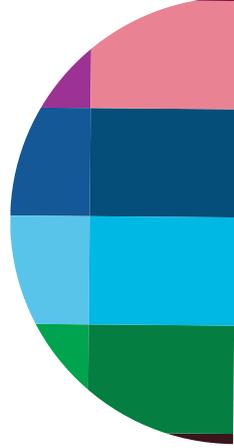




 **CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATION WITH
CHILDREN AGED 0–6 YEARS**
 DISCUSSION PAPER

unicef  | for every child



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Front cover:

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A young girl attending kindergarten class in Niamey, the capital of Niger. With a preschool attendance rate of only 12 per cent, UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Primary Education to conduct a pilot experiment to improve the quality of teaching. The ultimate goal is to ensure that all girls and boys have access to early childhood development and to prepare children for primary education.

Back cover

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Dwi plays with toys from a recreational kit he received in 2020 for children affected by COVID-19 at his home in Jombang, Indonesia.

Designed by:

Pablo Rebaque IG: [@rebaqueP](https://www.instagram.com/rebaqueP)

CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATION WITH CHILDREN AGED 0–6 YEARS

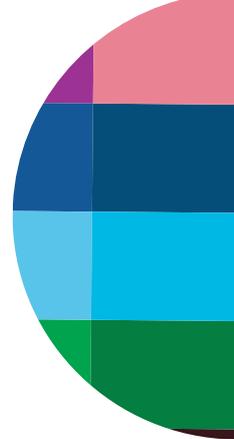
DISCUSSION PAPER

A review of literature and practice

This discussion paper presents the findings of a literature review in relation to child rights education with very young children, and the outcomes of some informal research undertaken with practitioners working on this topic in seven countries. It presents two examples of projects and programmes from UNICEF National Committees, in Norway and the UK. It proposes that by using fun and creative age-appropriate techniques, very young children can learn about their rights. They can understand and use the language of rights in context. By using concrete examples as a starting point, young children can then understand more abstract concepts about rights (such as rights-holders and duty-bearers) as they relate to their immediate context. The impact of this on their pro-social development, protection and democratic participation is positive. This paper intends to stimulate dialogue and further thinking and research on this topic for which evidence is currently limited.



This cost-effective preschool, in a remote community in Armenia, was established during 2019-2020 by UNICEF and partners. It is the only one in the local area. 60 per cent of children aged 3–5 in Armenia do not benefit from early learning.



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BACKGROUND

Ensuring that all children and adults know and understand children’s rights is at the core of UNICEF’s mandate to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter the Convention): “UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children’s rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.”¹ This is in line with Article 42 of the Convention which requires that “States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.” UNICEF globally is engaged in a wide range of child rights education (CRE)² activities to support this work.



In response to global requests for video animation resources for young children in relation to the Convention, UNICEF’s Human Rights Unit (Programme Group Leadership Team) and Child Rights Programming and Advocacy Unit (PFP) set out in 2021 to produce a **standardized UNICEF-branded video animation about the Convention aimed at children aged 3 to 6 years.**

This project builds on and reinforces work conducted in 2019 by these teams to develop a **standardized child-friendly version and visual icons for the Convention.** Prior to this, various versions of the Convention in child-friendly language had been developed since its adoption in 1989, including by UNICEF country offices and National Committees. These versions varied in quality and accuracy and were often specific to a country and therefore not easily transferable to another context. Many were prepared without consultations with children. Many visual illustrations representing articles of the Convention have also been developed over the years, often through creative projects involving child participation, supported by local artists. However, these illustrations are often very culturally specific, complex drawings or interpretive works of art. There was therefore a need for a comprehensive, universal set of simple visual icons for the Convention.



¹ UNICEF mission statement, <www.unicef.org/about-us/mission-statement>, accessed 16 July 2021.

² “Child rights education is teaching and learning about the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ‘child rights approach’ – in order to empower both adults and children to take action to advocate for and apply these at the family, school, community, national and global levels.” *Child Rights Education Toolkit: Rooting Child Rights in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Schools*, UNICEF Division of Private Fundraising and Partnerships, Geneva, 2014, p. 20.



In 2019, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention, UNICEF, in a partnership with Child Rights Connect, developed a child-friendly version (aimed at children aged 10–17) as well as visual icons for the Convention overall and for each of the main Convention articles. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed the child-friendly text and icons and officially granted its support. UNICEF has adopted the text as the organization’s standard child-friendly version of the Convention. Children participated in the development of the child-friendly text and icons through a global Children’s Advisory Team established by Child Rights Connect, with additional input into the text from over 100 children through Child Rights Connect’s global network of non-governmental organization partners. Three draft versions of each of the 43 article icons were then put to a global online public vote in 13 languages, for both children and adults, which ran from 12 April to 14 June 2019.



The UNICEF child-friendly text of the Convention is for translation by UNICEF only, supported by an internal UNICEF guidance document on how to adapt this, through child participation processes, into other languages. Any translations of the child-friendly text – and use therein of the UNICEF logo – must be signed off by the representative of a UNICEF country office or the executive director of a UNICEF National Committee.

Non-UNICEF stakeholders may use the child-friendly text of the Convention³ in any of the available languages, without adapting it in any way, citing copyright '© UNICEF'. The English language version of the child-friendly text must be cited copyright '© UNICEF and Child Rights Connect'.

UNICEF developed the **Convention icons** as a contribution to global CRE and advocacy efforts. It is hoped that all UNICEF country offices and National Committees, as well as United Nations, government and civil society partners, will use the icons to help promote the Convention for the benefit of children everywhere. However, to maintain quality control and consistency, the design files for translation are only available to UNICEF offices.⁴ Any translations of the icon text must also be signed off by the representative of a UNICEF country office or the executive director of a UNICEF National Committee.

Non-UNICEF stakeholders may use the **Convention icons**⁵ for informational purposes that are illustrative, educational, non-commercial and not intended to raise funds, and they must do so in line with the Design Guidelines,⁶ citing copyright 'Designs © UNICEF, 2019'. **Commercial use of the Convention icons on a product developed and sold for profit is not permitted**, even in educational textbooks if these products are being sold for profit.

Although used for a very wide range of ages, including with adults, the child-friendly version of the Convention was designed for children aged 10 to 17 years. Demand for CRE resources for younger children led UNICEF to explore the potential for a video animation aimed at children aged 3 to 6 years. This age group was targeted as it corresponds to pre-primary school experience in many countries, a cohort which has traditionally received less attention in relation to CRE due to perceived challenges associated with this developmental stage.

A mapping exercise was conducted to identify existing Convention video animations, produced by UNICEF or others globally. An analysis of approximately 50 videos currently available online (identified by UNICEF National Committees and via YouTube key word searches) did not reveal an existing video animation that would be appropriate to promote as a standardized global UNICEF resource for young children. This confirmed the need for a new product.

³ <<https://bit.ly/crcicons>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

⁴ Internal UNICEF and National Committee access only: <<https://bit.ly/crciconsunicef>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

⁵ <<https://bit.ly/crcicons>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

⁶ <https://weshare.unicef.org/archive/CRC_icons_Design_Guidelines_V2_Sept2020-2AM408P3YAVZ.html>, accessed 16 July 2021.

Feedback was therefore sought from early childhood development experts on what works and what doesn't work when communicating with this age group, as well as from the UNICEF National Committee CRE Network, to explore how practitioners are approaching CRE with children aged 3 to 6 years in practice. Responses were received from seven countries.⁷ Some of the National Committees responded directly, based on their experience of designing and delivering CRE programmes for this age group (Spain and the UK). Others reached out to early childhood educators who work on CRE directly with children of this age group (Iceland, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden and USA). See Annex 1 for this full feedback.

Informal outreach to an academic contact⁸ who has explored CRE issues identified some broader literature on the topic of CRE for three- to six-year-olds, and members of the CRE Network made further literature suggestions. This literature review is outlined in Part 6 and Annex 3.

The findings of this informal review of literature and practice touch on the experience of children even younger than 3 years, and reveal a general lack of evidence in CRE for very young children. The topic was therefore deemed worthy to develop into this UNICEF discussion paper, which aims to explore the concept and evidence from a discursive, open angle, hopefully advancing understanding and stimulating debate and further research on this emerging topic.



QUESTIONS POSED TO UNICEF NATIONAL COMMITTEES

See Annex 1 for full responses to these questions from practitioners. On the understanding that there is a big developmental range between the ages of 3 and 6 years....



- A** How do you introduce the idea of 'child rights' to children aged 3 to 6?
- B** In your opinion, is it possible for children aged 3 to 6 to understand the 'abstract concept' of child rights?
- C** Do you 'only' give examples of types of rights, such as food, health, safety, play, education, etc., or do you also try to explain what 'rights' are and/or how they are different from needs? If so, how do you do this?
- D** Do you use the actual word 'rights' when working with children aged 3 to 6, and/or do you resort to other words such as 'needs'?
- E** Do children aged 3 to 6 confuse the word 'rights' with other words which might sound similar in your own language? (e.g. in English 'child rights', 'left and right', 'right and wrong')
- F** How do you know that children aged 3 to 6 have understood what 'rights' are?
- G** Do you have any tips on what works or doesn't work when introducing child rights to children aged 3 to 6? Is there anything else you want to tell us?

⁷ Iceland, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States of America

⁸ Lee Jerome, Associate Professor of Education, Middlesex University, UK.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Initial feedback from some early child development experts indicated that children aged 3 to 6 are not yet developmentally capable of fully understanding abstract concepts of 'rights' (such as the rights-holder/duty-bearer relationship), and may confuse the term 'rights' with similar words in their own language which have a different meaning (e.g. in English – right and wrong, left and right). Some of these views were echoed by UNICEF Spain and by some practitioners in Slovakia (see Annex 1 for details).

Other early child development experts with experience of child rights indicated that at this age, it is nonetheless possible to start laying the foundations for an understanding of child rights concepts.

Most practitioners in National Committee countries who responded to the survey reported that CRE can be successfully carried out, even with very young children. This is supported by the findings of the (albeit limited) literature review (Annex 3). The findings and lessons learned that follow are drawn from this majority feedback.



LESSONS
LEARNED



Within the framework of an early childhood development programme in Mongolia, implemented by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Science, a new child-friendly kindergarten building has been established with capacity for 100 children.

- 01 Rights are for *all* children, not just from the age of (e.g.) 5, so all children should know about them.
- 02 By using fun and creative age-appropriate techniques, very young children *can* learn about their rights.
- 03 Young children can understand and use the language of rights in context.
- 04 Children as young as 2 years old can identify some rights, such as the right to clean water and healthy food, to have a home, to play and to express their views.
- 05 Having learned about their rights in a context that supports age-appropriate CRE, educators report that young children can then use their rights to talk about moral dilemmas, resolve disputes, be more aware of their own and others' safety, show more empathy to others, be more vocal and confident about expressing their views, and – when starting school – challenge others when their rights are not respected.
- 06 Using concrete and age-appropriate examples as a starting point, young children *can* understand more abstract concepts about rights (such as rights-holders and duty-bearers) as they relate to their immediate context.
- 07 If any confusion arises from the word 'rights' as being the same or similar to other words in the child's own language, this can be dealt with relatively easily through repetition and reinforcing the meaning in context, for example by illustrating and associating the word with visual and auditory cues. This is the same process taken with other words that have multiple meanings in the child's language and is not seen as a major problem by practitioners.
- 08 Early years settings which embed CRE (learning *about*, *through* and *for* child rights) report positive feedback from teachers and parents/caregivers.
- 09 A search of English language academic literature did not reveal much research explicitly addressing CRE for young children.
- 09 One academic paper about how children aged 1 to 3 years enact their human rights in the preschool setting explores ways in which human rights become part of and affect young children's everyday practices. Among other things, "[t]he very young children in this preschool both meet and have to deal with abstract principles of interaction deriving from ideas about equal value and treatment"⁹ It is not dealt with in the paper, but it would be interesting to see further academic research about whether and how young children's everyday 'navigation' of the situations they face, as part of their overall development and learning journey, could be affected and possibly enhanced by explicit age-appropriate CRE. Such work is already going on in practice in some rights-respecting preschools but has yet to be formally studied: "We work towards every child knowing about their rights and how to use them. This goes hand in hand with our approach to children's participation and influence" (Swedish Rights Respecting preschool).
- 10 The experience of the Boulder Journey School in Colorado, USA, working with children from ages 6 weeks to 6 years, shows that very young children are able to understand, communicate about and exercise their rights, and take action for the rights of others. Supported by practical examples and academic references, the case is made that young children are far more competent and pro-social than most adults imagine, but the onus is on adults to slow down, re-think

⁹ Quennerstedt, Ann, 'Young children's enactments of human rights in early childhood education', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, vol. 24, no. 1, 5–18, 2016, p. 15.

assumptions, transform traditional adult-child power relations, and use greater creativity in listening and responding to the many (often non-verbal) languages in which young children communicate.¹⁰

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To communicate rights for very young children, it would be useful to unpack, through a child rights lens, the five components of the nurturing care framework for early childhood development: good health; adequate nutrition; opportunities for early learning; safety and security; and stimulation/responsive care.¹¹ This would help to identify specific child rights messages for children and parents/carers. Further work is needed in this area.

