

Claudia Lenz

The Norwegian School of Theology and Center for Holocaust Studies, Oslo

History learning and its intersection with EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education

I. What do Citizenship Education, Human Rights Education and Intercultural Education have in common?

This article seeks to identify the ways in which history education is relevant for and can serve as a link between Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)¹, Human Rights Education (HRE) and Intercultural Education (ICE)².

These three fields have different origins linked to specific historical contexts and political developments. Civic and Citizenship Education (EDC) are a result of the post Second World War insight that stable and sustainable democracy needs robust democratic institutions as well as citizens who are informed about their rights and duties and who hold a “democratic mindset”. There has been a development from a main focus on knowledge about the democratic systems, democratic institutions and democratic rights and duties, to a broader approach towards *active citizenship*, linked to various forms of democratic participation and *democratic culture*.

This development marks also a tension between more preservative and stabilizing notion of civic education (linked to concepts like patriotism) and a more critical and transformative notion. This has consequences for the ways in which history is approached: whereas a stabilizing notion of civic education would aim to create positive identification with democratic traditions, a critical notion would also focus on struggles, backdrops and issues which are linked to contemporary challenges.

Human Rights Education is a result of bottom up and a top down developments: While the common reference point of HRE, the UN Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, has been created by an intergovernmental organization and adopted by nation-states, the *struggles* for Human Rights have been fought at the grass root level of civil society against state violations. This is strongly reflected in the principles and approaches of HRE, as they are reflected in the

¹ Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) will be used to cover the entire field of Civic and Citizenship Education, being aware of the substantial differences regarding the scope of democracy and democratic participation, as well criteria for citizenship. Some of these differences will be addressed with regard to their relation to history education.

² Intercultural Education will be used to cover the entire field of Intercultural, Multicultural and Critical Multicultural Education, being aware of the difference of the different assumptions regarding culture and cultural identity. Some of these differences will be addressed with regard to their relation to history education.

Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training from 2011. Here, the notion of empowerment is linked to the capacity to stand up for one's own and other's rights and to contribute to societal changes improving the overall Human Rights situation. Clearly, within such an approach, history can hardly be treated in merely affirmative ways. Of course, the narratives of successful struggles and the stories of "Human Rights heroes" can be encouraging and provide role models, but the critical dimension will always be crucial: the stories about injustice and Human Rights violations contribute to create an awareness and alert with regard to the present.

Intercultural Education has similar activist roots in antiracist and anticolonial struggles and the struggle for equal rights and mutual understanding in culturally diverse societies. There is quite a variation of approaches within ICE (especially, if related concepts like intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism are taken into considerations), but the following issues are usually covered in one or another way:

- the formation and negotiation of identities within frameworks of culture,
- the interaction and relation between individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds and
- the (power)relations between the majority, its norms and institutions and different minorities

When it comes to history, the above perspectives point into somewhat different directions: If identity and identity formation is a major focus, of course traditions and historical narratives play a major role. Again, there can be a stabilizing and a critical perspective. For minorities (e.g. indigenous people), which have been oppressed by assimilationist politics, the reconstruction of one's own culture and traditions and the majority's recognition of these traditions can be a major element and even prerequisite of reconciliation. However, for the minority itself, this can be related to a risk of homogenisation and self-essentialization, which makes it particularly difficult for those parts of the minority wishing to interpret their identity in different ways.

Even if such a description falls short for the different and partly contested approaches in all three fields, a development can be described which has brought these fields closer together in recent years. As all of these fields aim to educate young people to become aware of the possibilities and limitations for equal rights and full participation in the social and political life of a society and to be able to act for the realization and maintenance of these opportunities, their common goal is the *empowerment* of learners. Moreover, as a consequence of globalization, migration and increasing cultural diversity, the vision of equal and active participation in society has developed into a more integrated idea of democracy, human rights and diversity.

