

# Hypocrites or heroes? Thinking about the role of the teacher in human rights education

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**Abstract:** Human rights education (HRE) seeks to provide young people with an optimistic sense that we can work towards a more peaceful and socially just world, and that everyone can do something to contribute to securing improvement. But, whilst the academic literature and policy documents frequently position teachers as crucial to promoting human rights and social justice, the literature is also replete with examples of teachers' conservatism, their compliance in the face of authority and their ignorance. In addition, teachers work in institutions which routinely reproduce inequality and promote a narrow individualistic form of competition. This article explores some of the international research literature relating to the role of the teacher in HRE specifically, and more generally in the related fields of citizenship education and social studies, in order to offer some conceptual tools that might be used to critically interrogate practitioners' own beliefs and actions.

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### **Introduction**

In this article I draw on a range of relevant research literature to develop a heuristic classification system that will help describe the different ways in which teachers engage with and respond to human rights education (HRE). This is a problem that has emerged as I have reflected on 25 years of teaching practice in schools, third sector organisations, and universities. In that time I have taught about rights in history, sociology, politics, integrated humanities, citizenship and personal and social education; and with a team of university lecturers I have worked to embed the principles of HRE across an initial teacher education (ITE) programme in a UK university. Throughout that time I would have described myself as a human rights educator, but it has also become clear to me that my own knowledge and understanding of HRE was limited, and that some of the student teachers on the course experienced difficulties understanding their role as human rights educators. In subsequent years I have had the opportunity to conduct research into how teachers and students engage with HRE and citizenship education, and to lead a Masters level course in children's rights, and so in this article I seek to reflect on how that more recently gained knowledge can be used to shed light on some of the problems I, my colleagues, and our students encountered.

In the first part of the article I outline what I mean by HRE, and explain how and why I draw links between HRE, citizenship education and other related areas. In the second part I describe some of the trends in public education that may serve to restrict teachers' agency in relation to HRE. In the main body of the article I then outline a series of types of teacher response which engage with and promote human

rights to varied degrees. Finally I draw together some thoughts about how this classification of teacher responses might be used by HRE advocates to develop differentiated strategies for their advocacy within challenging contexts.

### **Defining terms and purposes**

I take as my starting point the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET), Article 2 of which states that HRE should include:

- (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 (UN, 2011).

This definition is particularly powerful because it addresses three key questions: (i) what is to be taught? (curriculum), (ii) how should it be taught? (pedagogy), and (iii) why should this be taught? (purpose).

In practice the precise answers to these three questions may change as HRE assumes rather different forms in different contexts. For example, Tibbits (2017) has devised a model of three forms of HRE: the first prioritises values and general awareness; the second focuses on accountability and professional development; and the third is more overtly related to activism and transformation. Tibbits (2008) has also argued that HRE is likely to take on different priorities depending on the national context in which it is being developed; for example, in post-conflict areas HRE might focus on the importance of the role of law, in poor democracies it might be expected to focus on sustainable development, whilst in wealthy democracies it might understandably focus more on questions of discrimination and equality. In addition, Bajaj (2012) argues that HRE takes on slightly different forms depending on the ideological motivations of those promoting it; for example, some focus on nurturing international solidarity, some focus on mutual understanding, whilst others focus on activism. These contributions indicate that from the relatively straightforward definition of HRE in the UNHRET, the practical models have proliferated.

In its focus on developing people's agency as rights-holders and activists, and its promotion of a politically informed understanding of the world, HRE clearly resonates with citizenship education (CE). From an HRE perspective CE is often criticised for being more likely to focus on the national context (and national citizenship is by definition less inclusive than universal human rights) and less likely to promote criticality in relation to government (whereas human rights is a mechanism for holding governments to account) (Osler, 2009). In response, Kymlicka (2017) points out that it is difficult to imagine government without the nation state (and ultimately it is to governments that we look to recognise rights in reality (Osler, 2016)), and equally difficult to imagine democracy without building some shared sense of political community, and for him that means it is important to

