of them without killing the idea that made them choose a subject (R10).

The respondent describes a change in the students transforming from being critical without necessarily being constructive to academics being critical on a higher level. This educator gives detailed instruction to students to support their studies and to argue about subject-ness. However, there may be another aspect to detailed instructions. According to Brookfield (2012), having a clear structure of learning activities is essential because where the ground rules are clearly defined, it is easier for the groups to focus on learning criticality. This educator, through thorough instructions to students, may enable critical thinking. However, they also have students work individually. Brookfield (2012) argues that students need to work in groups; he and hooks (2012) regard that as vital for critical thinking.

Indeed, it is impossible to know what happens in the classroom. Still, these respondents refer to what Tibbitts (2017) classifies as interactive/participatory methodologies, where critical thinking can occur only within a limited frame set by the teacher. One of the respondents refers to 'transmitting' critical thinking to students, which may even be an

expression of a didactic approach. Still, again, it could be an expression of ‘modelling’ critical thinking (Brookfield, 2012). Again, though, that requires students to work in groups and a more conscious approach to teaching and learning by the teacher team, and this respondent has not made any references to such considerations and activities, not to a joint pedagogical idea. Critical thinking or criticality cannot be separated from pedagogical awareness, especially concerning HRE and student subject-ness. Given the conclusions in the earlier themes indicating a teacher-student contradiction, a lack of deeper dialogue, and regarding students as objects rather than subjects of learning, it seems from the interviews that it is left to students themselves to develop criticality. Observations of seminar room learning activities may, however, show another result.

Activism

As mentioned, activism, understood as being engaged in injustice or racism, is, according to the respondents, something students bring with them to the program (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). The reason students apply to this program, as one respondent said, is because ‘they want to be part of some kind of change and therefore they want to push for human rights’ (R2). Therefore, this respondent continues: ‘I don't think, if I am honest, we always add that much to them. They have it in them already, somehow. Instead, it is more, maybe, to work with a certain kind of complexity’ (R2). Another respondent expresses a similar idea: ‘Sometimes we get extraordinary groups, but activism splash all over it so we need not exert ourselves, they are just there’ and continues: ‘one has to discipline this activism so that one is not only lobbyist but not too respectful either’ (R3). Or, as someone else says, reasoning on the balance between passion and an academic professional role:

In the best of worlds, we have students who leave determined to make a difference, but doing it in a qualified way having with them an academic way of thinking, critical thinking, an ability to process large amounts of data, draw conclusions, arrive at well-underpinned conclusions when advising or writing actions plans [...] We encourage people to be engaged and to maintain their passion. That is something I have said to all students after they read two semesters and have realised everything is a grey sludge - it was all black and white when they arrived and now everything is a grey sludge - that it should at least not make them ignorant. It is important to maintain passion and find the right place in this field: What do I want to know? What is it I like to become? But we do not encourage them to run out into the streets in particular matters or anything. They manage that themselves in their student organisation. (R8)

This response shows a wish for students to remain passionate, but they did not mention student activism as an asset in the program. There is a risk that learning activities, therefore, suppress student engagement. Instead, students are referred to extracurricular activities in

organisations connected to or outside the university (R3, R7, R8). A colleague from the same university says that a desired outcome of the program is that students:

Understand society in some ways and why it works the way it does. They need to be able to take on a certain social problem to understand what happens and to use methodological tools to dissect problems and challenges in a way that they understand what needs to be done. And it sounds very practical, but that type of skill requires, I think, an analytical way of thinking, a conceptualisation that is sufficiently robust but also ... That is my opinion, and history is needed; they need to know what societies look like they do' (R10).

This is consistent with the definition Tibbitts (2017) has of activism enabling or striving for 'collective action undertaken to influence the behaviour of governments' (Tibbitts, 2017, p. 72) but not necessarily challenging epistemological hegemonies (Zembylas & Keet, 2019). Another respondent has similar reasoning close to Tibbitts' definition of activism. They say that

I have tried to include the circumstance that [law] has an inherent force, that they are progressive values built into the system. Human rights have such a power that one can stand against rather strong interests and assert one's rights and turn out to be right because you *are* right. It is essential to be critical of the system, to see the flaws and how one can attack them /.../ so I try to include critical elements because I think it is a good way to understand the law, test it, and challenge it (R4).

This aims at an activist approach to the system, having the right tools to address them for change. However, they do not express that the system as a whole is questioned; they only express its flaws. Such criticism risks supporting the system, mending it, and not reshaping it substantially for the freedom of the oppressed.