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The keys to success:

- ✓ Get supporting adults on board (parents/carers and educators) so they understand child rights and can then consistently and automatically apply a 'child rights lens' to their interactions with young children.
- ✓ Use play as the basis of CRE: both free and structured play, with lots of visuals, photos, songs, stories, games, drama, puppets and mascots (e.g. Ronnie the Rights Respecting Rabbit).
- ✓ Accurately use the language of rights.
- ✓ Name the Convention articles and name everything that is a right as a right.
- ✓ Simplify rights/Convention articles and break them down so young children can understand them but keep them accurate: do not distort the basic meaning of rights and do not teach rights alongside, or as being dependent on, children fulfilling 'responsibilities'. Rights are inalienable, meaning they cannot be taken away from someone who fails to fulfil certain responsibilities. When 'rights and responsibilities' are taught together, there is a danger that rights are misinterpreted and used as a mechanism to control children's behaviour. UNICEF instead recommends that children should be helped to understand their own rights and to respect the rights of others.
- ✓ Start with concrete examples relevant to young children's everyday lives (e.g. names, birthdays, family situation, food, safety, privacy – such as going to the toilet).
- ✓ Keep repeating and reinforcing the language and examples. It's a journey. It takes time.
- ✓ Move from the concrete to the abstract.
- ✓ Involve young children in decision making so they can see the impact of their agency (e.g. preschool Rights Councils).

¹⁰ Hall, Ellen Lynn and Kofkin Rudkin, Jennifer, *Seen and Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, and The Althouse Press, University of Western Ontario, 2011

¹¹ See e.g. UNICEF, *Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low and Middle Income Countries*, <https://sites.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/UNICEF-Standards_for_Parenting_Programs_6-8-17_pg.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2021.

- ✓ Allow young children to be together in pairs and groups as much as possible to help challenge each other, further develop their thinking and experiences and have greater confidence in speaking out.
- ✓ “Scaffold children’s participation. Adults can use our resources, such as life experience, access to information, and facility with verbal expression, to help children participate. Encourage children to engage in their own processes of discovery and meaning making rather than taking them over. Adults continually must consider whether a situation calls for stepping in or stepping out.”¹² This applies also to peer conflict resolution.
- ✓ Leverage and strengthen existing parenting support programmes to also include skill building on communication about child rights.
- ✓ Design parenting support programmes with a strong focus on child rights, especially those of very young children.



IMPLICATIONS FOR UNICEF’S CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD VIDEO ANIMATION PROJECT

- ▶ Producing a one-off video resource will not magically result in young children understanding their rights, but it will contribute to the longer journey, supported by adults.
- ▶ If UNICEF were to produce a video animation for three- to six-year-olds, it would be a useful contribution to this journey.
- ▶ The video should accurately use the language of rights and not refer instead to ‘needs’.
- ▶ The video should simplify rights and focus on a few selected examples, but it should not distort the meaning of rights or create new rights (e.g. there is no ‘right to be loved’).
- ▶ The examples of rights in the video should be linked to everyday experiences of young children.
- ▶ Use repetition as much as possible.
- ▶ Make it fun and visually interesting. Most of the parameters from the initial project concept paper about what appeals to children aged 3 to 6 still stand, as do the elements required to make the video as globally relevant and easy to translate as possible.

It is anticipated that the video animation will be publicly released by the end of 2021.

¹² Ibid, Conclusion.





EXAMPLES OF UNICEF NATIONAL COMMITTEE CRE PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN AGED 3 TO 6 YEARS



UNICEF NATIONAL
COMMITTEE
EXAMPLES

UNICEF's Norway's 'Rights Cards' for kindergartens and primary schools¹³

Aimed at stimulating short discussions suitable for young children, the material consists of 15 picture cards and a booklet for the educator. Each card puts the spotlight on a right, such as the right to food, play, go to school, have a place to live, express one's opinion and be protected from violence and abuse.

The cards have a carefully selected picture on one side and text for the educator on the other, with questions and suggestions for topics of conversation. They address rights that apply to all children regardless of where they live, both the special challenges faced by children in other countries and current issues for children in Norway. The booklet has background information and suggestions for songs, literature and activities related to the various rights. The booklet and photos can be downloaded, but the cards work best physically – in a conversation or related activity. The physical cards are A4-sized, durable and can be wiped clean.

The cards use the word 'rights' combined with photos and dialogue with the children, but there is not a specific focus on the difference between rights and needs. The card 'All children have the same rights' includes text relating to adults' responsibilities: "Many adults work for children to be well and get what they are entitled to. UNICEF is working with others to help children who need it. In Norway, the Ombudsman will ensure that adults do what they can to ensure that children in Norway are doing well."

Around 4,500 packs have been produced over the years, and the cards have been well-received by kindergarten teachers. The resources have been presented in teachers' trade magazines and at conferences. They can be ordered free online,¹⁴ although postage and packing must be paid.

The project was developed in 2011 in cooperation with kindergarten teachers (funded by NORAD – the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and revised and expanded in 2017, funded by the Ministry of Justice and elaborating the focus on the right to protection from violence and abuse. The Minister of Children and Families took part in the launch of the revised version and has promoted it in various contexts.

¹³ <www.unicef.no/skole/undervisning/barnerettighetene/rettighetskort>, accessed 16 July 2021.

¹⁴ <www3.verdensgaver.no/undervisning>, accessed 16 July 2021.

The 15 cards cover a range of provision, protection and participation rights,¹⁵ phrased as “All children have the right to...”

- **Provision:** ... enough and proper food (Article 24); clean water (Article 24); help when they are sick (Article 24); a place to stay (Article 27); go to school (Articles 28 and 29).
- **Protection:** ...be safe and well (Article 19); care [be cared for] (Articles 9, 18, 20, 21); decide over their own body (Article 34); protection [in relation to refugees] (Article 22).
- **Participation:** ...speak out and be taken seriously (Article 12); believe what they want (Article 14); play (Article 31); rest (Article 31); all children who need it have the right to extra help [in relation to disability] (Article 23).
- **All children have the same rights (Article 2).**

UNICEF UK’s Rights Respecting Schools Award programme¹⁶ in relation to nursery schools¹⁷

Nursery schools cater for children aged 3 to 5 years in the UK, with some two-year-olds included. Some nurseries are attached to primary schools. As of March 2021, UNICEF UK had 108 nursery schools registered in the Rights Respecting Schools Award programme across England, Scotland and Wales (none currently in Northern Ireland). Of the 108 settings, 35 have achieved Bronze level, 30 have Silver¹⁸ and six have Gold¹⁹. The awards are valid for three years, after which time schools must be reaccredited.

The accreditation reports highlight a range of good practices, showing how very young children can benefit from knowing about their rights. The assessments show that children as young as 2 years old can identify some rights, such as the right to clean water and healthy food, to have a home, to play and to express their views. The language of rights is used by staff and echoed back by young children.

¹⁵ The cards are not grouped in this way, and they do not reference specific Convention articles, although a separate poster of the Convention rights is included in the physical pack. The ‘provision, protection and participation’ grouping, and reference to specific articles, has been done by the author of this paper.

¹⁶ <www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools>, accessed 16 July 2021.

¹⁷ Updated from a UNICEF PFP Child Rights Education good practice case study, 2017.

¹⁸ The Silver: Rights Aware accreditation is granted to schools that show good progress towards embedding child rights in their school.

¹⁹ The Gold: Rights Respecting accreditation, the highest stage of the Rights Respecting Schools Award, is given to schools that have fully embedded the Convention in their practice and ethos. The award is granted by UNICEF UK following a thorough accreditation process.

“Long term exposure over the year has a positive effect; without prompting, two-year-olds now talk about the right to be safe.” Staff member, nursery school, Birmingham.

“When you hear children quoting rights in context, it’s powerful.” Staff member, nursery school Birmingham.

Early years settings use a wide range of methods to teach children about rights, including songs, stories, games, photos, puppets and mascots, such as ‘Ronnie the Rights Respecting Rabbit’. Charters, such as one nursery’s ‘I Feel Safe Charter’, have been developed with young children to replace ‘rules’ and use Makaton sign language to make them accessible. Children in these preschools are taught about cultural diversity, celebrating differences, recycling, growing healthy food and saving water, all in the context of children’s rights.

“Forest School planning included the opportunity to build a shelter for Ronnie the Rights Respecting Rabbit to fulfil his right to an adequate standard of living, which the children extended to ensure there were spaces to meet his right to rest and play.” Extract from an accreditation report.

The rights-respecting approach also influences the way that staff relate to young children: *“I’m listening, I’m respecting his views”* (Staff member, nursery school, Birmingham). Even very young children enjoy their right to participate in decisions. Staff seek and respond to children’s views about the nursery space and activities, through watching children’s behaviour, using simple questionnaires and voting.

The nurseries themselves describe considerable impact from teaching such young children about rights. Rights help them to talk about moral dilemmas and guide children to resolve disputes well. Children are more aware of their own and others’ safety and show more empathy to others. Staff describe children as more vocal and confident about expressing their views. Children are observed taking the language of rights with them when they start school, and challenging others when their rights are not respected.

The work undertaken by these early years settings shows that, by using fun and creative techniques, very young children can learn about their rights. Importantly, they can also use them to stay safe, to learn how to respect themselves, other people and the planet, and to develop a sense of their place in the world that forms a foundation for the rest of childhood. One mother explained that through the work on child rights, the nursery was *“getting children ready for the world we live in”* (nursery school, London).

Rights-respecting outcomes in nurseries do not differ from primary or secondary schools, but the processes do. For example, there is no obligation to have a ‘charter’ of rights in the curriculum (given that many of the children are pre-verbal). They are also accredited slightly differently: a familiar member of staff asks questions to the children, observed by the assessors. In primary and secondary schools, the assessors ask children the questions directly. Furthermore, nursery schools are not required to complete the baseline questionnaires.

See Annex 2 for a sample assessment report from a Gold standard UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Nursery school.

6

LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

See Annex 3 for summary findings from these documents.

✓ **1992: Human Rights Education in the Elementary School: A Case Study of Fourth Graders' Responses to a Democratic, Social Action Oriented Human Rights Curriculum;** Rahima C. Wade, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.²⁰

✓ **1999: Raising Children with Roots, Rights and Responsibilities: Celebrating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;** written by Lori DuPont, Joanne Foley, and Annette Gagliardi, Founders of the Circle for the Child Project; edited and designed by Julie Penshorn, Co-Director, Growing Communities for Peace; published by University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center and the Stanley Foundation.²¹

✓ **2010: Young Children's Engagement with Issues of Global Justice,** A report by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Trócaire; Brian Ruane, AnneMarie Kavanagh, Fionnuala Waldron, Sheila Dillon, Maria Casey, Catherine Maunsell, Anita Prunty.²²

✓ **2011: Seen and Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education,** Ellen Lynn Hall and Jennifer Kofkin Rudkin, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, and The Althouse Press, University of Western Ontario.²³

✓ **2016: Young Children's Enactments of Human Rights in Early Childhood Education,** Ann Quennerstedt, Department of Education, School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden, in *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 2016, Vol. 24, No. 1, 5–18.²⁴



DOCUMENTS
CONSULTED



Balaram with his grandson Bhutesh, aged 4, in Rajasthan, India.

²⁰ Abstract available at <<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI9233173>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

²¹ Available at <<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/pdf/rrr.pdf>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

²² Available at <www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/chrce/pdf/CHCRE-Trocaire-report.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2021.