hold CE and HRE in dialogue, as each addresses a weakness in the other. In addition, many of those writing about CE, and developing CE programmes, also aspire to adopt critical, transformative and inclusive models, which address issues and actions beyond the nation state (Cogan and Derricott, 1998). Osler and Starkey (2005) urge educators to move beyond narrow definitions of citizenship as nationally defined status, and instead to embrace the other dimensions of citizenship as identity/belonging and practice. On this reading, CE can also build bridges between different groups of people around the world, and provide an educational space for developing young people's commitment to others and their capacity for contributing to positive social change. For Starkey (2017), one way to bring these agendas together in practice is to recognise human rights as a struggle – a political process in which all can participate, but within which those who have the status of national citizenship may be able to undertake additional political actions, such as voting for a progressive party, or lobbying a representative.

HRE and CE share some core commitments to (i) developing a politically informed critical understanding of the world (including rights); (ii) promoting a pedagogy that recognises young people as active learners rather than passive recipients; and (iii) empowering young people to see themselves as active agents in the world who can help to bring about positive change. Accepting that HRE and CE have different emphases, this shared core provides a distinctive pedagogic challenge to teachers and so it makes sense in this article to draw on literature from each of these two areas to shed light on how teachers engage with this challenge. In addition, there is a pragmatic reason for drawing on evidence from other related areas, because HRE takes on rather different forms in different contexts around the globe, including for example: *social studies*, *civics*, and *service learning* in the USA (Jerome et al., 2015). In addition, some international organisations, such as the Council of Europe (2010), combine HRE and CE into a single framework, albeit whilst recognising they have different emphases; others, such as UNICEF, now speak more specifically about *child rights education* (CRE) (UNICEF PFP, 2014).

In the rest of this article I will draw on some of this broad literature to reflect on the various ways in which teachers have engaged with, and responded to, these pedagogic challenges at the heart of HRE. Before starting to outline this variety of teacher responses, I want to briefly say something about the context of public education, and the threat this poses to HRE in many countries.

### **Teachers' (constrained) agency in challenging contexts**

Whilst policy makers often tend to envisage teachers simplistically as 'conduits', who will transmit policy into the classroom, in fact they may be better perceived as 'gatekeepers' or 'controllers' (Sim, 2008). On this view the teacher is a *curriculum agent*, whose practice 'is intellectual, moral and inventive' (Parker, 1987 quoted in Sim, 2008, p.263). This is reflected in Ball et al.'s (2012) work investigating how teachers respond to policy, and how they both shape it and are shaped by it in different ways. Teachers' agency is therefore best understood as situated – within their own individual political and professional narratives; within the institutional structures where they work; and within the broader political and cultural context in which schools operate (Priestley et al., 2015). In this section I outline some of the contextual factors that can be seen as potentially limiting the likelihood that teachers will endorse and promote HRE.

In 2014, Kishore Singh, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education issued a report considering the growth of privatization in education. He argued that the creeping expansion of the market is 'by definition... detrimental to education as a public good and vitiates the humanistic mission of education.' (UN, 2014, p.20). He also quoted Macpherson approvingly, when he claimed that we are, 'recast[ing] education not as a public or societal good grounded in democratic principles of justice and equal opportunity but as an individual, atomized and personalized private good' (Macpherson et al., 2014 cited in UN, 2014, p.11). In addition to the negative impact on teachers, Crouch (2003) has argued that the transformation of public services towards a market-oriented system in which professionals are measured by simple (and simplistic) criteria also undermines any broader notion of public service. Instead, all work is treated in the same way, with the end result that values other than those related to market-emulating managerialism are side-lined. This means that schools are increasingly seen as exam factories and, although the broader goals of education may still be paid lip-service, these are pushed to the margins of school life and therefore of teaching (Smithers, 2007).

Sahlberg argues that, in this climate, it is perfectly reasonable for teachers to simply 'teach to the test', as this is what is formally valued within the education system as a measure of success – both the students' success, and the success of the teacher (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 47). Ball documents examples of teachers who feel increasingly alienated from their work, and frustrated that they seem to spend more time and energy focusing on aspects of the job which fall outside of the core educational relationships between them and their students. Time spent complying with external demands cannot be spent devising new activities or even just talking to children, parents and colleagues. Emotional energy expended on managing one's performance for the managerial gaze shifts one's focus away from the children. The end result is a feeling of inadequacy and inauthenticity as the superficiality of an externally defined performance dominates one's experience (Ball, 2003).

