



Human rights in relation to education about religions and world views: the contribution of the Council of Europe to classroom religious education

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Abstract

The article considers human rights and their relevance to an impartial and inclusive form of religious and world views education. Such a form of education is justified because of its intrinsic worth as part of a liberal education, and its instrumental value to the personal development of students and to their social development as members of societies in which people need to live together, despite holding different religious and secular beliefs. It is argued that the human rights codes are especially relevant to the argument for inclusive religious education related to the social development of young people. The Council of Europe's work in this field since 2002 is summarised, including its publication of *Signposts* (Jackson in *Signposts: policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, <http://www.theewc.org/Content/Library/COE-Steering-documents/Recommendations/Signposts-Policy-and-practice-for-teaching-about-religions-and-non-religious-world-views-in-intercultural-education>, 2014). Its impartial (secular but not normatively secularist) approach sees the human rights codes as vital reference points for discussions about the limits of individual freedoms, including 'freedom of religion or belief', supports forms of 'education about religions and beliefs' which combine impartial study with opportunities for student dialogue and exchange, and regards such education as complementary to forms of faith nurture within families and communities.

Keywords Religious education · Human rights · Council of Europe · Intercultural education · World views

1 Inclusive religious education and its aims

In this article, I discuss modern human rights codes and go on to consider the role of the Council of Europe in contributing towards a human rights-based form of education about religions and other world views. I argue that human rights are highly relevant to an

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inclusive form of religious education (RE) which should be available to everyone in publicly funded schools of democracies. However, human rights do not provide the *sole* justification for this form of religious education.

There are some very different education systems and approaches to RE in Europe, but all have been influenced in some ways by the process of secularisation and by an increased religious plurality, due principally to migration. Recently published volumes on religious education in Western Europe (Rothgangel et al. 2014a), Northern Europe (Rothgangel et al. 2014b) and Central Europe (Rothgangel et al. 2016) indicate the variety of education systems and approaches to religious education in various parts of Europe, but all show an ongoing influence of, or reaction to, secularisation and religious diversity.

One approach to the general idea of ‘inclusive religious education’ takes a phenomenological stance, confining classroom activity to the study of religions (or religions and other world views), with no personal engagement with the religions studied from pupils or teachers, and no dialogue about this in the classroom (e.g. Jensen 2010). My own position is that ‘inclusive religious education’, should *both* develop students’ knowledge and understanding, *and* provide them with opportunities for criticism and reflection, partly through dialogue with classmates, moderated by the teacher (Jackson 2015, 2016a, 2019; Jackson and Everington 2016). Such civil dialogue should allow students to speak from a variety of standpoints, including religious and non-religious.

My view is that the fundamental (but not the only) reason for studying and discussing religions in inclusive, publicly-funded, schools is to promote knowledge and understanding. This requires competence, which includes students’ acquisition of appropriate skills and the adoption of particular attitudes and values (Jackson 2014, pp. 33–46). It is maintained that knowledge and understanding of religions is intrinsically worthwhile as an aspect of a liberal education which should cover all areas of human knowledge and experience (Hirst 1974). Additionally, it is argued that knowledge and understanding of religions is instrumentally worthwhile, in that it has the potential to contribute to pupils’ personal and social development. Personal development includes, for example, the moral and spiritual development of learners, which can be facilitated through providing them with opportunities both to reflect on their learning and to formulate and express points of criticism (Jackson 1997, 2016b, 2019). Social development includes learning to live together in democratic societies which, by their nature and within certain limits, allow citizens freedom to adopt and to practise the religion or philosophy of their inheritance or choice (Jackson 2004, pp. 146–142). Values related to the preservation of human dignity, and to the conduct of academic arguments and procedures, should be integral to religious education, to the whole curriculum and to the ethos of the whole school.