²³ Publisher's summary available at: <www.tpress.com/seen-and-heard-9780807751602>, accessed 16 July 2021.

²⁴ Summary available at: <www.researchgate.net/publication/283238244_Young_children's_enactments_of_human_rights_in_early_childhood_education>, accessed 16 July 2021.



ANNEX 1: PRACTITIONER FEEDBACK ON QUESTIONS

Responses are referenced by country.²⁵ Where multiple responses were received from the same country, the replies are colour-coded.



FEEDBACK ON QUESTIONS

A

How do you introduce the idea of 'child rights' to children aged 3 to 6?



ICELAND

RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

In 2019 I did an action research for a master's thesis. The core of my thesis was "How can I improve my teaching of democratic values to five- to six-year-old children?" That led me to introduce the Convention. Values led me to rights because children did not understand why they should care or participate. I had to break the word into small words that they understand: to be fair, help, etc., and build up from there. Children learn vocabulary, behaviour, ideas through free play and structured play. So, I suggest that the answer is by playing, talking with them (philosophical conversation), and creating a play that they can internalize and learn from.



NORWAY

RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

I would start with engaging the children by asking if they have ever heard about child rights. Then I'll introduce it like this:

- "A right is something you get when you're born. No one is allowed to take your rights from you, not your parents and not other children. All the children on this earth have the same rights as you. You are also not allowed to take them away from anyone else. A right is supposed to protect us, so we don't go hungry and so we have someone who takes care of us. But we also have other rights, such as the right to say what we mean, and to believe in whatever we want."

Then I'll show them a poster of child rights.

- "You have 54 rights, and they are all listed here. Who would like to come up and point at a right so we can read it out loud?"

²⁵ **ICELAND:** Patricia Valdes, Lækur preschool (with thanks to Pétur Þorkelsson, UNICEF Iceland CRE Officer for coordination); **NORWAY:** Wid Al-shamkawy, Kindergarten Teacher/UNICEF Norway intern (with thanks to Ellen Sandøe, UNICEF Norway CRE Manager for additional information); **SLOVAKIA:** four nursery teachers (with thanks to Filip Mroč, UNICEF Slovakia Schools Coordinator for translation and coordination); **SPAIN:** Ignacio Guadix García, UNICEF Spain, Head of Integrated Campaigns and CRE; **SWEDEN:** two preschools working with an adapted version of UNICEF Sweden's Rights Respecting Schools programme (the second preschool's answers include input from their Rights Council – a group of educators representing all sectors of the preschool) – with thanks to Mikael Blixt, UNICEF Sweden CRE Officer for translation and coordination; **UK:** Frances Bestley, UNICEF UK, Head of Rights Respecting Schools Award programme; **USA:** Mara Mintzer, Director of Growing Up Boulder and Vicki Oleson, Boulder Journey School (with thanks to Danielle Goldberg, Managing Director, U.S. Programs and the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, UNICEF USA).

- We talk about the chosen right and reflect on it together.

We had a project with FORUT [a Norwegian non-governmental organization], where the children got to watch short videos and follow a story of a child in Sri Lanka. We talked before and after the video about the rights and compared them to our country. I have read stories about family, friendship and education, and tried to get the children to relate them to rights. Other methods I've used to explain rights are through role play. I've also had early childhood education students that did a puppet show.



SLOVAKIA

**RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS**



I would try to explain it to the children as clearly as possible by using it in a conversation. What does it mean that we have some rights? That there are certain everyday needs that we meet and that there are obligations associated with it,²⁶ such as that children have the right to go to kindergarten, that we care about their health, that they can express their opinion when we talk, but also that they need to clean up their toys and can't hurt friends and such.



Children aged 3 to 6 are sensitive and receptive. They like to learn new things and learn mainly visually, tactilely. I manage to explain theoretical things to them with the help of cards, pictograms and coloured concept maps. Children see the pictogram and try to describe what they see, what problem is solved in the picture, so we derive their rights. They draw pictures about individual rights.



We have not yet thought about how we would introduce this topic to children in kindergarten, but it would certainly be in the form of a game.



I introduced the idea of children's rights via a short dramatization with dolls portraying children with different skin colours and types of clothing (our kindergarten provided this as a didactic tool in line with the topic including multiculturalism). The dramatization was focused on the fact that it does not matter what we look like, where we're from, what language we speak or in what house we live: we are all equal and have equal rights.

²⁶ Responses are included verbatim. Please note: UNICEF does not support the teaching of rights in conjunction with responsibilities, i.e. implying that rights are dependent upon children fulfilling certain responsibilities. Rights are inherent (we are born with them) and inalienable (they cannot be taken away). Rights should not be interpreted or communicated in a way that aims to control children's behaviour. UNICEF instead recommends that children should be helped to understand their own rights and respect the rights of others.



SWEDEN
RESPONSES
FROM 2 RIGHTS
RESPECTING
PRESCHOOLS



We start to introduce the Convention and its articles when we get the group together, by connecting them to name, birthday, identity, family situation, etc. We also introduce the Children's Council and read books on the Convention and everyone's right to speak up. We use learning by play, for example with help from *Friendlydolls*,²⁷ movies, songs, QR codes, hand puppets and pictures on the walls. Every year we celebrate 24 October [United Nations Day] and 20 November [World Children's Day/anniversary of the Convention]. In addition, we show examples of other children who are role models, for example with the book *Children Who Changed the World*.²⁸



In the everyday work with the children, the articles are spotlighted in different contexts for the children to build an understanding about their meaning. We name the articles in a clear way and illustrate them in the physical learning environment. We involve the parents/carers and highlight the articles in information and development talks. We get a lot of feedback from parents/carers where the children express themselves about their rights at home, such as "I didn't know this before but now I have developed, I have the right to develop". We want to, at all times, have a dialogue with the children for them to experience participation and influence over their education, from democratic decisions. We break down the articles to land at the children's level. For example, with Article 12, every child has the right to be heard, we deep-dive into what the actual words mean. Then we can get a better understanding of the meaning of the article. Every week, the children sit in pairs to talk about what we are going to do on a specific day, both the location to visit and the activity. Then they get to put it in the weekly letter to the parents/carers. The children get to vote on which book and what activity boxes to bring. We have been talking a lot about what children have the right to. We deep-dive together with the children, within the guiding principles working with Malmö University on a study. As with Article 6, what does the word 'develop' mean? When do you develop? "Like when I learn something. I couldn't ride a bike, then I practiced, so I developed and now I can ride a bike." We watch films about the Convention and rights. We name the articles by name and number and put them into context. And repetition is a must for the children to consolidate the knowledge.

²⁷ <<https://friendly.se>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

²⁸ <www.adlibris.com/se/bok/barn-som-forandrat-varlden-9789171265258>, accessed 16 July 2021.



Children aged 1 to 3: We are focusing a lot on the foundation for the value-based work by making sure they feel safe and that they want to be at the preschool. The children get to choose, for example the environment they want to be in by selecting from pictures. This forms a foundation for the children to express their opinion and voice, by choosing the environment they want to be in, what fruit they want to eat, what they want to drink, etc. We also work with the characters Rabbit and Hedgehog²⁹ who get into different situations.

Children aged 4 to 6: We are working a lot with the Convention books *The Ten Friendbooks*.³⁰ We use rights terminology, such as the Convention and rights, and connect that to what we read in the books. Then we give examples of rights. We continue to work with Rabbit and Hedgehog and connect that to the books. Right now, we are working with feelings and our safety walks (mapping safe and less safe areas around the preschool). During the walks, we use smileys for the children who do not speak yet or do not speak Swedish.



Milan, aged 3, and his mother Samratben with the preschool education activity kit provided during lockdown, in Gujarat, India.

²⁹ <www.nok.se/titlar/laromedel-b1/kompisar>, accessed 16 July 2021.

³⁰ <www.adlibris.com/se/bok/kompisbocker-baserade-pa-barnkonventionen-handledning-och-inspiration-9789127458994>, accessed 16 July 2021.



RESPONSE FROM HEAD OF UNICEF UK RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The first step is getting staff to understand about child rights: they are the specialists on how to convey messages. They introduce the concepts in the best ways they know how. They take lots of pictures of children doing things and saying, "this is the right to play/feel safe/have health care"; move from concrete to abstract; use lots of pictures of children enjoying their rights; use proper language, explain it, and talk about things in terms of what the children *do* understand. It takes time: it's not a one-off thing. There are lots of ways to 'drip' things into nursery education about rights. UNICEF UK covers the full list of rights with teachers but focuses on the 15–20 they talk about with children of this age. The rights that nursery schools are focusing on stemmed from a training session where the teachers agreed on the following articles:



(in terms of treating everybody fairly)

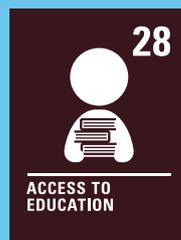
(for staff, but it's part of the language used)



(particularly useful for toilets)



(to be safe or protected)



(in terms of housing and shelter)

The training was in Birmingham, which is a very multi-cultural setting, so **Articles 14, 22 and 30** are all part of the school context. Often, the rights are simplified but still accurate as a starting point.



B

In your opinion, is it possible for children aged 3 to 6 to understand the 'abstract concept' of child rights?



ICELAND
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

Children know what respect is, but just in an implicit way. It means they don't know what they know. I had to make visible for them what is and what is not respect. I use literature, discussions and drawings to give children space to develop their learning in their own ways. When asking the children how they want to learn or what is more fun, they always say "play". I think that three-year-old children understand a concept in the proper context. We often discuss equality and the right to privacy, and they understand well.



NORWAY
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

It varies from child to child and how mature and developed they are, but in my opinion, children can understand the concept of rights up to a point. They will, however, need some time to ask questions and make their own assumptions in the meantime. I have had daily conversations with the children about child rights for a whole month, but realized it was not enough time for some of them to comprehend the concept of a right.



SLOVAKIA
RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS



Yes, if children are given an explanation that their brains can understand, for example through pictures, but also in the form of a game.



Yes, but through their eyes, in children's form: through cartoons, memory games and pictograms.



At the elementary (basic) level, yes.



Children understand the concept of children's rights if it's presented to them in an understandable form, in 'their' language, in a way they can understand.



SPAIN
RESPONSE
FROM UNICEF
SPAIN HEAD OF
INTEGRATIVE
CAMPAIGNS
AND CRE

We do not use the concept of 'rights' for children aged 3 to 6 years old. It is too abstract for their maturational level. We consider this learning as a conceptual itinerary starting with ideas linked to care and co-existence as a first step.



SWEDEN
RESPONSES
FROM 2 RIGHTS
RESPECTING
PRESCHOOLS



Our perception is that they can understand and successively deepen their comprehension. We observe that the children have an understanding for each other's differences and needs. 'We all know how, in our own way'.



Yes! – In the right context, the children build an understanding of their rights. It's about working with the articles at the right level and successively highlighting the Convention so that it will become consolidated knowledge. It's possible if you start from the children's experiences. It's easier if you connect the articles to things and situations the children recognize. For example, name everything that is a right as a right, "it's a right for you to rest at preschool". We want to point out that we do not want to rush the understanding. We let it take its time, and that way, they get an understanding they can carry with them for the rest of their lives. It is important for us as educators to connect the rights to the children's everyday lives. This makes it more complex to talk about the parts of the Convention they can't relate to, such as poverty or exposure. Our children are very knowledgeable about their rights, the rights that we as educators have broken down for them:

- Children have a right to be heard.
- Children have a right to a name.
- Children have a right to get help when they need it.
- Adults need to think about what is best for children.
- Children have the right to play, rest and leisure time.
- Children have the right to learn/to an education.
- The best interests of the child shall always come first.
- Adults need to listen to children.
- Children have the right to be safe.
- Every child is equal.
- Children have the right to food and water.
- You are a child until you turn 18.
- Children have the right to health care.



UK
RESPONSE FROM
UNICEF RRSA
PROGRAMME

Yes, to varying degrees based on individual children's development. It may be a less complex understanding than for older children, but it is an understanding, nonetheless.

C

Do you 'only' give examples of types of rights, such as food, health, safety, play, education, etc., or do you also try to explain what 'rights' are and/or how they are different from needs? If so, how do you do this?



