

Coping with Perplexities: How to Make Human Rights Education Sustainable

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Abstract

On 23 December 1994, the UN General Assembly adopted a plan of action for the United Nations decade for human rights education (HRE). 30 years later, this challenge is still increasing. As Hannah Arendt pointed out, human rights are valuable only as political rights, not for abstract individuals but for natural communities. While HRE in schools and classrooms is in focus, the context of adult education transfers philosophical and political thoughts into an educational context, particularly concerning biographical traumatic situations such as refuge and expulsion. Therefore, this paper presents and explains adult education approaches which facilitate coping strategies with ethical perplexities by evaluating the 30 Articles of the UNO Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Keywords: adults, biography, education, human rights, perplexity, sustainability

Introduction

The Assembly of the United Nations opened the Decade of Human Rights Education (HRE). They underlined some common convictions about HRE. Firstly, it should go beyond the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process; through which all strata of society, at all levels of development, learn respect others' dignity and means of ensuring respect in all societies. HRE is key to a concept of development that respects the dignity of all people. This includes the diverse groups such as children, indigenous peoples, minorities, and disabled persons. Resultantly, educators and NGOs should promote it worldwide; each person must be made aware of their civil, cultural, economic and political human rights to reach their full human potential.

The following research evaluates the 30 Articles of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It looks at their educational contribution to biographical work (United Nations, 1994).

Following the considerations of Hannah Arendt and others (Nussbaum, Ranciere), the study emphasizes the "perplexities" of (only abstract) Human Rights, starting with the French Revolution in 1789, when real human beings, not God's command or the customs of history, became the source of Law. Nevertheless, in the new secular and emancipated society, people were no longer sure of these rights. Until then, the rights were outside politics and guaranteed not by the government and the constitution but by social, spiritual, and religious forces. Therefore, human rights

become crucial whenever individuals need protection against the new sovereignty of the state and the new arbitrariness of society. Thus, man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order. Then he disappeared again into a member of a people.

From the beginning, the paradox in declaring inalienable human rights was that it reckoned an "abstract" human as a being who seemed to exist nowhere without any social order. Therefore, rights are only possible within a plurality of people, while the lonely persons in the desert has no rights (Gündoğdu, 2012; Stonebridge, 2011; van Rij, 2016).

Similar to Arendt, Jacques Rancière (2004) answered his question 'Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?' by remembering the rejuvenated human rights discussion in the seventies and eighties by the dissident movements in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Following Arendt, he criticizes that the "man" of the Rights of Man was a mere abstraction because the only natural rights were citizens' rights which are attached to a national community. This overturning of an arch-political statement into a depoliticizing approach is one of the most significant features of thought that emerged in the contemporary discussion about the Rights of Man, the Inhuman, and the crimes against humanity; particularly the flow of refugees in the twentieth century (Lombaard & Geikina, 2023). They split up such identity and made the nakedness of bare life; stripped off the veil of nationality and appeared as the secret of the Rights of Man. The programs of ethnic cleansing and extermination would then appear as a radical attempt to draw the full consequences of this splitting. Thus, the secret of democracy can now appear as a special power in the foreground. Concretely, the state power has to do with bare life (Ranciere, 2004).

For Arendt (2004), it is not only a matter of checking whether the reality confirms or denies the rights. The point is about what confirmation or denial means. Man and citizen do not designate collections of individuals: man and citizen are political subjects. Political subjects are not definite collectivities; therefore, those who suffer inhuman repression cannot enact the Human Rights that are their last recourse. In that case, somebody else has to inherit their rights to enact them in their place - the "right to humanitarian interference"; a right that some nations assume to the supposed benefit of victimized populations, and very often against the humanitarian organizations' advice (Marx, 2019).

With regard to the research from the theoretical considerations, the following research questions emerged: How can (adult) education constitute a comprehensive life-long learning process of maintaining mutual respect? How can adult education develop and widely promote a concept consistent with the human dignity? How can adult education facilitate awareness of human potential (civil, cultural, economic, political), which makes each individual person the source of human Law?

How can adult education assist people with protection against sovereignties of any kind?

How can adult education transfer an "abstract" human being into a biography and individual rights into group rights?

According to these questions, evaluation of the 30 Articles of the Declaration of Human rights (1948) shows their contribution to adult education by comparing them with the participants' own educational experiences, particularly concerning simulation games (Franzenburg, 2020).

Research Findings

After applying the content analysis method evaluating articles and educational experiences, the following results emerged concerning adult education.