Human rights are especially relevant to the instrumental-social argument. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his (*sic*) religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (United Nations 1948)

Human rights are also relevant to arguments supporting the view that parents should be able to guide their children as they grow up, in a family context which reflects their beliefs and values. Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms respect for the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their children as they grow up together with the right of every child to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion (United Nations 1990).

Thus, it is important to maintain a dialogue involving those working in ‘inclusive religious education’ and forms of ‘faith-based education’. It is also important to recognise that students from religious backgrounds and/or with personal religious commitments are likely to be present in the classrooms of ‘inclusive’ schools. Also, ‘inclusive religious education’ should provide opportunities for students to meet and engage with members of religious communities (Jackson 2014, pp. 87–97).

2 Modern human rights codes

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 was written by politicians and civil servants in response to the dreadful human suffering and genocide of the Holocaust. Those who formulated the UDHR were deeply touched by the horrors that human beings were seen to be capable of inflicting upon others. Of course, the text was written at a particular time—very soon after the Second World War—and in a western context, and this is evident in the language of the Declaration. Nevertheless, the Universal Declaration is an immensely powerful document that has continuing relevance, and its articles have had a profound influence on the drafting of other human rights codes such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as national legal codes such as the UK’s Human Rights Act. Their application, through governments and members of civil society, and through legal judgements in jurisdictions influenced by the human rights codes, have prevented much human suffering and have promoted strategies for living together in peace, despite deep differences in religious and ‘secular’ belief, as well as cultural context. The intention of the drafters of the human rights codes was that their implementation should be *collaborative* and *international*.

3 The United Nations universal declaration of human rights

The United Nations Charter is the UN’s foundational treaty. It came into force on 24 October 1945, signed initially by 50 member countries. When the atrocities committed by Nazis became apparent after the Second World War, the consensus was that the UN Charter did not sufficiently define the human rights of individuals. The Commission on Human Rights, consisting of 18 members of various nationalities and political persuasions, was constituted in 1946 to prepare an International Bill of Rights, which became the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Drafting Committee began its work in January 1947, and was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. The UDHR was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The principal drafting role was given to a Canadian, John Peters Humphrey. Winston Churchill was a strong supporter of the Declaration, and he had already delivered a speech in Zürich in September 1946, with the aim of international collaboration through the United Nations at a global level, and through a European organisation (an embryonic Council of Europe), collaborating to resist tyranny. (<http://www.churchill-in-zurich.ch/en/churchill/en-churchills-zurcher-rede/>). I will go on to discuss the educational work of the Council of Europe, but first I will consider some issues about the idea of human rights.

4 Debates about human rights

The nature of human rights, and their role as guiding principles within democratic societies, is a matter of on-going debate, to the extent that it seems fashionable, and often expedient, for some politicians, to attack human rights codes, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, and human rights organisations—and even the very idea of human rights. Some critics point out the Western bias or the European Enlightenment/post-Enlightenment pedigree of human rights. Rather than being universal, human rights values are relative to a particular time and context (e.g. MacIntyre 1981). Some attack Western assumptions about individualism in the human rights codes, or their lack of attention to duties or obligations. Others see human rights as just one set of values in competition with others, drawing attention to increasing attacks on human rights from conservative nationalist and religious forces, and to reliance on the power of liberal states to maintain a human rights perspective—human rights representing a form of imperialism in the guise of moralism (Hopgood 2013). A different argument derives modern assertions of human rights from Christian commitment to the sacredness of human life, a view grounded in the belief (Genesis 1: 26) that humans are ‘created in the image and likeness of God’ (Waldron 2002). A further criticism is of the ambiguity of the idea of human dignity, expressed in the human rights codes as an inherent quality (e.g. Nordenfelt 2004).