ICELAND
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

With three-year-old children, I begin with values/rights as respect, participation, care or equality, so children learn very soon that they are entitled to those values from other children and adults. I choose one right from the Convention per month with four-year-olds, and I put it in various contexts: literature, drawings, stories, roleplay, etc. so the child will learn to recognize it. Each child has a personal experience from home, so after they internalize the learning, the outcome (knowledge) looks different.



NORWAY
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

I have explained with words and made it into a conversation where both I and the children ask and answer questions. I used children in my examples: "Would it be OK if no one listened to what X has to say? Would it be OK if we only listened to X?" My focus was to tell them it is very important to have these rights. I might have confused rights with needs – I wish I had more knowledge about how to address child rights back then.



SLOVAKIA
RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS



We teach children through examples such as comparing the world of adults and the world of children: a mother and a father have a job, they have the right to decide what job they go to, what people they meet and so on; children go to kindergarten, they decide which child to play with and so on. Children cannot distinguish what rights exist; they only learn about children's rights.



Personally, I only explain examples of children's rights in relation to needs and possible differences in conceptual understanding, followed by teaching ethical education and civics.



Only in the context of the first part of the question [giving examples of types of rights].



Taking into consideration the age category of the children, I only state examples of children's rights, since explaining to them at this age the different types of rights that exist would be very complicated due to their limited worldview. Children cannot distinguish well between a 'right' and a 'need', as for them the two are often the same thing.



SWEDEN

RESPONSES FROM 2 RIGHTS RESPECTING PRESCHOOLS



We're not sure how to interpret the question, but we'll give it a try. We consciously put most emphasis on the parts of the Convention that lift the child as a competent and fully-fledged human being. For us, this is about a sustainable now and a sustainable future (socially, economically and ecologically).



We often ask the children questions about the Convention. Sometimes we, the educators, intentionally say something wrong about children's rights and the children correct us right away, such as whether a statement is right or wrong. We have active discussions about the different articles and repeat them so that the knowledge is consolidated and the children can put their understanding into words: "Before I couldn't climb that tree, but now, I have developed and now I can do it." We link articles to rights, such as 'the right to go to preschool'. We not only talk about the different rights, but also explain them and what they can mean for everyone. We try to create understanding in the children about how children in other conditions experience rights and that there are differences. What we have discussed, among other things, is poverty: 'every child has the right to clean water', that there are children who do not enjoy these rights due to geographical and economic differences. We use everyday situations to exemplify:

- Child: *Do I need to wear mittens?*
- Educator: *Yes, it's cold outside.*
- Child: *Why?*
- Educator: *Because the best interests of the child should always come first, that is written in the Convention, and I don't want you to get cold hands.*



UK RESPONSE FROM UNICEF RRSA PROGRAMME

Rights are taught as more than just a list of examples. Teachers explain that "rights are special". We do talk about 'duty-bearers', e.g. nursery key workers and teachers must make the children feel safe.

D

Do you use the actual word 'rights' when working with children aged 3 to 6, and/or do you resort to other words such as 'needs'?



ICELAND
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

I use the word *right* together with *I can/cannot* for three- to six-year-olds, so children hear how the term is used. I alternate with the legal meaning: 'she is allowed, or I'm allowed'. An example of this is voting; such action is easy. My experience is that the word 'allow' can have a dictatorial connotation, so I usually engage with the child in conversation to clarify. I like to relate 'rights' with the word 'care': I have the right because somebody cares for me and fights for that right.



NORWAY
RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR

I did use the word *right*, but often followed by a further explanation. I would say that we *must* have rights, and how important it is for everyone to respect each other's rights.



SLOVAKIA
RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS



We certainly prefer using the word 'need' because the meaning of this word is easier for a child to understand than the word 'rights', which the child does not understand or its meaning at this age.



I use the word 'rights'.



We use both terms when working with children. Each concept has its own explanation, its own meaning. We use 'rights', e.g. in the rules of the class and games that aim to strengthen the class community, as well as in the evaluation, guidance, manifestations of inappropriate behaviour, etc. We rather use the word 'need' when interpreting, transferring knowledge from areas such as health, human body, etc. (a person needs to eat, drink, sleep, learn because ... to be healthy, to rule ...).



I use the word 'rights' and try to explain it to them in 'their' language. The difference between the terms a 'right' and a 'need' is not distinct, as their reasoning does not reach the required level to distinguish between more complex abstract terms yet.



SWEDEN

RESPONSES FROM 2 RIGHTS RESPECTING PRESCHOOLS



We are very careful to use the actual words such as rights, articles, democracy, vote, majority, research, Secretary General, protocol, etc.



We use the words 'rights', 'your rights' and the 'Child Convention' (Translator's note: *Barnkonventionen* in Swedish, the commonly used term for the Convention in Sweden). We also use the word 'articles' early on, for them to get an understanding of how the Convention is structured. We are working for the children to know that they are rights-holders – for them to know what they have the right to.



UK

RESPONSE FROM UNICEF RRSA PROGRAMME

UNICEF UK is very strict that the language used (in the Rights Respecting Schools Award programme) needs to be 'rights' and not 'needs', and to convey the understanding that 'rights are special': nursery schools in the programme use the language of rights *a lot*.

E

Do children aged 3 to 6 confuse the word 'rights' with other words which might sound similar in your own language? (e.g. in English 'child rights', 'left and right', 'right and wrong')



ICELAND RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

Vocabulary is an aid and a barrier; if children don't know the words, they cannot use them. Three-year-old children learn what is called the first meaning of the word. That is the usual word in daily settings. The word 'rights' is not in that category. Therefore, children don't understand it. One critique to explain the lack of children's understanding of values and rights is that adults don't introduce words relating to rights and values to children. When a word has two meanings, such as the case of 'réttur' in Icelandic, children get confused, and it is very funny and normal. In Iceland, we have our word 'right' that can be a dessert (*réttur*), so I had a fun fight with my students (five-year-olds), mainly because I'm a foreigner. One of the keys to solving this barrier is to use the word in the child's environment as early as possible.



NORWAY RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

None that I have observed; however, the same word is used as in 'right or wrong'.



SLOVAKIA
RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS



Children often confuse words that are similar sounding, so I think they do.



With the right motivation of students, children, there is no confusion of understanding the meaning of the word 'rights'. Children are receptive and the word 'rights' is used extremely frequently.



It is possible, but we have not encountered this in our practice.



Yes, it is a common phenomenon that children interchange such terms with words that sound very similar, since they encounter the word 'rights' very rarely (in some cases, for the first time throughout the activity).



SWEDEN
RESPONSES
FROM 2 RIGHTS
RESPECTING
PRESCHOOLS



No. [Translator's note: The Swedish word 'Rättighet' doesn't have any similar words such as the English right and left (the direction), only right and wrong].



Maybe it could be connected to the word for right and wrong. But that is not something our child groups have reflected on, since this language has been present for them during their entire stay at the preschool, from the age of 1. We haven't noticed that they mix up the words, but we always connect the word 'rights' with the Convention and the article in question. That could help to avoid confusion among the children.



UK
RESPONSE FROM
UNICEF RRSA
PROGRAMME

Yes, but it is absolutely normal that there is some confusion between words – they just need to learn the difference, as with other examples [e.g. of right and wrong, right and left]. It is part of the normal learning process.



How do you know that children aged 3 to 6 have understood what 'rights' are?



ICELAND RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

You know that the child has understood what a right is when he/she executes it. Children learn by doing. So, adults must create a place for the children to practice. To have the 'right to do something' involves action, sometimes to participate. When I finished my thesis, I saw that children needed a space to execute and practice their rights, so I created a Children's Assembly in the preschool that is held every week. The Children's Assembly (*Barnabing*) has its president and two secretaries who direct the meeting. Each role has a right, and they are chosen by vote. There, children talk about the week: a) if a person, adult or child, violates their rights; and b) we discuss something related to the preschool. My duty in the Children's Assembly is to lead children in their role, to keep a diary of the things that we discussed and give it to the Director when needed. An example of this is a winter party that the preschool holds in February. It was initiated in the Children's Assembly, the Director said yes, and the oldest group in the preschool decorated the preschool with a winter theme. Their parents participated by taking a walk with their children and sending a picture of something related to winter, such as aurora borealis, snow, trees, etc. The Children's Assembly in the preschool has many ideas that are not always visible to all the preschoolers, but they are visible for the Children's Assembly. It is a way in which children feel involved in the school administration activities and learn that they can influence the preschool.



NORWAY RESPONSE FROM 1 EDUCATOR

Children would make their own examples for the different rights, and if/when they do that, I know that they have a correct understanding of the concept.



SLOVAKIA RESPONSES FROM 4 EDUCATORS



They rather understand the concepts of need and duty. I don't think they understand what the word rights really means. It is a difficult word for a child to understand.



Some understand it as what they can afford, what belongs to them, what they are guaranteed.



At the elementary (basic) level, yes.



At this age, it is tougher for children to understand what 'rights' truly are.



SWEDEN
RESPONSES
FROM 2 RIGHTS
RESPECTING
PRESCHOOLS



We interpret and experience that our children dare to stand up for their opinion and to express their feelings. Children who earlier were silent make themselves visible and dare to stand up for their opinion. In the children's play and reflections, we can see traces of our work with the Convention.



As we highlight it in their everyday lives, we can see how they act and interact with each other and us educators. We also see from their language when they point out and talk about the Convention: "I can make my voice heard". The children also talk about the Convention at home. "I have developed" [Article 6], it becomes a natural part of the everyday. When the children themselves link to the article, 'the right', in a situation. For example, with the younger children, we know that they understand when they choose the environment and they know what it means, or to choose fruit. Among the youngest children, they show that they have rights by allowing us to look clearly at things they want or do not want. The older children can put into words what it is: "we have the right to rest", "we have the right to food", "we have the right to clothes" or "we have the right to privacy" (for example, no one gets to follow you into the toilet if you don't want them to, including adults). When they express themselves in that way, we understand that there is an understanding among children about what rights mean. Democracy is seen in the everyday work and when they play with each other. We notice that the children think a lot about rights when we as adults hear them discussed and reflected on.



UK
RESPONSE FROM
UNICEF RRSA
PROGRAMME

Children can walk you around a nursery school and show you "this is how we're safe/the right to be safe" (first aid box) – food they eat and drink, their names on their clothes pegs, etc. – all linked to rights. It's about linking rights to everything and embedding it in the children's everyday experience and constantly reinforcing the language. Children go home and say, "I've got the right to play/be listened to/all rights are equally important/all children have rights ..."

G

Do you have any tips on what works or doesn't work when introducing child rights to children aged 3 to 6? Is there anything else you want to tell us?



ICELAND

**RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR**

As a foreigner, I want to promote a global and multicultural conscience, so I think it is important to open up the world for them and let them know how we in Iceland support children's rights in other nations. It aids children to be in 'someone else's shoes' and see the importance of caring and participating. I want to end by saying that an important point I learned in my work is that children are often taught what they owe others but less what people owe them. It can be one reason why it is so difficult for all of us to stand up for our rights, even when we are adults.



NORWAY

**RESPONSE
FROM
1 EDUCATOR**

I would use as many visual materials as possible. Tell stories with puppets and have roleplays. Hang pictures of the different rights in the classrooms and make an inspiring environment that intrigues their curiosity. Try to break down the rights to simple stories so the children can relate to them and encourage them to come up with examples. Include it in all the activities and make the children familiar with the vocabulary. Repeat as often as you can, and do not rush it.



SLOVAKIA

**RESPONSES
FROM
4 EDUCATORS**



Children encounter the topic of children's rights during everyday activities in kindergartens, regardless of whether they are aware of it as a right. Every day, we talk about health care, during self-service activities, hygiene or dining. In guided conversations, we talk about how we help our friends, that we are all equal, we love each other. We teach children to behave, greet and listen. All of these are the children's rights that they encounter every day and which the teachers explain and instil in them.



Games, physical activities associated with visual stimulation, short videos, workshops.



We have not yet developed the topic 'Children's Rights' as a separate project. We address this through day-to-day activities throughout the school year. We only have the theme 'Feast of All Children', in which we get to know the characteristics and features of children of other nationalities and states. We also find that there are children in the world who cannot walk, hear, see ... We do not include 'Children's Rights' in the topic, but only what children can see.