As many of these quotes show, a desirable outcome of the programs is academic skills. One says, 'It is obvious that [students] use their education to look into questions they are interested in that drive them but that they do it with a systematic, scientifically based and grounded approach' (R7). A similar approach from another educator who says that students have gotten

A profound and broad understanding of human rights as an idea, social phenomena, as something open for debate, that is dynamic, maybe changeable, and leaving with that idea on human rights, is really good, I think, regardless of whether they end up in an organisation, an authority or a company. As in most university education, they learn how to gather material, to analyse, focus, write a report on a specific question, then hold a thought and to evaluate (R6).

Thus, students come with activism, and the primary approach to it is to defuse societal criticism and transform it into academic skills or to maintain passion. However, it teaches

how to discipline activism with an academic analytical approach. As the respondent said: ‘I have to knock that small idea out of their minds’ (R6). This statement reveals an idea of students as objects and an approach to the inner life of students. Instead of harbouring activism and faith in human rights, working *with* students and learning from them, activism is partially or entirely subdued. A few respondents mentioned that students may pursue an inquiry of choice as part of the syllabus, and here, activism may have been channelled into academic activities without being suppressed. This seems to happen at the end of the program rather than at the beginning, and it could be discussed whether or not the signal from the education and the teachers of the narrating subject has already been fixed. Otherwise, it may be argued students must socialise in the academic context and only then may gain the academic freedom to pursue one’s research interests.

Transformation

The respondents do not explicitly mention transformation; admittedly, the interview protocol does not explicitly ask about it. What becomes apparent is that there are two kinds of transformation at play: one targeted in HRE and elaborated on in this article and another that concerns academic abilities: students transforming from novices to academics. The latter is a desired outcome of all university education, and the former is a desired or prescribed outcome of human rights education. There is undoubtedly no prescription as to what is truly transformative. Transformation may occur in individual students only from reading about human rights. Still, as research shows, educators can design for subject-ness, model criticality, and facilitate transformation and, thus, activism towards a universal human rights culture by a problem-posed dialogical collective process where teacher and students interchangeably are in the learner and teacher position (Biesta, 2022; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 2000).

As the previous sections show, teaching and learning methodologies are predominantly didactic and later become increasingly interactive/participatory, as understood from the interviews. From the way respondents talk about students and the educational design, most of them hint that a teacher-student contradiction is maintained through the programs. This does not exclude good relations or engaged seminars from the interviews they seem to be, but the teacher-subject prevails even in interactive or participatory teaching and learning activities. As indicated by the respondents, students are not generally entrusted with managing their learning activities. The approach to teaching and

learning does not exclude critical thinking or criticality. However, the pedagogical unawareness and the lack of explicit or conscious integration of educational theories of critical thinking and criticality into the program, a program on human rights, which in itself is, or can be, criticism of society, is not promoted on a collective and institutional level.

Moreover, students' activism is mostly regarded with scepticism instead of being the initial motor of the program, the point of departure and motivator for each student in their learning process. As it seems from the interviews, there is a contradiction between activism and being academic in the respondents' approach to activism; there is a risk of transformation from activism to docility. To conclude, the programs transform academics out of new students. As shown from the interviews, they are not transformative in an HRE sense, as HRE requires working with student subject-ness, criticality, and activism.

Concluding Discussion

In this concluding chapter, the findings are discussed at a general level. It centres on the research question, the aim of the inquiry, and the knowledge gap it seeks to address. Furthermore, I consider the thesis's possible shortcomings, the need for further research, and my thoughts on the fields involved and their contributions to teaching and learning within the higher education landscape.

The aim was to explore how educators' approaches to university human rights education (UHRE) can be problematised using theories of student subjectivity, criticality, activism, and transformation. The premise was that this question would reveal how educators conceptualise pedagogical matters, students, and activism, and how these perceptions influence their educational design. It was also posited that this question allows for an analysis of the findings concerning topical issues in human rights education and potential inherent conflicts of interest within higher education on human rights. The goal of pursuing this inquiry was to deepen the understanding of teaching and learning in university human rights education and its inherent dilemmas and possibilities. I argue that educators' pedagogical awareness, their views on students, and their educational design are critical to students' transformation into critical, knowledgeable, and skilled individuals who actively contribute to a universal human rights culture. Two major questions arise in this context: first, whether the inquiry has adequately answered the research question and met the study's aims; and second, what the overarching dilemmas and possibilities in UHRE are for the future.