There is a degree of truth in these comments. ‘Human rights’ do appear from within a particular historical and cultural context and have a particular pedigree (Morsink 1999). The publication of the UDHR in 1948 was a direct moral response to the totalitarianism that threatened Europe during the Second World War, and which led to the Holocaust, and a genuine attempt to articulate moral principles essential to the democratic process. Nevertheless, there were members of the drafting committee from Lebanon and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

There were, no doubt, some influences from Christianity. However, as Heiner Bielefeldt—a philosopher, historian and Catholic theologian as well as former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief—argues, modern human rights codes are not simply a reformulation of earlier Western values and ideas; human rights, as expressed in the UDHR, for example, are not intrinsic to Western history, or to Christianity, and need to be seen in a hermeneutical relationship with moral motifs that emerged in the past in the context of religions and philosophies. As Bielefeldt observes:

...although St Paul emphasises spiritual equality between freeman and slave, he never criticises slavery in social reality... Even in Paradise Aquinas thinks that human beings would have lived in relationships of political domination and subordination... Luther’s emphasis on the spiritual freedom of every Christian and the spiritual equality of all believers... was not meant to call into question the given social and political order...

The Catholic Church finally endorsed human rights and religious liberty during the Second Vatican Council, that is, as late as the 1960s. The fact that the Catholic Church, as well as other Christian churches, rejected human rights over a considerable period of time indicates that human rights cannot appropriately be described as an ‘organic’ result of the Occidental history and culture as a whole. Human rights did not develop as a natural unfolding of humanitarian ideas deeply rooted in the cultural and religious traditions of Europe. On the contrary, people in the West... had (and still have) to fight to have their rights respected. (Bielefeldt 2000, pp. 94–97)

Human rights, or at least some aspects of them, or indeed the way in which they are phrased, continue to be criticised or rejected by some of those who advocate certain rules or principles based on an external authority, such as a particular interpretation of scripture or tradition. One might add that individuals and governments may abuse the very human rights that form the basis of their law and policy; they are wrong to do so. Their actions do not negate the moral force of human rights in principle.

Of course, rights can be over-emphasised and the duties or obligations associated with them played down. However, critics should be reminded that Article 29 of the UDHR deals with duties in relation to rights, declaring that ‘Everyone has duties to the community...’. The question of responsibilities and duties in relation to rights will be considered in more detail later. None of the criticisms outlined above negates the fundamental moral force of the UDHR, reflected in its response to human cruelty and genocide, and summed up in its view of the innate value of the human person, expressed as the fundamental right to *human dignity*.

5 Justifying human rights politically: comprehensive and political liberalism

Although, for many, a moral commitment to the innate value of the human person is fundamental to human rights, support for human rights is expressed in political terms; the defence of basic rights that protect the equal freedoms of individuals in society is seen as essential for the working of liberal democracy. By enforcing rights such as freedom of religion, thought, speech, association and political participation, liberal political practices enable individuals to pursue their own conceptions of the good life, rather than having any one such conception imposed on them by the state. Here the key question is what justifies the process. Is a justification something external to, or intrinsic to, the practice of democracy?

Some European Enlightenment thinkers took the former view. For example, John Locke justified the equality and independence of persons by appealing to theology. God created human beings equal and independent, and that is why individual persons possess natural rights to life, liberty, health, and possessions. John Stuart Mill, in contrast, put forward a utilitarian argument for maximising human happiness as a justification for individual civil and political liberties. These are examples of what John Rawls calls ‘comprehensive liberalism’, where individual rights are justified by appeal to wider philosophical or theological premises. Rawls’ later work rejected comprehensive liberalism as a justification for *social* policy (*individuals* may have their own comprehensive positions), and defended political liberalism, regarding justice as ‘...fundamental political ideas implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society’ (Rawls 1993, p. 223). Political liberalism applies to individuals in their *public capacity as citizens*, not in their private role as individuals, who may have their personal comprehensive ideas of the good.