I only answer based on my experience: for me, short dramatization stories, emotionally tinted discussions with examples from their lives, and sometimes instructive fairy tales. The important thing is to know the boundaries of perception of the children of different age groups in the kindergarten (from the smallest to the preschoolers) and based on that adjust the activities. It is also crucial for the teacher to know and be able to affect the atmosphere in the class before the activity, choose the right type of motivation and course of activity – something different works for different age groups. The smallest children aged 3 to 4 like a small performance; the group aged 4 to 5 want fairy tales, stories with emotions that can be analysed thoroughly (especially the motives of the actions of the characters); preschoolers aged 5 to 6 like interactive exercises, problematic situations and stories that mirror their own experience with the situation – it's vital for them to express their opinion, solution to a problem, ideas, etc.



SPAIN
RESPONSE
FROM
UNICEF

At this stage, the family is most involved, so it could be a good opportunity to produce some specific messages for them, i.e. key days such as World Children's Day [20 November, the anniversary of the Convention]. As an example, you can watch eight short videos that we produced in 2011 with the most important cartoon character for children aged 3 to 6 during that period in Spain (Pocoyo).³¹

³¹ <www.youtube.com/user/PocoyoUnicef>, accessed 16 July 2021.



SWEDEN

RESPONSES FROM 2 RIGHTS RESPECTING PRESCHOOLS



It's crucial that we as educators are self-reflective and carry 'child rights glasses'. Also, that we think about and use brain and emotionally smart pedagogy. This is an illustration of how they work with worms to talk about the United Nations and conflict solving:



Här bor våra nya kompisar Dagge Dagmask, Dizzy och Maskis och snäckorna som är inte har fått namn ännu.



När några barn studerar våra nya kompisar i lådan säger ett barn: "Om maskarna och snäckorna börjar kriga, vad gör vi då? Pedagoger frågar "Hur kan vi göra, tänker du? - Vi kan säga till han chefen och så får han säga stopp och säga att man ska prata med varandra i stället! Menar du generalsekreteraren för FN? - Ja!

The text reads: *Left picture:* This is where our new friends, Dewy earthworm, Dizzy and Wormy and the snails yet to be named, live. *Right picture:* When some of the children observe our new friends in the box, one of them says: "If the worms and the snails start a war, what will we do?" The educator responds: "What do you think we can do?" Child: "We can tell him, the boss, and he can tell them to stop and that you should talk to each other instead!" Educator: "Do you mean the Secretary-General of the United Nations?" Child: "Yes!"



Don't be afraid to use the right terminology and start with the four guiding principles [of the Convention]: Articles 2 [no discrimination], 3 [best interests of the child], 6 [life, survival and development] and 12 [respect for children's views]. Believe in the competent child to build and accomplish sustainable development and positive belief in the future. Break down the articles. Talk about one article at a time. Involve the parents/guardians and all the educators. Establish a rights-based preschool council for collegial learning in the area. Project groups on every unit can discuss the work and further develop the education of children in every age group. Collect resources of literature, music, films, etc., about the Convention. Conduct safety walks. Use concrete images with non-verbal children. Work with democratic processes. We have a Rights Council for all five-year-olds in the area. The principal meets with them once per semester. We have a light celebration every year on 20 November (Convention anniversary), when the children create their own lanterns and connect it to Article 2: every child is equal.





SWEDEN, Preschool #2: Some contextual remarks from the principal and vice-principal

To be able to understand how it is to work with the Convention, it's important to understand all the work that needs to be done before you implement the work with children aged 1 to 6. Here are some of our thoughts on that work.

- The Convention is for all children, but it is through us adults that it's made possible. With an increased understanding, we as adults can further our ability to live up to the demands the Convention puts on us. For the children to be able to understand their rights, it is important for us as adults to take our responsibility and teach the children what their rights are. You, as an adult, are the duty-bearer: we have a responsibility to teach children about their rights.
- At our preschools, we have an expressed approach where every educator is to work long term with helping the children understand they are rights-holders. We work towards every child knowing about their rights and how to use them. This goes hand in hand with our approach to children's participation and influence.
- To be able to work with this approach, the school management must have a great focus on the question and to first and foremost educate the staff, to regularly work with case descriptions, work for collegial discussions based on the Convention and to put a lot of focus on value-based work.
- The work starts right away when a child starts in our preschools. We make sure to inform about our working methods and attitudes – that it's based on the Convention.
- Every educator has the Convention with them in every plan, reflection and teaching plan. It's the main theme throughout the entire education.
- The Convention is written into the preschools' systematic quality work [Note from UNICEF Sweden: It's legally required in Sweden for every school to have a documented 'systematic quality work'] and it's also in the municipality template.



- When someone new is recruited to work at the preschools, they are required to work towards making every child's voice heard. Not just now and then, but as an everyday approach. The children have a big influence and participation in the everyday business and their education. This is an important part of the education that we are proud of.
- In our preschools, we have created a Rights Council for the educators: they meet two to three times per semester. Every part of the organization is represented. The Council discusses how you could work with the different articles with the different age groups. We also share plans and documentation, for inspiration, tips and feedback. Together, we challenge each other to evolve and move forward with our work.
- This group also creates signs with the different articles, to illustrate our rights work in the preschool environment. We also share literature, films and other useful materials.



UK

**RESPONSE FROM
UNICEF RRSA
PROGRAMME**

- Feedback from nurseries is that it makes a huge difference. For example, it gives children a wider understanding of the world. As with older groups working on Rights Respecting Schools, improvement is noted in child-child and child-adult relationships (although relationships in nursery schools are often better than in primary and secondary schools anyway).
- As with all Rights Respecting Schools (e.g. primary and secondary as well), it takes two to three years for the nursery/school to really embed the programme. It's a journey. It takes time for staff to be aware of it and get it internalized so it filters into everything.
- Parents have been so positive.
- People say it isn't possible to teach young children about their rights, but it is. However, it takes time and effort and willingness. It's very easy to say, "it's not possible"
- Nurseries are using the Convention icons. For example, one nursery enlarged the icon images and turned them into 'steppingstones' in the classroom.
- Producing a one-off resource won't magically result in young children understanding their rights, but it will contribute to the longer journey, supported by adults. If UNICEF were to produce a video animation for three- to six-year-olds, UNICEF UK would definitely use it in their training and the individual nurseries would also use it.
- Rights are for *all* children, not just from the age of (e.g.) 5, so all children should know about them.



ANNEX 2: UNICEF UK SAMPLE RRSA ASSESSMENT REPORT – MONTESSORI NURSERY SCHOOL



RRSA EXPERIENCE



UNICEF UK Gold level Rights Respecting School, London, UK. This image shows a primary school, but the banner is also distributed to Gold level nursery schools.

UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Schools Award – Accreditation Report: Gold Level (February 2021)

(This report is for a Montessori nursery school in the UK. It has been made anonymous and is shared with permission of the school and UNICEF UK.)

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a Gold virtual accreditation report. The assessors would like to thank the Senior Leadership Team for their warm welcome to the school, for the opportunity to speak with a governor and parent during the assessment and for the detailed evidence provided to support the process. Prior to the accreditation visit, the school completed a comprehensive *School Evaluation: Gold* form and provided a good collection of evidence including video and audio evidence of children engaging in rights-respecting activities and discussions.

It was evident that children's rights are embedded across the school and underpin every facet of school life.

Strengths of the school include:

- A wide range of age appropriate, creative resources to teach about rights.
- Rights based planning successfully used across the setting.
- Identifying the strong links between the Montessori approach and RRSA and strengthening this by ensuring that the approach is underpinned by rights.
- Communication with parents about rights work, including through learning journals which parents are encouraged to contribute to with home learning about rights.
- Good use of Picture News to engage children in discussions about global citizenship issues.

Outcomes for Strands A, B and C have all been achieved (**see below**).

2. MAINTAINING GOLD: RIGHTS-RESPECTING STATUS

Our experience has shown that there are actions that have proven useful in other RRSA schools and settings in helping them to maintain and build on their practice at Gold level. Here are our recommendations for your school:

- As much as is appropriate for the age of the children, ensure that staff use rights language accurately. UNICEF's online training course 'Strengthening the RRSA' may be useful to support staff to recap rights language.
- Further develop opportunities for children to campaign and advocate for rights issues they are interested in.
- Continue to develop the excellent rights-based practice and share this work with other Montessori nursery schools.

WE ARE A UNICEF GOLD RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL



Children's rights are learned, understood and lived in this school.



© UNICEF UK

Banner distributed by UNICEF UK as part of the Rights Respecting Schools Award to all schools, including nurseries, achieving accreditation at Gold or Silver levels.

3. ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

School context	[School Name] is a small preschool setting with 32 children on roll. Two children have EHCPs [<i>Education, Health and Care Plan</i> for children who need more support than is available through special educational needs support] and four are on targeted plans. At its most recent Ofsted inspection [UK government educational inspection scheme] it was judged to be outstanding.
Attendees at Senior Leadership Team meeting	Headteacher/RRSA coordinator and deputy headteacher.
Number of children interviewed	Video and audio evidence of children engaging in rights activities and discussions.
Number of adults interviewed	1 governor and 1 parent.
Evidence provided	PowerPoint (photos, voice recording, video), evaluation form.
Registered for RRSA: [Date – 2017]	Silver achieved: [Date – 2018]

Strand A: Teaching and Learning About Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention) is made known to children, young people and adults, who use this shared understanding to work for improved child wellbeing, school improvement, global justice and sustainable development.



The headteacher of [school name] is passionate about children’s rights and has embraced a child rights-based approach within the school. Staff have developed a wide range of creative activities to support children to explore rights in age appropriate ways and have set up a dedicated area of the classroom which supports both child-initiated and adult-led rights activities. In line with Montessori principles, the nursery presents rights concepts from concrete to abstract, using objects and pictures to represent rights when talking about them with children. [...] A video showed children celebrating the birthday of the Convention, where children discussed the right to protection, to education, to be healthy, to a name and to play. During the daily circle time, children often discuss the ABCDE of rights, and

children understand that rights are for everyone, you are born with them, they cannot be taken away. One child explained 'indivisible' to his mum in a voice recording saying, *"None of these are worser ... All of them are the same."* He also referred to the symbols they use in the nursery saying, *"Your heart means it's unconditional!"*

Children develop an understanding of the lives of other children around the world through specially chosen books and the regular use of Picture News images. The headteacher noted, *"We have books that we put the UNICEF flag on. They read about children around the world, for example how schools are very different. We then talk to them about what they are finding out and about other children's lives."* Picture News is used to engage children in discussions about global events, including complex and controversial issues such as the storming of the Capitol in the USA, and the staff support them to link these issues to rights.

Staff are passionate and knowledgeable about rights and explained that rights are now at the centre of everything they do. The headteacher explained, *"We plan together. Our planning is cross-curricular; we have planning boards for everything which highlight the rights we want to teach and how we are going to teach them. Each teacher leads on a curriculum area and tries to link their area with rights e.g. if we are doing phonics and the p sound, we might look at the right to protection."* Staff review the children's progress on their rights learning in their daily meetings, *"We believe in reflective practice and continually think about how we can improve."* The headteacher explained the difference in practice between Silver and Gold: *"At Silver, it was teaching them about rights. At Gold, it is more about a way of being, our way of being, who we are – it's part of everything we do as opposed to activities."*

Parents are very supportive of the school's work on rights. When their children start at the nursery, they receive booklets on children's rights and each child makes their own rights plate which is taken home. Children's online learning journals track the understanding of rights and use of rights language by children and parents contribute to this by adding observations from home, and evidence showed that they are increasingly seeing the importance of celebrating their children's developing understanding of rights. One parent said, *"It's not just that he knows it and can repeat it back – he understands it. We were talking about education at dinner and he said, 'We all have the right to education and education can protect us.' He talks to us about democracy and voting and tells us that we could settle arguments with voting."* The school's governor is passionate about the school's work on rights and the positive impact it has on children. *"I've been blown away by the way it has been implemented. Rights Respecting Schools crosses so many important lines of nurture, inclusion, world views, taking the children beyond localized views."* He added, *"The setting prepares children for the wider world. I get the feeling that the children are prepared to change the world in a positive way."*

Strand B: Teaching and Learning Through Rights –Ethos and Relationships

Actions and decisions affecting children are rooted in and reviewed and resolved through rights. Children, young people and adults collaborate to develop and maintain a school community based on equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation; this includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners and promotes well-being.