Whilst Ball is writing about educational reform in England, he also argues that such policies are emerging around the world through policy epidemics, supported by international organisations such as the OECD (Ball, 2008), and through new networks of global governance, including philanthropists, specialist policy organisations, research institutes and private providers (Ball, Junemann and Santori, 2017). The market-emulating policies spread through such networks have been described by Sahlberg (2010) as the global education reform movement (GERM). These changes also mean that public service as an expression of a citizenship ethic is replaced by a market-related logic in which teachers are recast as service-providers and children (and their parents) as consumers. So there are good reasons to problematize the context within which teachers are trying to promote HRE. Their own professional lives, and the contexts in which education takes place, are increasingly at odds with the values and practices of HRE. When the values of the market and the attendant individualization of risk and responsibility take centre stage, what can we expect of teachers and how do they respond?

### **Types of teacher response**

In the next section I review some of the literature on teachers and teaching in HRE (and related areas) in order to explore some of the ways in which HRE is thwarted, and consider why teachers do not always manage to rise successfully to the challenge. Such an approach is similar to that adopted by Kitson and McCully (2005) in their

investigation about whether teachers engage with controversial and sensitive issues in the classroom, and what factors influence their decisions. I developed these categories both to contribute to a clearer model for thinking about the problems that arise, but also to inform the development of differentiated strategies to tackle the varied reasons why HRE sometimes fails.

### **The ignorant teacher**

The UNHCHR evaluation of the first phase of the World Programme for HRE noted that ‘the overall approach to teacher training seems ad hoc’ (UNHCHR, 2010, p.10) and bemoaned ‘the lack of systematic approaches to... the training of teachers’ in this area (UNHCHR, 2010, p.20). In a survey of teachers in Ireland, whilst attitudes to human rights were generally positive, teachers had low levels of knowledge of human rights (Waldron et al., 2011). This is a common story from international research. In Scotland, for example, a majority of teachers said they had not been trained and lacked adequate knowledge (BEMIS, 2013), and teacher education emerged as a key recommendation in similar research in Australia (Burridge et al., 2013), Finland (HRC, 2014) and Denmark (Decara, 2013). A review of teacher education across 26 countries demonstrated that none of the countries ensured teachers knew about children’s rights through their initial teacher education (Jerome et al., 2015).

One possible reason for this lack of knowledge might be related to the highly regulated performativity culture of many schools, especially those in England. One may note that clearly these teachers are able to qualify and perform the role of a teacher without remedying these knowledge gaps. This might indicate that the kinds of performance indicators used to judge teachers reflect concerns which are not related to the deep development of learning in HRE. This certainly resonates with that strand of research which consistently decries the superficial teaching which results from the ‘teach to the test’ culture in many schools, where achievement of the metrics for accountability becomes the main and distorting focus of teaching (Sahlberg, 2010). In Osler’s account of research undertaken in Iraqi Kurdistan, one school inspector said, ‘when it comes to the subjects of human rights and democracy, I do not have very close knowledge of them,’ (Osler, 2016, p.94), which at the least indicates that she is able to undertake her job, and inspect schools without having this knowledge. This was common in the 26 countries reviewed by Jerome et al. (2015), where very few inspection frameworks made explicit reference to HRE. In such a context, where teachers want to be seen as successful, and to work in successful schools, the absence of HRE in the definitions of success, means there is no immediate incentive to tackle this ignorance, nor any mechanism to point out that there is specialist knowledge to be discovered.