The comprehensive life-long process of maintaining respect is a crucial educational purpose based on the struggle against discrimination in challenging situations where different life concepts confront each other. When people develop rules of (non-violent) communication, challenges can change into enrichments.

The participants of educational projects can make the experience of maintaining dignity and respect by simulating tribunal situations, where the "accused" person is at the center of interest. The other participants in this simulation game can facilitate an atmosphere of acceptance and appreciation and recognize all aspects of personality and attitudes to take them into account. During the different changes of roles, the participants become aware of the members of their inner team (accusing, defending, judging, affirmative one), and of the complexity of individual and collective life (Franzenburg, 2020).

With these experiences of empathy, the participants become aware of their potential, but also of their limits; thus, they learn balancing closeness and distance. They then transfer it into private contexts, to empathize with and tolerate unfamiliar attitudes and life concepts. With this further experience of empathy training, the participants become open to this attitude's political and social aspects. They learn and remember social marginalization and discuss structural violence by simulating an encounter in an office of a financial or a social help center. Thus, they facilitate projects concerning the transparency of social discrimination.

Thus, by facilitating person-oriented educational and cultural opportunities for socially discriminated persons' families (by joining discussion groups, standard sponsored visits to concerts or galleries, or other events), people learn self-efficacy and resilience strategies against manipulation. By emphasizing the human dignity of all segments of society, the participants make experiences with themselves and each other regarding discrimination, fairness, privacy, (social) supplementation, and (cultural) participation. They interpret these attitudes according to the category of human dignity by simulating situations of religious and philosophical evaluation of attitudes (intercultural/interreligious dialogue, application for a job).

By combining a biographical approach with a systemic point of view, (adult) education facilitates awareness of individual human potential as a crucial social potential.

By emphasizing the individual biography behind statistics (and the statistical meaning of a single biography), they encourage self-efficacy and self-confidence as a part of a community (like the categorical imperative of Kant) and use solidarity and transcultural community as a virtual weapon to protect each other against sovereignties of any kind.

Thus, people experience both; being an individual biography and being part of a community (milieu, ethnic, social, global humanity). This suggests that they experience both kinds of rights; individual and collective at the same time (Franzenburg, 2020).

Discussion

Arendt's commentary on human rights in 'The Origins' is characterized by her aporetic approach ('perplexity'), wherein she draws upon Socrates as a prominent exemplar. Instead of proposing a novel moral basis or devising an alternative institutional framework, Arendt contends that the primary objective of critical inquiry should focus on something else instead of pursuing such a resolution. Instead, the focus should emphasize examining the complexities surrounding human rights for a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with the absence of rights, prompting a re-evaluation of the notion of human rights in light of these challenges. As demonstrated in Arendt's case, this involves reconsidering human rights as the right to possess rights.

Arendt's political hermeneutic approach is notable for emphasizing concrete situations rather than abstract philosophical notions. The focal point of concern lies in examining the collective convictions about human rights and the challenges that arise from these convictions (Arendt, 2004). One way to cope with such perplexity follows the idea of Martha Nussbaum, who combines Human Rights and Human Capabilities within the "Human Development Approach," which she developed together with Amartya Sen and which is embodied in the Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme annually since 1990 (Nussbaum, 1997). This approach emphasizes political purposes as a basis for constitutional thought; therefore, focuses on ten "Central Human Capabilities," including life, bodily health, bodily integrity, the development and expression of senses, imagination and thought, emotional health, practical reason, affiliation (both personal and political), relationships with other species and the world of nature, play, and control over one's environment (both material and social). Each country can do this specification differently according to different histories and traditions. A crucial aspect of this approach is the distinction of rights as "first generation" (political and civil) and "second generation" (economic and social) (Nussbaum, 1997; Brunold & Ohlmeier, 2022).

All rights understood as entitlements to capabilities have material and social preconditions which require government action. They concern discrimination against women, people experiencing poverty, and people with disabilities; who deserve the ability to possess optimal health, encompassing reproductive health, sufficient nourishment, and suitable housing (Nussbaum, 1997).

While research about HRE in school education is extensive (Adami, 2021; Bajaj, 2011; Becker et al., 2015; Burridge et al., 2014; Dijkstra, 2002; Foley, 2021; Orend, 2004; Osler, 2018; Parker, 2018; Rechsteiner, 2017), the variety of adult education approaches challenge similar standardizations. An appropriate approach for this concept encompasses various facets such as reading and fundamental instruction in mathematics and the sciences; among other subjects. The capacity to employ imagination and cognition, in conjunction with engaging and creating personally selected works and events, encompasses religious, literary, musical and other domains. The capacity to employ one's cognitive faculties in manners is safeguarded by assurances of freedom of expression, encompassing both political and artistic discourse; the freedom to practice one's religious beliefs; the ability to engage in enjoyable activities and minimize detrimental distress.