II. History, agency and empowerment

History touches upon some of the most existential features of Human existence: historical narratives, as they occur in museums, speeches of politicians but also in everyday situations such as family talks around the dinner table link the past to present, organize past and present into narratives and patterns of interpretation that help to build and maintain a sense of identity and belonging. But history and historical consciousness also provides outlooks for the future: the ways in which we interpret the past (Rüsen 2016) inform our expectations of what is “*going to come*” and the normative basis of our assumptions what “*ought to come*”. With the stories, also norms and values are transmitted through history – this holds true for all aspects of history culture and history education.

The idea of *empowerment* points to history, or more precisely, to the link between past, present and future. If education aims to enable learners to understand and act in accordance with principles of democracy, human rights and respect for diversity, they are also prepared to act for *change* – education becomes transformative, potentially contributing to social and political change. This *future* outlook has an impact on the possible ways in which the past is told and interpreted. History is no longer limited to the story of tradition, heritage legitimizing a present status quo, but a source of insight and reflection regarding the possibly different ways of interpreting and organizing the world. In the following paragraphs, this enlightening mode of history shall be further elaborated.

This is why history education can have a strong impact on young people’s identity and sense of belonging as well as the values related to this identity – even if children are exposed to many other historical narratives and interpretations, for example through media. It is not by accident that authoritarian rulers, when getting in power, very quickly see to it that history books and history teaching are changed and “streamlined” with the new doctrine in power and its record of the past.

For most of history, the stories regarded to be worth to be told and commemorated were the stories of kings and rulers and their great deeds and victories which were projected into the future, if not eternity. History was a means of stabilizing existing power relations.

Enlightenment and the changed the relation between what the historian Reinhart Koselleck (1985) named “the room of experience” and the “horizon of expectation”, which means: instead of eternal, god given truth, the autonomous human subject entered the scene. Capable of independent reasoning and action, this subject would be capable to *change history*. A whole new set of ideas, indicating that historical change can be made by any man and woman emerged – it became possible, that working class, women, the enslaved and the colonized could re-write history.

In this moment, history writing and history education became ***potentially empowering***.

Historical consciousness is a condition for agency: Being able to act as a subject of one's own life and in the context of social change is related to being able to tell one's own story and to identify with historical agents. This is one of the reasons, why the collective narratives of resistance against suppression are of great importance. They provide a possibility to identify with the position of being an agent of change.

But even more important than the content of the stories told and taught are the skills of critical thinking and reflection. Empowering history education has, ideally, to refrain from any kind of indoctrination or manipulation into the identification with particular narratives and interpretations of the past.

But this is not how history education in modernity looked like: during the 19th century, history teaching at schools played first and foremost the role of forming *national* identity. The implementation of history as a school subject has by and large coincided with the process of modern nation-building and the new subject was a part of the formation of a common identity of the then members of a "nation" with a feeling of belonging. The main feature of history teaching following this aim was the presentation of a comparatively closed account of "the" past as a cohesive narrative, focusing on aspects of national „character“, pride, heroism and, eventually, suffering. We see the legacy of this nationalist paradigm of history education in all European countries today (Lybæck/Osler 2014). However, it finds itself in a more or less open tension with an orientation towards values such as democracy and human rights, pointing towards a much more critical, self-reflexive and de-nationalized/cosmopolitan record of history.

The United Nations (2016) and the Council of Europe (2001, 2011) have in recent years advocated for a form of history education that is informed by the goal to empower learners to make informed and independent historical judgements, to relate to contradicting historical narratives and to critically reflect on the "images of the other" which often accompany the "history of pride" provided about one's own group or nation.

In the following paragraphs, a number of pedagogical principles and approaches will be described which spell out how history education contributes to this overall empowering educational vision.

III. "The past as the distant other" – historization as a powerful tool for reflexivity

As historical consciousness is a crucial precondition for human agency, *historization* is the art of systematically relating past, present and future in order to critically reflect and better understand one's own time and in order to gain prospects for a desirable future.

Historization is linked to empowerment through the awareness that things have not always been like they are today, and that they have changed because of *people's decisions and actions*. Historization means, to explore phenomena in perspective, in terms of continuity and rupture, to study the roots of present day achievements, everyday life and catastrophes in the past, without assuming they are determining the future. What has been created and formed by human action, can be changed and improved through human action.