Parker’s (2018) discussion of the knowledge base of HRE reminds us that according to Vygotsky we need to differentiate between everyday concepts and scientific concepts. Parker argues that the scientific concepts underpinning HRE will reflect the various disciplinary perspectives that have helped to define and shape human rights, including ideas drawn from law, sociology, and politics. For those who are not aware of this depth of knowledge, it is feasible to assume that their ‘everyday’ understanding of the concept serves them perfectly and they may simply import their common-sense understanding of human rights into HRE. Whereas one might normally expect a maths teacher to have substantial mathematical knowledge, or a history teacher to have a qualification in history, this is unlikely to be the case for HRE teachers, as there are few countries where HRE exists as a specialist

qualification or status (Jerome et al., 2015). There is evidence in the literature that this sometimes happens; for example, Mahler et al. (2009, p.37) noted that officials they interviewed were 'convinced that they had complied' with HRE, even though their policies were deeply flawed and ignored significant principles around inclusion. Howe and Covell (2010) reported teachers who were adamant that they needed to focus on teaching children about their responsibilities before they could start on their rights, and a student teacher argued in my own ITE programme that everything related to children's rights was 'mostly common-sense' (Jerome, 2012a, p. 111). There are parallels in related areas, for example in England; when CE was introduced into the national curriculum, teachers regularly reported they were very confident in their subject knowledge overall, even though they had not read any of the key documents (Hayward and Jerome, 2010) and when asked about specific topics, such as how the economy functions, or how the EU operates, they admitted they had little knowledge of these areas (e.g. Kerr et al., 2007). In recent education policy reforms for preventing violent extremism, teachers in England have similarly reported that they are confident they can safeguard children from radicalisation, whilst being unable to explain how radicalisation occurs (Busher et al., 2017).

### **The teacher as obstacle**

One possible solution to the problem of teacher ignorance is to connect them with existing expertise outside of school. A range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specialise in particular aspects of HRE, and have the potential to help schools overcome a number of weaknesses (Potvin and Benny, 2013). Such provision can reach many young people with opportunities to discuss their experiences of school, outside of school (Eksner and Nur Cheema, 2017). Once they are open to the idea of working with experts in HRE, teachers can be seen as collaborative agents – willing and able to work with specialists to establish educational programmes (Bajaj, 2012). But, until they have been convinced to provide access, the teacher may simply be seen as an obstacle, in that they have the power to act as a gate-keeper, but they may not open the gate.

Covell and Howe (2005) argue that teachers who do not have a strong commitment to HRE can fall back on their general busy-ness as an excuse for not making space for the subject. This is echoed in Schweisfurth's (2006) study of Canadian teachers, many of whom simply failed to engage with a Global Citizenship Education initiative because they felt they were too busy. Bajaj's discussion of a case study in India points out that, at the very least, NGOs wishing to develop HRE programmes must have a strategy for winning over teachers, to gain access to children and schools. The link between this potential teacher obstruction and the performative-managerialist culture is perhaps in this concept of busy-ness. Whilst most schools would officially embrace goals related to HRE, there are clear priorities in which other measurable outcomes are favoured. It would not be surprising if teachers responding to these priorities were to perceive time spent on non-priority areas such as HRE as time misspent. As teachers have to make judgements about where to focus their efforts, it is easy to see how HRE might be marginalised.

### **The conservative teacher**

In dealing with teacher beliefs about children's rights, David (2002) points out that this may present a challenge to their traditional beliefs because it represents a shift from education as welfare provision to education as a right, and implies a second shift

in adult roles from protection to facilitating emancipation and autonomy. Empirical case studies continue to reiterate the importance of these issues. For example, a case study of HRE in Hong Kong concluded that two major obstacles remained; the teachers' fear for the loss of their authority and the limiting impact of their lack of subject knowledge (Leung et al., 2011). In the absence of specialist knowledge which might counteract this fear, or a training intervention that might assuage these concerns (see for example Gaynor, 2007; Lyle, 2014), some teachers' innate conservatism about adult-child relationships may come to the fore. For example, in Ireland a survey found that teachers' lack of specialist knowledge meant their teaching was not always related to human rights language or principles and that this was associated with a tendency to focus on a social cohesion agenda rather than empowerment, critique and inequality. Teachers thus tended to adopt a conservative model rather than a transformative one, with half the reported HRE events being linked to charity campaigns with a more global focus than a local one (Waldron et al., 2011). Similarly, Jerome's (2012b) case studies of CE demonstrated that teachers often adopted a softer communitarian sense of citizenship as 'helping' and 'good neighbourliness', and downplayed the more overtly political dimensions. Some of the teacher case studies in Banks' (2017) edited collection illustrate how a very conservative educational context can lead teachers to focus on aspects of HRE which are less overtly political and critical of the government; for example, Mr Ozgur in Turkey focuses mostly on creating an inclusive multilingual classroom and developing empathy (Aydin and Koc-Danngaci, 2017).