Children are supported to enjoy a wide range of their rights; excerpts from their online learning journals showed the children discussing the rights they are enjoying, such as their right to be healthy, to speak and be listened to and to be protected. Children understand the role of staff, as duty-bearers, in supporting their access to rights. The headteacher said, *“One child went up to a teacher and said that they were a duty-bearer because they help children access their rights. It wasn’t prompted – it was just from his own ideas.”* Children know that they can ask adults for help and support when needed. One child was struggling to reach the easel and she asked an adult for help. The adult asked her what they could do then supported her to realize her idea of finding a stool to use. Relevant policies, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, explicitly place rights at the centre and rights articles and principles are threaded throughout the School Improvement Plan. Children are supported to understand the importance of fairness and equity, that everyone is different, and some people need more support or to do things differently. The headteacher gave the example of one child with autism, and how understanding the other children were of the specific way he needed to do things.

As a Montessori school, [school name] is child-centric and child-led, therefore children are treated with great respect and relationships between pupils and adults are very respectful. The school has a high teacher to pupil ratio, so children have freedom to access what they want, when they want to, and the school frames this within respecting the dignity of the child. The school teaches children to treat others with respect; the headteacher explained, *“We used the brown eyes, blue eyes experiment to explore treating people differently, to see how they felt.”* Staff reported that children now use rights language independently to sort out disagreements. They have a Montessori Peace Table which children can use to resolve conflict. Teachers all have bags with little peace bunnies attached, which means that wherever children are, they can use the peace bunnies to resolve issues. The headteacher said, *“They know we will listen to them and hear them. They know that there is someone to talk to if they need to sort something out.”* The school also celebrates children who respect the rights of others during their daily circle time.

Children at [school name] feel safe at school. The headteacher reported that there have been no instances of bullying at the school. Throughout the COVID pandemic there has been a high rate of attendance and children reported that they felt safe in the nursery survey.

The school supports children's social and emotional well-being in a number of ways. Children attend Forest School sessions and they also have a free flow approach to indoor and outdoor play areas.

They have a curriculum area with both adult- and child-led resources that support the physical, mental, social and emotional needs of children. The school has an in-house Centre of Excellence in partnership with a number of professionals who support the wider needs of individual children and their families, such as paediatricians and play therapists. The headteacher noted that, *"As a school we have volunteered 100 hours of play therapy, with the support of [name of organization] to those that most need it thereby ensuring that children's needs are met in order that they are in the best position to access their learning."* Children learn to develop healthy lifestyles and link this with their right to health.

The school strives to ensure their practice is as inclusive as possible, and works closely with specialist nurseries, schools and professionals to support the needs of the children attending. Numbers of children with [special education needs] have increased each year and the school has supported children through the Educational Health Care Plan process. The school has a diverse staff body and they run cultural days on various countries they have links with. The headteacher noted, *"We recently hired a teacher who wears a hijab and children have raised questions – they are not afraid to ask! We linked this back to rights."* Children also explored the Black Lives Matter protests through Picture News and were encouraged to discuss their thoughts.

As part of the Montessori approach, children are involved as active partners in their learning – choosing what they want to do and where they want to learn. Resources are laid out in different areas for children to choose from and children are taught to respect each other's work and to wait their turn. The free flow concept which gives children the choice of learning indoors or outdoors supports and encourages children to take an active role in their learning.



The best way to teach and learn is through play, regardless of age. Nera from Bosnia and Herzegovina opted for messy fun with finger painting during a day in COVID-19-related isolation in 2020.

Strand C: Teaching and Learning For Rights – Participation, Empowerment and Action

Children are empowered to enjoy and exercise their rights and to promote the rights of others locally and globally. Duty-bearers are accountable for ensuring that children experience their rights.



Children at [school name] know that they are listened to. They influence decisions daily, in line with Montessori principles and underpinned by Article 12 of the Convention [respect for children's views]. If a child has an idea, staff will support them to put this on the Wishing Tree. Any decisions which will affect everyone are voted on. One example of this is during the recent cold weather where staff asked children if they wished to continue with their Forest School session as planned. Children discussed this and then voted to go as usual. Another example is where children were getting upset that they didn't get to blow out the candle at the end of circle time. The staff asked children how they could solve this problem, and they shared their ideas. They voted for putting names in a hat to choose who gets to do it and now are all clear that this was chosen in a democratic way. Children also vote for a Head Boy and Head Girl annually. Circle time is used as an opportunity to ensure that everyone's views can be heard. One experienced nursery teacher (who is new to the school) wrote, *"I have been really impressed by the way children are included in making decisions."*

Children at [school name] have taken action to uphold their rights and the rights of others in several ways. They have participated in the Clarks Shoe Share appeal, raised money to purchase a UNICEF School in a Box, raised money and collected resources for local children's hospitals and recycle crisp packets to support the Air Ambulance. In the current situation due to COVID, as parents cannot enter the nursery building, they have created the 'world house' at the gate of the nursery, which they link to rights. Through this area they encourage families to become involved in crisp packet recycling and donation of hygiene products for those in need. After learning about issues at school, children tell their parents to bring in goods to donate or recycle, demonstrating their understanding of the issues. When children engage in cooking, staff discuss issues such as fair trade with them and link this to rights. The headteacher stated that the school's use of Picture News and books such as the *Little People, Big Dreams* series have increased awareness of, and engagement in, global issues such as climate change, giving children the big picture for their involvement in local litter picking to keep the environment clean. The headteacher said, *"These actions support children to learn that rights are about the whole world, not just themselves."*



ANNEX 3: SUMMARY FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENTS CONSULTED



DOCUMENTS
CONSULTED

Please note: This does not represent a comprehensive literature review of the topic. The documents here were highlighted by key contacts as being relevant to the topic of CRE for young children (around which there appears to be a scarcity of materials). These are English language documents, based on research and/or experience of young children in high income countries.

1

1992: Human Rights Education in the Elementary School: A Case Study of Fourth Graders' Responses to a Democratic, Social Action Oriented Human Rights Curriculum; Rahima C. Wade, University of Massachusetts, Amherst³²

This is a PhD thesis based on research conducted in 1990–1991. It is a qualitative study describing the reactions of 18 White children (girls and boys) aged 9 to 11 in a public, suburban US elementary school, in response to a month-long human rights curriculum unit,³³ democratic classroom practices, and social action projects implemented by the author in conjunction with the class teacher. The study concludes that “if the activities are presented in ways that are enjoyable and meaningful to the children, interest in human rights and social action work can be effectively fostered in preadolescence” (p. 274).

The pioneering nature of this study and its author’s vision of human rights education (HRE) as a transformative experience for upper elementary students are to be recognized. However, the findings of this study must be understood within the context of its time, notably:

- There were very limited practical HRE/CRE materials and experience available to draw upon in the author’s development of the curriculum content and methodology used. There is a strong focus on human rights violations of ‘others’ and ‘overseas’, and the author acknowledges that – due to lack of experience and limitations in her initial understanding of human rights – her curriculum actually ended up reinforcing stereotypes. The curriculum methodology also focused more heavily on ‘academic’ reading and writing skills than play-based initiatives to introduce human rights concepts. It is also not clear how much the one-month human rights unit was linked explicitly to the longer-running elements of democratic classroom practices and social action projects (bake sales, etc.), i.e. by using and repeating rights language and concepts.

³² Abstract available at <<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI9233173>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

³³ “The unit activities included learning center exercises on the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, simulations and journal writing activities focused on having students explore their feelings and experiences with discrimination, and many other activities on human rights from the personal to the global” (p.95).

- There is no reference to the full range of rights included in the 1989 Convention, which was very new at the time. Reference is only made to the 10 Principles of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This limitation can be compared with modern lessons learned about the value of explicitly, accurately and repeatedly naming child rights from the Convention and embedding their language and concepts into the everyday experiences of young children.

A literature review at the time of this research (1990–1991) led the author to focus on the 9- to 11-year age group as “an important period to introduce human rights education” (p. 5) due to:

- “children's development in the areas of moral reasoning, empathy, and political socialization [which can] provide a foundation for human rights work that has personal meaning (Tomey, 1980). Children at this age can understand interdependence in a global sense, can identify with being citizens of both one's country and one's world, and have a strong concern for fairness and justice (Anderson, 1976)” (p. 5).
- “Damon (1988) and Hoffman (1983) maintain that upper elementary children can begin to develop empathy for the suffering of distant others and may be motivated to engage in prosocial actions by these feelings. The capability has obvious implications for teaching an action-oriented human rights curriculum to preadolescent children” (p. 9).
- “Schmidt-Sinns (1980), a German scholar, also concludes that the middle childhood years are the best place to begin human rights instruction. He notes that for pupils at the primary level, the issue of human rights appears to be too abstract, yet it is a mistake to wait until students are teenagers because ‘politically relevant attitudes, such as empathy and solidarity, a sense of freedom and a feeling for right and wrong, are implanted at an earlier age’” (p. 36).

The author acknowledges: “A number of other researchers have found that some young children are capable of advanced moral thinking in some situations, thus calling into question both Piaget's and Kohlberg's stage theories” (p. 60). In addition, some of her own study findings can be interpreted as supporting the value of HRE/CRE interventions at an *earlier* age than 9 years.³⁴ Furthermore, her interview with a colleague (who teaches about using children's literature on the Holocaust at the elementary level) includes comments which support very early HRE: “Hannah shared that she felt human rights education should begin very early in children's schooling. ‘I think individual human rights are a beginning point no matter how old you are’” (p. 262).

³⁴ For example, in relation to democratic classroom practices (part of the HRE concept of ‘learning through rights’): “[...] this school in general does not support student initiative. These children had already had four years of schooling where the teachers were the primary decision makers and curriculum planners. Even in this classroom, where the teacher was far less traditional than most, she was almost completely in charge of curriculum planning. To ask children to shift into these roles after this previous ‘training’ is a large request” (p. 211). Likewise, in relation to the limited impact of this HRE work on the students' behaviour: “Because most of the children had already spent four years of schooling together and had developed relationships with each other over those years, changing students' attitudes about and behaviors towards each other was a more difficult task than modifying their perspectives towards distant others” (pp. 259–260).

2

1999: Raising Children with Roots, Rights and Responsibilities: Celebrating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; written by Lori DuPont, Joanne Foley, and Annette Gagliardi, Founders of the Circle for the Child Project; edited and designed by Julie Peshorn, Co-Director, Growing Communities for Peace; published by University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center and the Stanley Foundation³⁵

- This is a detailed 12-week curriculum specifically for children aged 3 to 6 and their parents/carers.
- It consists of 12 two-hour sessions which follow the same format with both joint and separate adult-child time: it is as much about educating parents/carers as children. It is set in a strong 'parenting education' context. The sessions can also be conducted with children on their own if parents/carers are not engaged. In this case, the child works with an educator instead of a carer and written information is sent home to carers.
- It explicitly aims to encourage human rights activism and social change: adults do 'action steps' as homework.
- It should be seen as a product of its time (1999). The authors are to be recognized for tackling CRE with such young children and for drawing on their significant expertise with this age range and in the parenting education context.
- All activities are well suited to the age group and geared towards strengthening child-adult relationships. There is a good mix of sensory, fine motor, gross motor, art, music and 'reading together' activities.

However ...