IV. History, identity and belonging

Education plays a crucial role in the formation of identities. In many ways, not only in history lessons, learners are confronted to narratives dealing with the question of “who we are” and “how we became who we are”. An example, many schools have school traditions and rituals related to these traditions (annual ceremonies of opening/closing the term, rituals related to sports events etc.). Whenever the values and norms of the present are linked to the past, notions of belonging

So, the question is “Whose stories are told by whom and to whom?” followed by “Who is authorized to speak in the name of the past? Who is silenced?”

The empowering dimension of history education is not only related to the narratives which are presented, but to the capacity and competence to ask these critical questions about the uses of the pasts, and about the effects of in- and exclusion related to them.

V. History, multiperspectivity and “living together”

As history is so closely linked to identities and belongings, it is also strongly linked to emotions. Historical narratives can appeal to empathy and sympathy, and they can mobilize fear, outrage and hate. History is a part of conflicts in many ways. Divisive narratives can activate latent conflicts and perpetuate existing ones. Stories of historical injustice and conflict can be employed in order to create ideas and feelings of “us” versus “them”, and these images of the other can easily be mobilized in order to generate aggression.

EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education have in common that they aim to avoid or deconstruct divisive narratives, and establish tolerance for difference and mutual understanding, as well as the capacity to “put oneself into another person's shoes”.

Pluralism, one of the central dimensions of democracy has also a historical dimension. The capacity to tolerate and constructively deal with different opinions, and conflicting world views, by focusing on mutual respect, critical thinking and reflection is also needed in order to accept diverging or conflicting versions of historical accounts.

Multiperspectivity, the capacity to view an issue from different perspectives, is one of the central principles which can avoid polarized narrative and hostile interpretations of the past. Multiperspectivity is a central principle in intercultural education, too. This is not necessarily based on the idea of mutual understanding as “understanding the other”, as if the “other” (culture, group etc.) would be a fixed and static entity. Going further, multiperspectivity can contribute to a critical reflection and deconstruction of the very notion of “us” and “them”. Instead of the focus on what “we” have in common and what divides us from “them”, differences within these groups or cultures can come to sight (diversity within). Maybe “our” history has more in common with “their” history than nationalist or sectarian narratives want us to believe? The focus on *Shared histories* is, therefore, a very powerful way to replace sentiments of fear and aversion towards the assumed other with ideas of common experience, heritage and achievement.

VI. Learning about, through and for in History Education

If history education shall contribute to democracy and Human Rights, it cannot be limited to transferring knowledge **about** historical experiences of injustice or struggles for democracy and freedom, or about Human Rights principles and democratic institutions. Aiming to empower learners to be aware of and be able to defend the dignity and the democratic and human rights of each individual, the learning process needs to contain an experience based dimension, which is linked to participation –the learner should be the owner of his/her learning process and not only an object of pedagogical interventions designed regardless of his/her interests, strengths and needs. For history education, this means that the learning process needs to open for what appears as relevant and meaningful for students in light of their own personal backgrounds and invite them to express their views and interpretations while respecting others’. This dimension of the learning process is called **learning through** – or within – the values of which shall be promoted: democracy, human rights and intercultural understanding.

EDC/HRE and ICE are *future oriented* endeavours, related to the agency of the learner. This dimension of the learning process has been called “**learning for**” in article 2 of the *United Nation Declaration about Human Rights Education and Training*, adopted in 2011:

“Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing to, inter alia, the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and

behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights.”

These intertwined and interdependent competences place learners as agents of their own learning and as co-responsible for their learning environment.

VII. History and Competences for Democratic Culture

In the international educational research of the recent years, there is little dissent regarding the fact that active democratic participation is nothing that is learned by acquisition of knowledge alone (see: ICCS 2009). A person can have the most outstanding knowledge about democratic principles and systems and might still not be able to participate in democratic decision making processes, to exercise her/his own rights or to respect and defend the rights of others. A person might also have the most sophisticated knowledge of former injustice, but still, might not be willing to engage for fairness and justice in his or her own environment.

Knowledge is needed in order to recognize contemporary dangers – but knowledge needs to be related to the skill to differentiate, to see where the historical parallel stops and our own situation is different from the past.