In this context, emotions are key elements of such capacities as subjective experiences that arise from an individual's mental and physiological highlight that

they are often triggered. The capacity to form emotional connections and bonds with entities and individuals is a fundamental aspect of human existence (learning by attachment). Such a lifestyle includes the ability to develop affectionate feelings and the capacity to experience sorrow and mourning in the absence of care-givers. In a broader sense, it encompasses the ability to love, grieve, and undergo emotions such as longing, gratitude and justified rage (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The absence of fear and anxiety is a symptom of resilience in one's emotional development. Advocating for this skill entails endorsing various human associations. As a model of practical reason, the capacity to develop a conceptual understanding of what is considered morally desirable and to participate in thoughtful analysis regarding the strategic organization of one's life is pivotal in the advancement. The provision above encompasses the safeguarding of the freedom of thought and belief; and the practice of religion. The capacity to coexist and interact with others acknowledges and demonstrates empathy for other individuals, and engages in diverse social exchanges; facilitating the ability to envision another person's circumstances empathetically. Preserving this capacity entails safeguarding the establishments that comprise and foster these associations and the liberty to convene and engage in political discourse. The concept of self-respect and non-humiliation is rooted in the social foundations; encompassing the ability of a dignified individual whose inherent value is equivalent to that of others (Nussbaum, 1997).

Thus, philosophical, political, and religious reflections on core human rights concepts can help to create a non-affirmative approach to human rights education. Such approach does not only integrate intra- and interpersonal but also intra- and intercultural aspects into a transcultural encounter-oriented dialogical concept.

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt's views on human rights education can be understood through her writings on the importance of education, suggesting that taking responsibility for the world can save it from ruin. Arendt argues that education should prepare children to love; take responsibility for the world, and prevent the erosion of the public realm and politics. She emphasizes the need for critical thinking abilities in democratic education, as it is the only model supporting the values essential for a healthy democracy. Arendt's political thinking also sheds light on the impact of activities such as upbringing and teaching on education. Furthermore, her experience as a refugee fleeing Nazi oppression influenced her thinking based on human rights; which she explored in her significant works. Arendt's understanding of human dignity, particularly about the right to membership in a political community, provides a basis for addressing controversies in contemporary human rights discourse. The results and findings of this research emanates from the same principle established in 1948 in the preamble (United Nations, 1948). These principles emphasize acknowledgement of all individuals' inherent dignity, and equal and inalienable rights within the global community. Such recognition is the foundation for promoting freedom, justice and peace worldwide. Conversely, the disregard and disdain for human rights have resulted in extreme cruelty that evokes a strong sense of outrage among humanity. Hence, it is imperative to safeguard human rights by upholding the principles of the rule of Law, thereby decreasing the likelihood of individuals who turn to revolt as a final recourse against instances of tyranny and oppression.

As Arendt (2004), Ranciere (2004) and Nussbaum (1997) underline, it is just the prominence of human dignity which matters. As the above discussion suggests, it serves all individuals; building the foundation for their entitlements and embodying rationality, moral consciousness and a sense of fraternity. Almost every conception of humanity incorporates this fundamental principle, whether it be the Basic Law, the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, image of God or the regard for life. This occurrence catalyzed the inquiry into how dignity concerns a specific cognitive or moral advancement level. Several instances throughout history and contemporary times exist wherein society, groups, or government have responded affirmatively to this query; resulting in fatal outcomes for the individuals involved. Therefore, it is imperative to consistently emphasize and assert the unbounded applicability of human dignity as an integral component of rational ethics.

The self-evident nature of the inclusion of the right to life, liberty, and security of the individual inside human dignity is juxtaposed with the paradoxical coexistence of theoretical principles and real-world implementation. Resultantly, this leads to having socially solid, economic and political implications because violence has many faces, expressions and impressions (physical, psychological, structural, open and hidden, intended and by ignorance).

By facilitating an appreciating and accepting learning environment, human dignity-oriented adult education in simulation games assists people in making experiences with solidarity, transparency and self-efficacy. Thus, suggests them to share their abilities and capacities for joint human rights projects. A methodical key in this way is storytelling (in verbal or nonverbal communication and interaction); a fundamental human activity that constitutes identity, because action and human identity have a narrative structure as a constant retelling, re-evaluation, and reconfiguration of the past. Therefore, plurality, equality, rights, freedom, conscience and judgment are crucial educational cooperative and participatory concepts.

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