Rawls’ justification for political liberalism is as follows. Liberal societies have a variety of reasonable but irreconcilable comprehensive moral, religious and philosophical positions; this is ‘reasonable pluralism’. There is no way to gain public agreement that it is more reasonable to adopt one of these over any other. Those holding different comprehensive views will need to focus on finding what Rawls calls an *overlapping consensus*. This refers to how supporters of different comprehensive views, involving apparently inconsistent conceptions of justice or morality, can agree on particular principles that support a state’s basic social institutions. Political liberalism rejects views denying basic liberal

rights of citizens or refusing to tolerate conflicting comprehensive views. Non-liberal viewpoints are allowable as long as they accept the right to political autonomy, and therefore do not seek to suppress alternative views.

6 Dialogical liberalism

However, the limit of political liberalism lies with those in society who refuse to acknowledge it, and reject it. The point has been made that political liberalism ultimately has to appeal to comprehensive moral ideas to defend liberal rights against those who reject political liberalism (Tan 2000, pp. 53–54). The solution need not be a ‘strong’ comprehensive liberalism, which requires the liberal state to impose its moral judgements. Rather, the liberal state can refrain from acting on its judgement that, for example, a particular minority cultural or religious practice is unacceptable, and promote dialogue and discussion, rather than imposing equality (Tan 2000, pp. 59–60). I use the term ‘dialogical liberalism’ for this. Through the practice of dialogical liberalism, the state can persuade, encourage, support or criticise without forcing people to do as it says—except in extreme cases, involving, for example, violence to others, as in cases of terrorism, or coercion of vulnerable individuals. In such cases, the state has the right to intervene. At the level of social and political interaction within a society or wider grouping, basic human rights—as reflected in the UDHR—can provide a set of provisional moral principles, derived from reflecting on the idea of democracy itself, relevant to dialogue between those holding different views within a liberal society. Rawls’ idea of overlapping consensus is highly relevant to this.

7 A dialogical approach to human dignity

One example of ‘dialogical liberalism’, using human rights as provisional moral principles in dialogue with moral ideas derived from particular cultural sources, relates to the idea of human dignity. Many critics of the universal imposition of Western liberal democracy and a Western formulation of human rights do accept the idea of the innate value of the human person—what the Universal Declaration calls ‘human dignity’. However, they express it differently from the Western view of the individual, autonomous person. Rather, they use moral concepts and practices from within their own cultural and religious traditions which support the idea of human dignity as being a necessary condition for a just society.

One version of this view points out the relational nature of individual identity in some cultures, in which persons are not considered as fully autonomous individuals who can be defined in isolation from human relationships (Parekh 1994). This does not mean that there is no concern here with human dignity or a just social order. In a traditional Hindu family, for example, certain family members are expected to take on particular responsibilities in relation to their position in the family (which could be eldest son, or first cousin, for example). Thus, autonomy, as understood by some Westerners, is restricted by virtue of a person’s birth. This does not, however, negate the idea of human dignity.

For Heiner Bielefeldt, respect for human dignity provides a focus for overlapping consensus concerning human rights.

Respect for human dignity constitutes the very precondition for any normative interaction among human beings, within and among societies. At the same time, the concept of human dignity has a long history and it strongly resonates within most

religious, philosophical and cultural traditions, including the Bible, the Qur'an, the work of Confucius, or Stoic philosophy, to mention a few examples. This denotes the possibility that human dignity could become the centre of an overlapping normative consensus shared by people from different religious or nonreligious backgrounds, who otherwise may continue respectfully to disagree on many questions of ultimate concern. (Bielefeldt 2013, p. 68)

8 Rights and responsibilities

One criticism claiming Western bias in the UDHR concerns the relationship between human rights and responsibilities or duties. In terms of 'dialogue' with the UDHR, it is worth reflecting on the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, published by the InterAction Council (1997); this is an independent international organisation which draws on the experience of a group of former heads of state, and was originally chaired by the late Helmut Schmidt. Here, the Western social and historical context of the UDHR is recognised, and some attempt is made at an accommodation between 'East' and 'West'.