Bajaj adopts the term 'decoupling' (Bajaj, 2012, p. 4) in this regard, which refers to situations where a programme such as HRE is formally adopted, but subsequently only selectively implemented or significantly adapted. In her study, religious morality or rural public health and hygiene were used as lenses through which to interpret human rights, with the effect that these distorted what was learnt (frequently by de-politicising rights and focusing on children's responsibilities). There are other examples where prevailing cultural values and educational traditions are seen to be incompatible with aspects of HRE. For example, Lee argues that HRE advocates in the Republic of Korea refuse to use the terminology of rights at all in order to avoid the local sensitivities that might be aroused (Lee, 2007), whilst in Japan Akuzawa (2007) and Takeda (2012) argue that HRE tends to be mediated through a dominant approach to moral and values education, leading to some principles such as participation being downplayed. In this context, Akuzawa cites anecdotal evidence that, when asked about human rights, teachers often talk about values such as kindness, sympathy and being good to friends rather than concrete rights or conventions. This is also evident in the case study of Mr Ogawa's classroom, which is based on developing empathy for others, especially those suffering from the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and reflecting on shared identity, but which fails to engage directly with the state's responsibilities towards residents in the affected area or with policy questions about nuclear power (Kitayama and Hashizaki, 2018; Kitayama et al., 2017). Distortions occur where rights are mediated through education for national identity or patriotism (Akuzawa, 2007). Similarly, there is some recent evidence that teachers tend to interpret policies for countering violent extremism through Islamophobic assumptions, and thus further distort the principles of HRE (Leeman and Wardekker, 2013; Pal Sian, 2015).

We have already noted that teachers are not simply preparing young people as citizens and rights-holders; teachers themselves are citizens with their own

political beliefs which will inevitably influence their interpretation of HRE. This means some teachers will have conservative political views that are in tension with aspects of human rights, and therefore their conservative interpretations may well be more overt and conscious. This was evident in one of Osler's (2016) interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan, where one teacher said, 'I don't think HRE fits with our reality... which is not ready to digest the message behind human rights norms' (p. 97). Whilst one may detect a sense of regret in this quotation, a more overt conservatism is revealed quite dramatically in Bekerman and Cohen's (2017) discussion of teachers in Israel, where one of their interviewees admitted, 'I am indifferent to students saying "Kill all of the Arabs," whereas I get mad when they say, "All of the politicians are corrupt"' (p. 390).

Teachers may be conservative forces in at least three ways then: firstly, they may simply adopt traditional authority roles in schools and thereby limit the agency of young people; secondly, they may conform to traditional moral aspects of HRE; and thirdly, they may promote conservative political interpretations of HRE, because of their individual political motivations. In these ways teachers can refract the radical, political and collective nature of HRE through the traditional expectations of school and society about children. One of the students in my own teacher education course lamented about the HRE component of the programme, 'I found this to be the most problematic course, one which looked more like government propaganda than any realistic look at what happens in education' (Jerome, 2012a: 110). From his perspective, we were attempting to politicise a process that was apolitical, and so he perceived that HRE exacerbated his problem with what he referred to as 'badly behaved pupils who had no interest in learning' (ibid.) rather than offering him a solution. Given that the global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2010), discussed in the second part of this article, tends to focus on compliance and individual performance and accountability, one might expect this policy context to exacerbate these conservative tendencies.