In order to be capable of promoting and defending democracy and Human Rights, a person needs to be able to intervene, verbally, through argumentation and/or through action or interaction with others. But being able to is only one side of agency – being willing to is the necessary other side. The development of skills and attitudes goes hand in hand – in order to counteract acts of hate or discrimination for example, one needs to know with whom to associate and how to cooperate in order to counteract. And one needs to be motivated and willing to use your knowledge and abilities for this purpose. This requires an educational process which is informed by the values and principles of democracy and allows the learners – as individuals and members of a community they cooperate and coexist in – to develop a mind-set/ attitudes, skills and knowledge by experiencing and practicing democracy.

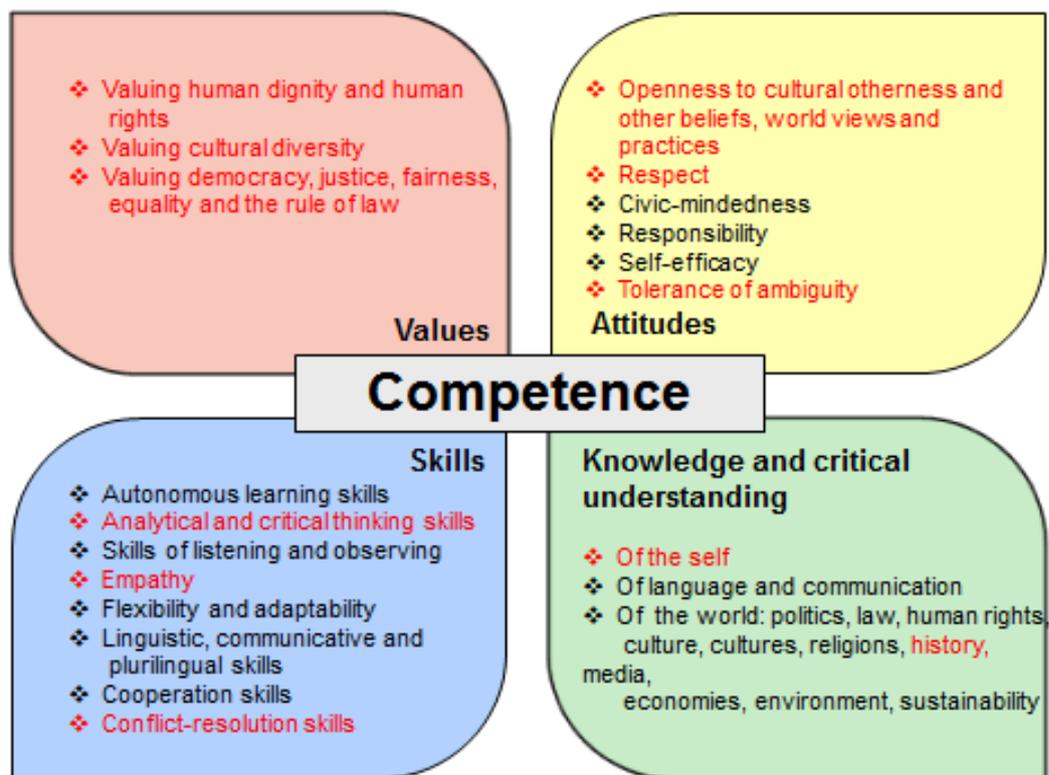
Many of these competences can be developed through history education.

As mentioned above, historical narratives can engage learners, intellectually and emotionally. Working on individualized stories representing different positions in a historical event can invite learners to take perspectives of different historical actors. In this way, empathy can be developed and openness for cultural otherness fostered.

The awareness that (hi)story always is told from a particular perspective and that historical narratives serve particular interests is a basis for critical thinking and reflection.

These examples may illustrate how historical education directly can contribute to the development of Competence for Democratic Culture.

In the overview of the 20 components of which the model Competences for Democratic Culture is composed, the attitudes, values, skills and knowledge and critical understanding which are most relevant for history teaching are highlighted in red. This shows, how planning and evaluation of history teaching can be done in a very conscious way within the framework of education for democratic participation and intercultural understanding.



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