...many societies have traditionally conceived of human relations in terms of obligations rather than rights. This is true, in general terms, for instance, for much of Eastern thought. While traditionally in the West, at least since the 17th Century age of enlightenment, the concepts of freedom and individuality have been emphasized, in the East, the notions of responsibility and community have prevailed. The fact that a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted instead of a Universal Declaration of Human Duties undoubtedly reflects the philosophical and cultural background of the document's drafters who, as is known, represented the Western powers who emerged victorious from the Second World War. (InterAction Council 1997)

The document goes on to say:

Because rights and duties are inextricably linked, the idea of a human right only makes sense if we acknowledge the duty of all people to respect it. Regardless of a particular society's values, human relations are universally based on the existence of both rights and duties.

Examples of responsibilities or obligations in relation to rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities include the following:

If we have a right to be educated, then we have the obligation to learn as much as our capabilities allow us and, where possible, share our knowledge and experience with others

If we have a right to benefit from the earth's bounty, then we have the obligation to respect, care for and restore the earth and its natural resources.

In the context of the inclusive religious education classroom, it is important to add responsibility to take the religious and worldview positions of others seriously and to respect their right to hold them. This responsibility extends to the employment of appropriate didactical strategies, including fostering sensitivity to others while trying to understand their religious stances, including their meaning and use of religious language (Jackson 1997, 2016b, 2017, 2019).

9 Summing up dialogical liberalism

Instead of seeing the articles of the human rights codes always in terms of strict rules, there is scope, in some cases, for treating them as broader principles which can be applied in a nuanced way in different cultural situations, without abandoning their underlying moral and political force. For example, those working in the field of intercultural dialogue take a view that reflects the complexities of cultural life and cultural change as described by empirical researchers and theorised by academics working in the field (e.g. Barrett 2013; Baumann 1999; Jackson 2004, 2014, 2019; Skeie 1995, 2002; Skrefsrud 2016). Thus, the idea of interpreting human rights articles so that they are meaningful within particular cultural contexts is important. This idea is expressed in the Council of Europe's *Signposts* book in the following way:

It has been argued that there can be constructive dialogue between individuals and groups having different emphases when discussing the concept of human dignity. This dialogical view acknowledges different moral, religious and cultural sources for ideas of human dignity, but also recognises some close overlap between the different ideas. This dialogical view is consistent with the work of the Council of Europe, which has a strong commitment to the promotion and exploration of intercultural (including inter-religious) dialogue. On this view, there is a recognition that there are related expressions of the idea of human rights within different cultural or religious ways of life. For example, consensus might be found through the discussion of “overlapping values” – of attempting to find some degree of common ground, even though particular moral justifications may be rooted in different traditions or beliefs (Jackson 1997). This is close to what the philosopher John Rawls (1993) means by an “overlapping consensus”. (Jackson 2014, p. 81)

10 The Council of Europe

We now move from a general discussion of human rights and inclusive religious education to summarise the policies and activities related to this topic within the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organisation specifically concerned with human rights, and with education related to human rights.¹

The Council of Europe was established directly as a result of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It was founded on 5 May 1949 by the Treaty of London (Council of Europe 1949), signed by ten states. It now has 47 member states, covering about 820 million citizens. The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg, France, with meetings initially held at Strasbourg University, then, from 1950 to 1977, in the *Maison de l'Europe*, and from 1977 in the newly built *Palais de l'Europe*.

One of the first tasks of the Council of Europe was to draft the European Convention on Human Rights, an international treaty to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms across Europe (implemented in September 1953). All Council of Europe member states are party to the Convention and new members are expected to ratify it as soon as possible.

Completely separate from the European Parliament, the Council of Europe aims to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law and to seek solutions to social

¹ The present author has contributed to the educational work of the Council of Europe since 2002.

problems, such as xenophobia and discrimination against minorities. The Council of Europe also aims to promote awareness and development of both Europe's cultural identity and its cultural diversity. Thus, there is an intention to develop across Europe a common commitment to the values expressed in the human rights declarations and conventions—such as the value of human dignity—whilst respecting and valuing Europe's cultural diversity and the traditions of each member state. There is an acknowledged creative tension between a common approach to human rights and a recognition of European cultural diversity, as exemplified in different national histories of religion and state. There is no attempt to impose Council of Europe recommendations on member states.