### **The hypocritical teacher**

Working in a conservative cultural / institutional context may lead some teachers to adopt an avowedly conservative view of HRE, as discussed in the previous section, but it may also lead to another potential problem – teachers believing they are promoting a more critical and progressive form of HRE, whilst falling considerably short of that goal. Krappman (2006) has argued that many schools continue to assume children are inexperienced and undisciplined and so, when teachers ask students to state their view, 'students often regard this as a mere educational trick rather than a genuine interest in [their] perspective' (p.65). This leads to the charge of hypocrisy (Yamasaki, 2002), for example where school councils are manipulated to co-opt students into new managerialist discourses and/or traditional authority structures (Hunt, 2014). Our first form of teacher hypocrisy then is the situation in which teachers appear to offer a democratic and rights-respecting education, but fall short because they do not really believe in children's capacity to engage with the process, or because they fall back too readily on managerialist agendas. Critics of progressive education argue that this form of hypocrisy is built into the very assumptions of the philosophy because the teacher is always ultimately wielding authority, just under the cloak of democratic participation (Buckard, 2007). Webb (2014) describes the tensions experienced by teachers who seek to combine

'assertive teacher authority' with a 'relaxed rights-respecting adult' role in a Rights Respecting School.

Another form of hypocrisy stems from fuzzy thinking about the role of values in education. Somehow, well-intentioned teachers fall into the trap of proclaiming they leave children free to explore alternatives whilst seeking to embed values covertly into their teaching. The authors of the Council of Europe's Compass Manual for HRE claim that values clarification is one of their pedagogical tenets (Brander et al., 2012: 32) and thus fail to recognise that the manual explicitly promotes the principle that all young people should value human rights – thus aligning itself more clearly with a model of values transmission. In a study of student teachers of citizenship education, there was a similar tension between their desire to promote the values of democracy through developing democratic pedagogies, but a distaste for explicitly saying that was what they were doing. Similarly, many more of these student teachers felt it was appropriate for the school to somehow promote certain values, even though they were sceptical about undertaking the task of promoting values themselves (Jerome and Clemitshaw, 2012).

Mejias and Starkey (2012) argue that this is not just a problem of well-meaning teachers falling short of their aspirations. The competing priorities of exam grades and individual progress in a competitive system are not simply alternative policy prescriptions vying with HRE for attention, but they often function as overarching paradigms, which may be inherently antithetical to HRE. In a study of a school implementing an Amnesty HRE programme they concluded there were tensions between the dominant neo-liberal paradigm promoting individualised, competitive, consumer models of education, and the humanistic, collaborative, developmental education espoused within the HRE model, echoing the concerns of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (discussed above). In Mejias and Starkey's example, the dominant discourse prevailed and student voice was ultimately silenced quite dramatically, when school managers reasserted their authority over the children and abandoned their rights-based project. As Mejias (2017) has written, 'HRE was seen by teachers and leaders as a way to encourage better behaviour and even conformity through the linking of rights to responsibilities,' (p.191) This meant teachers felt able to withdraw students' rights if they deemed them not to be living up their responsibilities, and so the project was ultimately undermined by 'authoritarian management practices' (p.190).

Chuah (2009) tries to argue that hypocrisy within the stifling performativity culture could be embraced as a stepping stone towards a more progressive set of values. His argument is essentially that it is better to tolerate teachers saying they value alternative educational goals even if they really do not, or know they cannot achieve them, because this at least creates an alternative way of talking about education. He also argues that teachers should adopt a more playful approach to exploring non-performative goals. Both I think are problematic; the former ignores the impact such hypocrisy may have on children, and the second ignores the reality of being monitored and judged. Children with teachers who cheerfully embrace a rhetoric of HRE but fail to follow through are likely to feel betrayed. Teachers who playfully spend time on alternative projects either detract from their performance of the officially sanctioned roles for teachers, or call these performances too obviously into question. Either way it is difficult to interpret such hypocrisy as anything other than problematic. One way in which teachers may try to resolve these difficulties is to embrace exams and qualifications in aspects of HRE and thus publically perform

educational success through their subject, but this is also potentially problematic in that the subject becomes another element in the 'exam factory' and is as susceptible to the logic of 'teaching to the test' as any other subject.