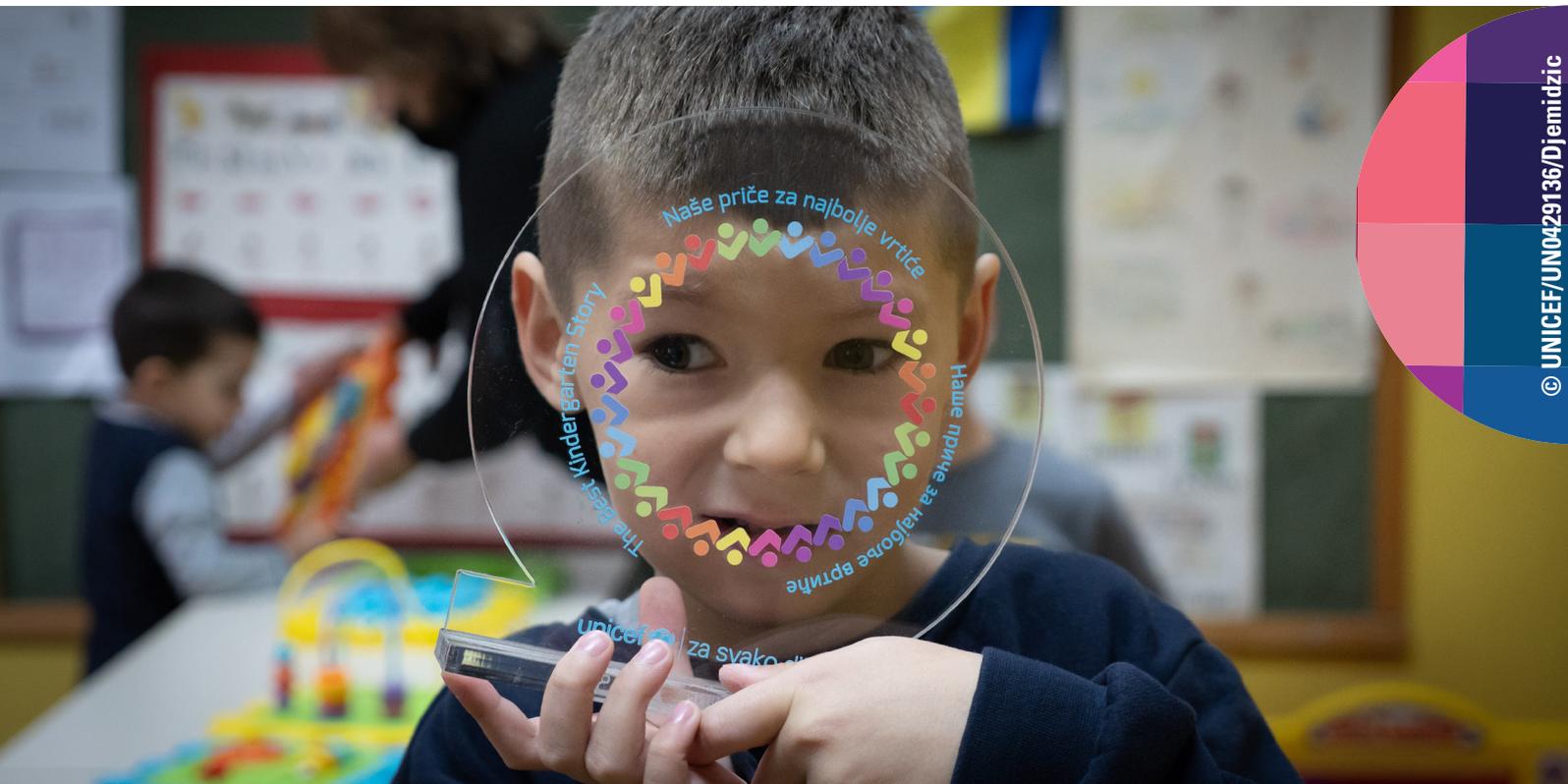
- The emphasis in this curriculum on 'responsibilities' alongside rights is very problematic and renders the material inappropriate to be circulated as implying any UNICEF endorsement. Overall, especially for the children, it seems that the emphasis on their 'responsibilities' is stronger than on their 'rights'. For example, even the children's certificate of completion refers only to their 'responsibilities' (p. 106).
- It includes some misunderstandings, such as 'the right to be loved'.
- It does not really explain what rights are, even for adults, but relies more on examples. There is no explicit explanation of the duty-bearer/rights-holder relationship. There is no exploration of the difference between rights and needs.
- Apart from Sessions 1, 2, 9, 10 and 12 the separate children's activities do not even mention rights. There are some occasional mentions of rights in the 'Community Circle' joint child-adult activities of other sessions, however. The majority of explicit CRE takes place in the separate adult sessions.
- The curriculum assumes that lots of creative and play resources and materials are available.
- Some sessions and activities are very culturally specific to the USA, e.g. Session 4.

³⁵ Available at <<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/pdf/rrr.pdf>>, accessed 16 July 2021.

3

2010: Young Children’s Engagement with Issues of Global Justice; A report by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra and Trócaire; Brian Ruane, AnneMarie Kavanagh, Fionnuala Waldron, Sheila Dillon, Maria Casey, Catherine Maunsell, Anita Prunty³⁶

- This research report of three- to six-year-olds’ engagement with global justice issues does not focus specifically on rights, but it reveals some interesting findings on empathy among young children for others.
- The literature review (pp. 8–13) provides a useful summary of changing perspectives of early childhood education and of challenges to widely held assumptions about what young children are capable of understanding:
 - “Educators that espouse traditional modernist perspectives based on developmentalism believe that children under the age of 7 are incapable of engaging with or understanding abstract issues around diversity, difference, human rights, social justice, discrimination and prejudice. However, a substantial corpus of evidence suggests that children are cognisant of these issues from a very young age” (p. 14).
 - “Contrary to traditional modernist perspectives of childhood and children’s learning, a plethora of contemporary research studies suggest that young children are capable of engaging with and understanding abstract issues around diversity, difference, human rights and social justice” (pp. 29–30).



Students at a centre for hearing and speech rehabilitation learn maths and computer applications. UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides support to all relevant education authorities in ensuring access to, and improving the quality of, learning for all children.

³⁶ Available at <www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/chrce/pdf/CHCRE-Trocaire-report.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2021.

Abstract: *Using examples from a Reggio-inspired school with children from ages 6 weeks to 6 years, the authors emphasize the importance of children's rights and our responsibility as adults to hear their voices. Seen and Heard summarizes research and theory pertaining to young children's rights in the United States and offers strategies educators can use to ensure the inclusion of children's perspectives in everyday decisions. Real-life classroom vignettes illustrate how young children perceive the idea of rights through observation and discussion. The authors' work is based on three essential ideas: (1) the 'one hundred languages' children use for exploring, discovering, constructing, representing and conveying their ideas; (2) the 'pedagogy of listening', in which children and adults carefully attend to the world and to one another; and (3) the notion that all children have the right to participate in the communities in which they reside.*

This is a highly recommended and sophisticated book which brings together academic research and practitioner experience to demonstrate that, consistent with practitioner findings in UNICEF National Committee countries, **very young children are able to understand, communicate about and exercise their rights, and take action for the rights of others.** It is difficult to do justice to the richness of the findings, but some key concepts are included below.

- **"The current discourse on children's rights often has ignored young children,** for two reasons. First, adults tend to view infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as immature, dependent, and not yet fully formed, making the concept of rights irrelevant to them (e.g., Pugh & Selleck, 1996). A second reason why young children's rights have been neglected in the children's rights literature is that assessing the ideas of children, especially children who are not yet verbal, is challenging and requires novel approaches to research. Because educators at Boulder Journey School work with children as young as 6 weeks, we have tried to represent the voices of children beginning in infancy" (Introduction³⁸).
- "The Finnish educator Monika Riihela held that infants as young as 8 months have ideas to share. She asserted that every person, no matter how young, has stories to tell" (Chapter 1).

³⁷ Publisher's summary available at: <www.tcpres.com/seen-and-heard-9780807751602>, accessed 16 July 2021.

³⁸ Quotations are referenced only by chapter as they are taken from an electronic version of the book without page numbers.

- **Young children are far more competent and pro-social than most adults imagine.**
 - These concepts also go hand in hand: “beginning in infancy, children spend much of their school day working together in pairs and small groups. [...] Enhanced competence does not require ‘more capable peers’ – only companionable peers. In our work with children at Boulder Journey School we find that when working together, peers at similar levels of development build ideas and enhance one another’s understanding of the world around them” (Chapter 1).
 - “Educators repeatedly find that when adults think of (and treat) children as capable, resourceful, and powerful, rather than immature, egocentric, and in need of adult control, children show themselves to be exquisitely competent. This is consistent with a wealth of recent research into children’s capabilities. As researchers develop better assessment techniques, children prove to be more competent at younger ages than previously thought (e.g., Alderson, 2000b; Kagan, 1994)” (Chapter 2).
 - “When young people become aware of the issues of children’s rights, their understanding tends to manifest itself in prosocial concerns about far-reaching issues of fairness, rather than a preoccupation with self-interest” (Chapter 4).
 - “Children become competent by first being treated as if they are competent” (Alderson, 1994, p. 56) – cited in Chapter 4.
 - “As author Judith Rich Harris (1998) put it: **Children are not incompetent members of the adults’ society: they are competent members of their own society**, which has its own standards and its own culture ... loosely based on the majority culture within which it exists. But it adapts the majority culture to its own purposes and it includes elements that are lacking in the adult culture” (p. 199) (Chapter 6).
- **Very young children can understand, communicate about and exercise their rights, and can take action for the rights of others.** See, for example:
 - The lessons learned when **teachers brought two three-year-old children into the infant classroom to play, observe, and reflect on infants’ rights**: “children understand that rights, including the right to self-expression, are not contingent on age. [...] Several 2- and 3-year-olds observed that even infants express themselves, conveying their emotions and ideas by shaking and clapping. Young children not only appreciate the importance of self-expression, they also demonstrate a keen awareness of the delicate balances required by the notion of rights” (Chapter 1).
 - Chapter 5 which details, with specific examples, “**Children’s Exploration of Rights Through the Construction of a Hamster City**”: “An ever-widening circle of adults has been struck by the depth of the children’s thinking about the rights of their hamster, and by their care in creating a world in which these rights were respected”. This

recounts the enchanting journey of how a class of four-year-old children initiated questions about the quality of life of Crystal (the class hamster), resulting in a gradual transformation of her world from a small cage to an increasingly sophisticated city, constructed with the enthusiastic help of teachers and family members. This journey is fuelled by *child-led* considerations of concepts related to: Crystal's right to freedom and movement and how this should be balanced with her right to safety; her right to privacy; her right to choose between her 'indoor sleeping' and 'outdoor adventure' spaces; and her right to a family life (transitioning from the children's own ideas of what that 'family' would look like, to considering the issue from Crystal's own perspective).

- ▶ “This evidence counters popular views of young children [...] as unable to consider the perspectives of others, as promoted in Freud's (1995) work on the 'narcissistic infant' and Piaget's (e.g., 1959) discussion of children's 'egocentrism' before the age of 8. We found that the children often assumed Crystal's perspective and did so with increasing insight as their relationship with Crystal deepened. For example, their fears for the hamster's safety initially were subsumed into their own fantasy play, which featured powerful dinosaurs. Before long, however, they expressed concern over real dangers in Crystal's environment, such as tall platforms without walls and ingestible decorations. Similarly, the children's desire to provide company for Crystal might have seemed self-centered initially— little people were needed. Later, however, they recognized that despite their best intentions, people were not the ideal company for hamsters. As Emma observed in April, 'I think Crystal needs another hamster to push her on the swing! We could do it, but she needs a friend'" (Chapter 5).
 - ▶ “Elizabeth [teacher, picking up on a *child-initiated* train of thought]: *Palmer, if you were stuck in a cage, what would you do? Palmer: I would say, 'Please let me out of this dumb cage'."*
 - ▶ [...]
 - ▶ “Jack: *Maybe she's climbing on the top so she can feel like it's life. Yeah!"*
- **“Listening to young children means appreciating that they communicate using a wide array of languages.** If children do indeed speak using 100 languages, then in order to understand what children are saying, adults must listen with all of their creativity” (Chapter 1).
- **Verbal language can be a source of misunderstanding, as well as understanding:**
 - “It took the teacher a few minutes to realize the child had confused the word 'rights' with the more familiar word 'writes.'" However, “[a]s a second example of misunderstanding, several teachers decided to avoid the use of the word 'rights' in their research with 3- and 4-year-old children. They asked instead, 'Is it okay to be happy? ... Is it okay to be sad? ... Is it okay to be angry?' [...] The question,

'Is it okay to be?' has very different connotations, however, than the question, 'Do you have a right to be?'. This change of language, and therefore meaning, resulted in very different answers from the children: their understanding of 'is it okay to be?' was not the same as their understanding of 'do you have a right to be?'