The Council of Europe integrates political activity with various projects undertaken under the umbrella of its directorates. Educational projects are currently conducted within the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation, which is part of Directorate General (DGII) of Democracy.

On the political side, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe consists of members of the national parliaments of member states, not members of the European Parliament. There is also a Standing Conference of Ministers of Education. The most powerful political grouping is the Committee of Ministers which includes the Foreign Ministers of all 47 member states. Periodically, the Committee of Ministers makes Recommendations to member states based on projects conducted within the Council of Europe. These are not legally binding, but are intended for close consideration in relation to particular contextual factors in individual states. The creative use of such recommendations in particular member states provides an example of the kind of 'dialogical liberalism' referred to above. In 2008, the Committee of Ministers issued a recommendation on teaching about religions and non-religious convictions (Council of Europe 2008a).

11 The Council of Europe's educational work

The European Court of Human Rights was established in January 1959 and is responsible for the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights in the Council of Europe member states. As a public political institution, the Council of Europe cannot take a stance on the truth or falsity of religious claims. Central to the Council of Europe's educational activity is its work on human rights education, regarded as intimately related to education for democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue. In the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, for example, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education are regarded as a continuum (Council of Europe 2013).

The Council of Europe's educational work at school level focuses on the inter-related areas of education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, and intercultural dialogue. Cutting across these are themes such as language, history and, from 2002, religion (and from 2008, religion and non-religious convictions), as well as interdisciplinary educational work on topics such as media representations of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Thus, the underlying rationale for including studies of religions in the Council of Europe's educational work might be said to relate to human rights, citizenship and intercultural education. The reason why the Council of Europe did not include study of religions in its educational work prior to 2002 was not an inherent secularism (meaning 'anti-religious stance'), but its application of the French principle of *laïcité*, in which religion was regarded as a private concern, rather than a topic for public discussion

or treatment in public education. As will be discussed below, the Council of Europe changed its view conclusively on this topic.

The term ‘religious education’ is not used in the Council of Europe literature, mainly because of its ambiguity, preferring to use expressions such as ‘the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue’, making the link between the study of religions and the Council of Europe’s ongoing work in intercultural education. There was no intention to *reduce* religion to culture by making this link. Religion described as a cultural phenomenon, or ‘cultural fact’, is an attempt to recognise the presence of religion and religions in a way that can be publicly agreed and affirmed by all. Whatever disagreements there are about religion, everyone, at least, should be able to recognise that religions—including those who hold and express religious beliefs—are there, in space and time. There is no intention on the Council of Europe’s part to assert that this is *all* that religions are. Of course, religions have claims to truth but, since these cannot be verified or falsified in a way that would command general public agreement, one can only talk reasonably about the fact that they and their members exist, use religious language, are committed to certain beliefs and values, and participate in certain practices. (On avoiding the reduction of religion to culture, see Jackson 2014, pp. 21–22).

12 The religious dimension of intercultural education

The Council of Europe’s educational remit follows from its commitment to human rights, giving close attention to human rights, citizenship and intercultural education. In 2002, the Council of Europe added the study of religions to its educational work, through a project entitled ‘The Challenge of Intercultural Education Today: Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe’. Adding the dimension of religion required revising the Council’s concept of intercultural education so that it contributed to the Delors Report’s four pillars of education for the twenty-first century—to know, to do, to live together and to be (UNESCO 1996). Thus the Council of Europe is concerned with knowledge and understanding of religions, and with the personal, existential dimension of learning about religions, as well as with the social goal of learning to live peacefully in the context of religious diversity.