### **The heroic teacher**

The HRE literature often celebrates case studies of successful practice, and this illustrates that, even in difficult contexts, teachers can work independently and collaboratively to realise HRE. In Banks' (2017) collection of case studies from around the world, it is evident that many of these teachers champion HRE because their own political identities have strengthened their commitment to human rights. In England, Veronica connects her own experience as a British-born Ghanaian woman with her role as the mother of black sons in London, and her concern for social justice as a teacher (Osler, 2017). In Korea, Mrs Lim always used her love of travel and languages in the classroom, but transformed her teaching when she experienced a political awakening around the concept of 'fair travel' and ethical consumption (Chah et al. 2017). In Lebanon, Nadine recognises that the constraints of the curriculum and the testing regime make it difficult to go against the grain with more project-based HRE, but with the support and encouragement of her colleagues and head teacher she continues to experiment with projects that insist on exploring the 'big questions' which refuse easy answers (Akar, 2017). Amani, a teacher in Kuwait, started to explore HRE by reading government-endorsed textbooks critically, to explore the gaps and tensions with her class, and then lobbied for a classroom space where she could encourage less formal student interactions, and eventually lobbied the government to request a national student council (Al-Nakib, 2017, 2012). Mr C, a citizenship teacher in England, is a political activist who uses his experiences around the world as teaching material, and who also creates opportunities for his students to engage in campaigns (Keddie, 2008). Sim (2008) in her research in Singapore described these process as teachers *re-forming* policy, through active interpretation, as opposed to narrowly *conforming* to policy.

Agberia (2016) illustrates why these examples are so exceptional and noteworthy. His study of Palestinian teachers working within the 'hegemonic narrative' of the Israeli curriculum reveals how they meet the letter of the law by teaching the required material and preparing their students to succeed in their standardised tests. But they also undertake a second role, which involves a number of strategies - providing alternative narratives to supplement the official resources; drawing connections between events in the curriculum and contemporary issues and political action in their local community; both teaching the information for the test and contextualising this in wider, more critical accounts; and teaching about human rights so that students can situate their experiences within a universal framework and see potential avenues for political action. This seems to capture what is implicit in all of the examples considered in the first paragraph of this section – that these teachers are effectively doing two jobs. The first job is the one required by the education system, the one measured by performance metrics, and monitored through inspection and management. The second job is the one where HRE emerges, providing students with additional knowledge, multiple perspectives and critical interpretations, and where political agency is nurtured. Here teachers are required to strike a careful balance between surviving and flourishing as professionals (with a need to retain their jobs and gain respect) and pushing against the boundaries, extending their scope for action.

All of these examples present HRE as overtly political and other studies have confirmed that different political beliefs tend to lead teachers to construct HRE rather differently. Leenders and her colleagues (2008) have demonstrated in their research in the Netherlands that teachers' own beliefs about politics shape their classroom practice and Myers' (2009) research in Brazil demonstrates the impact of teachers' own political activism on their practice. For many of these teachers, teaching is seen as a political activity (Myers, 2009, p.19) which influences their interpretation of the curriculum, their selection of topics for study and their pedagogical choices. This research suggests that those with more experience of participating in social movements may well teach in more democratic ways and consider a wider variety of actors and acts within their consideration of active citizenship and action for human rights.

### **Reflections**

These heroic teachers indicate that the performative culture may leave spaces in which teachers can explore HRE and related agendas. This requires teachers to tread a careful path – they must understand the rules of the system sufficiently well to spot opportunities for re-interpretation and challenge, whilst not compromising themselves too fundamentally in the eyes of those empowered to judge and discipline them. This means we have to recognise that teachers may well be on a journey, exploring the possibilities, testing the boundaries, and building their confidence. I am not claiming that the typology outlined above describes teachers in some essentialised way; rather it describes the various positions teachers may occupy at particular times, and in relation to different aspects of HRE. As an example, Al-Nakib's (2017) account of Amani, teaching HRE in Kuwait, ends by noting the curriculum has been reformed and the course which was spread out over three years has been condensed into one, radically reducing the time she has available to explore issues around the textbooks. She will do less HRE as a result, but she is unlikely to stop. By contrast, Bozec's (2017) account of Arnaud, teaching in France, describes a cautious teacher, starting to teach about knowledge, building his confidence to hold debates and discussions, and eventually being moved to engage directly with contemporary traumatic incidents (Charlie Hebdo). Teacher's agency in implementing HRE may therefore depend on them building their own confidence, building trust in their students, and importantly on their political reading of the context.