In seeking answers to the research question, I opted for semi-structured interviews with a specific cohort that was assumed to be experienced and influential in the design of cross-disciplinary human rights education, unified by the theme of human rights. The number of respondents was limited; only nine individuals' responses were included in the data analysis. However, in a study of this nature, particularly in a master's thesis where the aim was to understand and problematise approaches based on theories from the relevant scholarly field underpinning educational activities—ideally—the insights provided by these respondents regarding their programmes and reasoning offer valuable indications of the dilemmas and possibilities inherent in the academic setting and human rights education. As previously noted, the interviews are interpreted by a human rights scholar, which may influence the interpretation. This is why the number of quotations is relatively high, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions about what was said and to verify the trustworthiness of my statements. It is likely that the respondents expressed themselves more positively in my

presence than they would have if downplaying their pedagogical interests and reflections. My interpretation may have been influenced by a desire to remain a part of the Swedish human rights community, which could have unintentionally affected the analysis. Nevertheless, the findings point to two significant conclusions.

The first major conclusion concerns the dilemma inherent in university human rights education. This dilemma consists of a conflict between transformation into a skilled academic and the transformation required by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) (UN, 2011). The definition of human rights education employed in this thesis, particularly the concept of transformation, is clearly at odds with the approach of most respondents in this study. While working with criticality and student subjectivity alongside the transformation into a skilled academic is feasible in human rights education at universities, these two transformation processes are not mutually exclusive. A tentative illustration of these two processes can be presented as follows:

Academic Transformation: The teacher remains the narrating subject, encouraging critical thinking, comprehension of scholarly texts, content organisation, and analysis.

Human Rights-Based Transformation: Students and teachers engage in collective learning, with the focus not solely on the student but on the content. Through teaching and learning activities, the teacher employs relational pedagogy, fostering criticality, learner autonomy, and activism.

The human rights-based transformation embodies the values that the respondents seem to uphold. Interestingly, an interview (R9) not included in the analysis due to not meeting the sampling criteria is an example of a human rights-based transformation process. This may form the basis for a future article on the theme.

The second major conclusion pertains to the necessity for more significant implementation of the values inherent in human rights ethics (see Johnsson, 2002) within academic scholarship and in designing programmes and courses on human rights. Such values include human dignity, equality, the inviolability of the person, and personal autonomy. As many human rights education scholars conclude, these values correlate strongly with critical pedagogy and, as I suggest, with student subjectivity, relational pedagogy, criticality, transformative learning, and action. Boyer's critique of academic scholarship from 1990 remains relevant; there are few incentives to connect teaching and

learning theories to practice. However, to be credible and academically competent as a human rights educator, it is essential to integrate what is taught with how it is taught. As I noted in the introduction, being a human rights educator while rejecting the use of a microphone when addressing a large audience is contrary to a human rights-based approach to teaching and learning in higher education. In this context, one question must be posed: is this a problem? Should university education not maintain an academic focus, free from political or legal influences? There is a pressing need for pedagogical meta-reflection that connects theory to practice in educational design and ensures that educational systems and content do not merely reproduce oppressive structures and systems. Educators must "walk the talk" to empower students to become critical individuals engaged in society and committed to liberating all from unjust structures across time and space. Liberated educators liberate students. There is a global necessity for government professionals and politicians to master the subjectivity of clients, pupils, and patients through criticality and profound respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings. Universities must assume responsibility for educating these roles in society.

So, what are the overarching possibilities and dilemmas in UHRE for the future? The simple answer lies in the knowledge and time required to integrate human rights-based teaching and learning into practice effectively. I see a pressing need for further research on human rights education in universities, on teaching and learning in higher education, and on connecting human rights values to curriculum design. While a few articles—approximately three—have begun to explore this direction, much more is needed. One approach could involve engaging students in a course on human rights-related issues, co-designing the course, and collaborating with civil society organisations while conducting action research. I would have pursued this had I been in a human rights context. Instead, I have proposed to teacher students that we take a local government case of non-compliance with the Act on Education as a basis for learning about subject-ness, criticality, activism, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, I advocate for collaboration among scholars involved in UHRE; we must work with students to explore the dilemmas and possibilities in designing a transformative human rights-based curriculum.

With this thesis, I aim to anchor Human Rights Education as a disciplinary approach within the broader landscape of educational inquiry, contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. While this thesis concludes my current investigation, it does not signify the end of my inquiry into this new territory.

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