A meeting in Paris in 2003 and a conference in Oslo in 2004 enabled the project to move forward, and a team was assembled, including religious education specialists, which produced a reference book for schools on religious diversity and intercultural education (Keast 2007). The team assisted the Committee of Ministers in drafting a Recommendation to member states on ‘the Dimension of Religions and Nonreligious Convictions within Intercultural Education’ (Council of Europe 2008a). Members of the team assisted in establishing annual Exchanges including representatives of religions and belief organisations in Europe. Team members also contributed to interdisciplinary projects on ‘intercultural encounters’. Some of the project team’s activities were summarised in the 2008 Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (Council of Europe 2008b). The present author conducted a feasibility study for a possible European Resource Centre on human rights, citizenship and intercultural education, including studies of religious diversity; the European Wergeland Centre was established in Oslo in 2009. Two members of the project team were invited to participate in a joint Council of Europe/European Wergeland Centre working group to develop strategies to assist member states in utilising the 2008 Ministerial Recommendation. The present author wrote the book *Signposts*, on behalf of

the working group, for use by policymakers and practitioners across Europe in developing ideas for teaching about religions and non-religious convictions in schools (Jackson 2014).

13 Non-religious convictions/world views

The articles in the human rights codes concerned with freedom of religion or belief have been the basis for a social-instrumental argument for including studies of religions *and* other world views in public education. This rationale has been used by the Council of Europe and also by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR 2007). Initially (in 2002) the Council of Europe was concerned with adding studies of religions to its work on intercultural education. This policy was broadened (in 2008) to include non-religious convictions as well as religions, following discussion within the Committee of Ministers. However, it is important to note that Council of Europe recommendations are intended as working tools for member states, rather than strict directives, and member states are free to develop policy in ways that are appropriate within the national context. However, in the time available between the decision to add ‘non-religious convictions’ and the date of publication of the Council of Europe recommendation, it was impossible to explore in depth all the issues concerning the precise nature of the non-religious world views to be included, nor the various issues related to their inclusion. Some of these issues are explored in *Signposts*, chapter 7 (Jackson 2014, pp. 67–75). More research on this topic is being conducted by members of the *Signposts* International Research Network (SIRN) (see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/developmentprojects/sirn/>). The present author’s view is that the study of religions in public schools should be broadened, but that any change must be brought about in such a way that it does not impair the goal of understanding religions.

14 Conclusion

This article has discussed the nature of human rights, concentrating on the emergence of modern human rights codes following the Second World War. The Western *framing* of the UDHR and the European Convention on Human Rights is acknowledged, but human rights are not seen as having only a Western origin. What the modern human rights codes offer are principles that can be applied at a political level. Thus it is possible to be committed to a particular set of beliefs and practices at a personal level, while operating in a human rights context at a political level.

The primary goal of the Council of Europe’s work on religious diversity and education has been to promote—at school level—public *understanding* of religions and non-religious world views, taking the view that young people with some knowledge and understanding of religions and other world views are more likely to be tolerant of difference within society than those presented only with stereotypical accounts. However, the Council of Europe’s work on religious diversity and education is linked to the four pillars of education outlined in the Delors Report—learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be—illustrating that the rationale for the project includes an existential dimension, going beyond increasing tolerance.

Such dialogue is likely to reveal tensions between certain human rights values and values associated with particular cultural or religious traditions. These need to be acknowledged and explored, especially if such studies are to contribute to intercultural and inter-religious understanding. This activity exemplifies the view of ‘dialogical liberalism’ outlined above. The Council of Europe *Signposts* book offers advice (Jackson 2014, pp. 47–57) on applying the idea that there should be ‘provision of a safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule’ (Council of Europe 2008a, p. 7.1). Examples of effective dialogue, based on European classroom-based research and involving young people with a range of different personal world views (e.g. van der Kooij 2016) are given in *Signposts*.

Finally, policymakers and educators need to ensure that social-instrumental aims that are sometimes (incorrectly) perceived as the *only* focus of the Council of Europe, need to be complemented by a liberal education aim, and by the goal of contributing to the personal development of children and young people.

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