As it can be useful to think about children's agency in terms of how particular situations thicken or thin their agency (Robson et al., 2007), so the teachers in each of these categories might be supported to thicken their agency. For example, the 'ignorant' teacher may be supported by revealing the rich knowledge base that underpins HRE, moving it from the 'unknown unknown' into the 'known unknown' category. Just offering a course may not be effective if teachers have not yet realised they lack powerful knowledge (Parker, 2018). Some 'conservative' teachers may be assisted by learning about the small steps taken by others in similarly restrictive contexts; for example, the school inspector who told Osler (2016, p.95) 'it would be better that these subjects are taken up to the political level and enacted through law' might be persuaded that there are small positive steps that can be taken through carefully curating existing curriculum resources, rather than waiting for national reforms (Al-Nakib, 2017; Akar, 2017). Similarly, teachers who are using the rhetoric of HRE without fully achieving it, and who thus risk being seen as hypocritical, may benefit from critical friends within the profession to help them deepen their practice.

By contrast, conservative teachers who are politically opposed to HRE, for example the Israeli teacher unprepared to challenge racism, may need to be the object of external political activism, demanding the school live up to its legal obligations.

Foucault's conceptualisation of power maintains that it does not simply reside with individuals or office-holders, rather it exists within power-relations, i.e. between people. Whilst some may well seek to construct a panopticon (Perryman, 2006), there is always the possibility for forms of 'insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy' which means 'there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight' (Foucault, 2001 cited in Leask, 2011, p.63). Stickney observes that every occurrence of a surveillance situation involves a negotiation between the observer and the observed teacher. Confident teachers can brazen it out, re-describing radical pedagogical or curriculum interpretations in terms which are more likely to be officially sanctioned. Alternatively, Stickney notes teachers can simply reserve a 'public script' for such events, and revert to 'hidden scripts' when un-observed (Stickney, 2012, p.657). This may feel dangerous or even dishonest, but as Leask reminds us, this is an inevitable consequence of the way power circulates and constitutes 'strategic games between liberties' (Foucault, 2000 cited in Leask, 2011, p.64). In this Leask argues 'resistance... is reclaimed, and made common. Resistance is by no means reserved for Byronic heroes: it is for all, by all, and everywhere' (Leask, 2011, p.66).

Ball and Olmedo (2013) go further in applying this insight to teaching and argue that our sense of identity as teachers cannot exist prior to our engagement in such power relations and that such identities are formed through what we do, rather than what we are in some essential sense. What Ball and Olmedo, Leask and Stickney all indicate is that the first step is to unsettle the dominant discourses and create a space for thinking differently. On the basis of critique and re-imagining educational practices one can search for spaces and strategies to explore alternatives, but, having developed a more political reading of one's situation it is also important to engage with more collective forms of resistance, such as those promoted by Apple (2013), who emphasises the need for individuals to work together, both to build more powerful movements for change, but also to sustain the individuals engaging in this difficult task.

O'Sullivan (2008) has argued that we should not be surprised that many teachers are not motivated by a radical or critical form of HRE, because ultimately they have benefitted from education and are unlikely to question those values which underpin the system. As I have argued, many teachers are also likely to succumb to the dominant discourse regulating their professional lives – faced with life in the panopticon the most sensible solutions may well be to stay and play by the rules of the game or find the door and leave. Those who stay and engage in the personal and collective struggle need help to build the 'decentred unities' (Apple, 2013) which offer the intellectual and emotional support to sustain their efforts and to build the democratic alternatives. As Apple's discussion of Black American activist-teachers reminds us, 'the educator as moral being, as community activist, as teller of the truth... as the keeper and defender of the memory of black history and culture...constituted a heavy burden to bear' (Apple, 2013, p. 90). Committing to use one's teaching to contribute to political change through HRE will always make substantial demands on individual teachers. Heroic teachers are heroic precisely because through their struggle they create the spaces for developing practices which (may) presage a fuller achievement of democratic citizenship and human rights.

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