- "Children's unfamiliarity with abstract terms and their more concrete use of language can impede child– adult understanding. On the other hand, children's use of language can elucidate the issues at hand with a poet's precision" (Chapter 1).
- In line with findings from practitioners in UNICEF National Committee countries, the book confirms that **"play is crucial to the well-being and development of children, and is the main activity through which children seek and find meaning"** (Chapter 1).
- **Lack of time is a major barrier** to adults appropriately 'listening' to very young children: "[A] commitment to honoring children's rights means appreciating the importance of slowing down" (Chapter 1).
- Consistent with other practitioners' findings which emphasize the importance of repeatedly linking the language and concepts of rights to children's immediate, everyday experiences: "Given children's attentiveness to the here and now, educators at Boulder Journey School have found that **children's discussions, including discussions of rights, are particularly rich when they center on issues salient for children at that moment**" (Chapter 1).
- "Children demonstrate an **astute awareness of the privileges and responsibilities of the adults in their lives**. These young children expressed the sophisticated notion [...] that infants have a right to experience their environments despite their lack of mobility, and that adults have a responsibility to foster infants' participation in the world around them" (Chapter 1). "The authors propose that in order to advance children's rights adults must make spaces for children as safe as necessary rather than as safe as possible" (Chapter 3). "Respecting children's rights and autonomy does not mean leaving them to act and decide on their own. It means being available as a support and guide when needed and stepping back to allow children to engage in their own process when possible" (Chapter 4). "Adults can assert power over children, both by rendering them invisible and also by requiring communication" (Chapter 6). "Scaffold children's participation. Adults can use our resources, such as life experience, access to information, and facility with verbal expression, to help children participate. Or, if this power is abused, to silence them. Encourage children to engage in their own processes of discovery and meaning making rather than taking them over. Adults continually must consider whether a situation calls for stepping in or stepping out" (Conclusion).
- "The authors believe that **it is in everyday exchanges with children that a commitment to children's rights rings true or hollow**. These everyday exchanges are not usually uplifting heart-to-heart discussions or endearing moments of bonding. The exchanges that require an irreversible shift in perspective are more often irritating or uncomfortable. Like the afternoon I returned home late and told my

2-year-old son, 'Okay, you have a choice. Would you like to take a bath now or eat dinner?' He looked at me calmly and responded, 'There are more choices than that.' [...] The children's rights lawyer Jeremy Roche (1996) warned, 'Critically, once we genuinely allow children to exercise their right to speak and be heard, we might have to participate in new conversations' (p. 33). **New conversations can be disorienting.** [...] New conversations demand time, space, and energy. [...] To be questioned, disturbed, challenged, and at a loss for words can leave a person feeling wrong, perhaps foolish. This feeling may be hardest to accommodate when interacting with children. In front of children, adults expect to appear as knowing and in control. Adult social power allows parents, teachers, and others to unthinkingly quell the legitimate uprisings of children. The authors of this book have come to believe that social power accruing from membership in the social group 'adult' is not entirely different from social power afforded to people who are White, or male, or able-bodied" (Chapter 2).

- The book thoughtfully explores similarities and differences between children's rights and other human rights movements: Black civil rights, women's rights and disability rights: "It would be enough to commit to children's rights because it is the right thing to do, because it honors the humanity of the children in our lives. But a commitment to children's rights accomplishes much more. **A transformation of power relationships between children and adults can provide a model for negotiating relationships across other differences in status that too easily become the basis for social inequity.** As adults and children work to find new ways of relating to each other, so too may we find new ways of relating across differences in race, gender, disability/ability status, socio-economic status, religion, and nationality" (Chapter 2).
- **"Rights are not conditional, nor are they a zero-sum entity.** [...] A children's rights perspective is surely limited by the notion that when children receive more rights, adults get fewer" (Conclusion).
- In relation to the HRE/CRE concept of learning not just *about*, but also *through* and *for* rights: "**Children's relationships with other children enhance their ability to participate. It is time to rethink the view of children as egocentric.** Evidence has accumulated that children are acutely sensitive to the perspectives of others. [...] Adult society often has faulted children for a lack of community-mindedness, while simultaneously removing them from adult society and communities of children. [...] Alderson (2000b) noted that children learn well 'especially in small groups and away from strong relationships of authority and dependence' (p. 131). Similarly, Mayall (2000b) noted that children in groups are better able to assert their own perspectives while in the presence of adult social power. [...]"
 - Provide opportunities for children to offer collective, as well as individual, voices.
 - Resist temptation to use adult power to disrupt peer relationships.
 - Cultivate spaces that support children's participation." (Conclusion)

Spotlight on the 'Boulder Journey School Charter on Children's Rights'³⁹

"[The teachers] arranged an initial meeting of a small group of 4-year-olds and asked, "What is a right? If someone says, 'I have a right to do that,' or 'I have a right to think that way,' what does it mean?" (I. Hillman, 2003). The children discussed their ideas until they agreed on statements made by two children. One child stated, 'A right is like you know in your heart it's okay to do it ... you can do it if you want and that's it.' Another child added, 'But only if it's okay, like you won't hurt somebody and it's not safe because the other person has a right to not be hurt too, right?' Over the ensuing weeks, the children compiled a list of their rights (Pufall, Rudkin, & Hall, 2004 ; Rudkin & Hall, 2005)" (Chapter 1).

- Of the list of 61 rights in the children's own language, **some echo very closely specific articles of the Convention**, for example: "Children have a right to have fun" (Article 31), "Children have a right to never, never go to jail" (Article 37), "Children have a right to be listened to" (Article 12), and "Children have a right to not be called names" (Article 19).
- **Others may be interpreted as more specific manifestations of Convention articles, relevant to the children's everyday lives**, for example: "Children have a right to grow taller" (Article 6); "Children have a right to color with paint or markers and to choose which one" (Article 31); "Children have a right to twist their own ears, but not a right to twist other people's ears (a child must ask the other person first)" (Article 19); "Children have a right to clean, fresh food to eat and if the food is dirty, they can say, 'NO!'" (Article 24).
- **Others reveal an understanding of the relationship between adults and children, which could be analysed in the context of the 'evolving capacities' of Convention Article 5, with implications for the rights-holder/duty-bearer relationship**, for example: "Children have a right to be safe from fires and have firefighters ready to help them if there is a fire"; "Children have a right to have their hair look like they want, but not a right to cut it unless they ask first"; "Children have a right to brush their own teeth (and parents have a right to check their teeth when the children are done brushing)"; "Children have a right to watch adult TV shows if Mom or Dad say 'okay,' like Enterprise or Survivor"; "Children have a right to tell parents and teachers to help them if they have a big problem"; "Children have a right to solve their own problems whenever they can"; and "Children have a right to guess how things work".
- **The children very clearly balance participation and protection rights** (a topic explored in depth in the book), for example: "Children have a right to run or walk, to choose which one, if it's safe"; "Children have a right to pretend with glass, but not a right to drop it 'cause that's not safe"; "Children have a right to watch movies, but not scary ones, but actually, they can watch a scary movie every once in a while"; and "Children have a right to hang upside-down when it's safe".

³⁹ © Boulder Journey School, 2010.

- **The children express the importance of having control over their own bodies and reactions:** “Children have a right to read books when they are crying (so they don’t have to talk about it right away)” ; “Children have a right to be asked if someone wants to twist their ears” ; “Children have a right to say, ‘No!’ or ‘Stop it!’ when people are tickling them without asking” ; “Children have a right to say, ‘Yes!’ when people tickle them, too” ; “Children have a right to walk away from people who are bothering them, but ask the bothering people to stop first to see if that works” ; “Children have a right to hug and kiss” ; and “Children have a right to say, ‘No’ to mouth kisses”.
- **Many of the rights reveal young children’s naturally pro-social tendencies and respect for the rights of other people (and animals):** “Children have a right to have friends” ; “Children have a right to touch everything, but gently, but not birds because that can scare them very much” ; “Children have a right to sing, and to sing to other people” ; “Children have a right to help other people and even birds with broken wings (so it’s okay for people to touch them)” ; “Children have a right to be in love and love each other” ; “Children have a right to make ideas with other people” ; “Children have a right to talk, as long as they do not interrupt someone else who is talking first, but children have a right to wait for their turn to talk” ; “Children have a right to have their words heard by other people” ; “Children have a right to know what time it is, and how many minutes they have to wait for something (their turn), and the time it will be when it’s finally their turn” ; “Children have a right to paint their fingernails, boys and girls, with their moms” ; and “Children have a right to play with Mom and Dad (after they are busy)”.
- **Particularly rich are the children’s rights in relation to their play and imaginary worlds:** “Children have a right to pretend that there’s a beach anywhere” ; “Children have a right to pretend everything” ; “Children have a right to play tea parties, even with real tea” ; and “Children have a right to crawl like kitties”. One right in particular reveals young children’s ability to consider abstract concepts: “Children have a right to pretend being dead and think about what it means to be dead”.

Although some of the children’s self-determined rights deviate from the Convention and would not be considered legally accurate (for example the ‘right to be in love’), “[t]he sheer magnitude of the Boulder Journey School Charter on Children’s Rights should dispel any notion of young children as empty vessels waiting to be filled with adult ideas, including ideas about their rights. The Charter on Children’s Rights makes it clear that young children have important insights into the issue of children’s rights and how it pertains to their own lives” (Chapter 1).

Abstract: *This paper explores ways in which human rights become part of and affect young children's everyday practices in early childhood education and, more particularly, how very young children enact human rights in the preschool setting. The study is conducted in a Swedish preschool through observations of the everyday practices of a group of children aged between 1 and 3 years. With a child view based on human rights theory and childhood sociology, an action-based methodology for seeking children's perspective is used to analyse the observation data. Three rights areas are identified in which children frequently deal with human rights in their actions and where they enact a range of possible rights-holder positions: ownership, influence and equal value. These rights areas, and the children's various enactments of the rights, are reflected against the preschool context as a co-constructor to the actions of the participants.*

Note: This paper is not about CRE, but about how children aged 1 to 3 enact their human rights in the preschool setting. It nonetheless:

- Highlights the lack of research on early childhood education from a rights perspective: "It can be noted that rights-oriented research on children under the age of 3 is very limited and that few studies have investigated children's everyday practices and lives from a rights perspective" (p. 7);
- Points out that more research has been done with young children in relation to 'participation' rights compared to other kinds of rights, but even then, rarely with under-three children and usually focusing on educators' knowledge, rather than children's;
- Promotes a perspective based on the 'sociology of childhood' which "theoretically strengthens the claim that *children are legitimate humans and holders of human rights*" (p. 8). This is compared with previous views of children that tend to objectify the child: "the child is understood as an object for natural development (psychological perspective) or socialization (sociological perspective), thereby directing the interest towards what the child will become" (p. 7);
- Critiques the research focus on the 'voice of the child' which favours verbal expression (p. 8);
- Emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting findings: "The context should thus not be simply regarded as a surrounding environment, but as a participant in the meaning-making process" (p. 9):

⁴⁰ Summary available at: <www.researchgate.net/publication/283238244_Young_children's_enactments_of_human_rights_in_early_childhood_education>, accessed 16 July 2021.

- “The three basic starting points in the analysis are: (i) that children’s meaning-making (or voice) is observable in their actions, (ii) that children’s actions provide first-hand information about their experiences in preschool and (iii) that the preschool context is a co-creator of the children’s actions” (p. 9);
- “[E]arly childhood educators working with young children’s human rights need to acknowledge that societal structures are indeed present in the preschool setting and affect how children act. It is also clear that dominance cannot simply be explained in terms of individual development. Our knowledge about how rights in the preschool relate to power structures among young children is very limited and more research in this area is needed” (p. 16).

The data analysis in this research focuses on the ‘rights themes’ of ownership, influence [“the political human right to be heard and taken into account”] and equal value:

- “[I]t was often possible to identify one right or aspect of a right as the principal or most visible right in a situation. When the principle right in a situation had been identified, the next step was to formulate what function the children’s actions had in relation to this right. The final analytical step was to articulate the rights-holder positions that were enacted through the children’s actions. Table 2 presents the analysis chart (an example situation is provided).” (p. 10)

Table 2. Analysis chart

The actions and their context	Which human right is identified?	What is the function of the actions?	What rights holder/s are enacted?
Otto (2,5) and Selma (2,5) are sweeping water from a puddle with brooms. They are having great fun and laughing together. Then Selma drops her broom and tries to take Otto’s from him. He does not want that and catches his broom, refusing to let go	Ownership	Selma - to become owner of Otto’s broom Otto - to retain ownership of the broom	A person who can take over ownership A person who can assert ownership

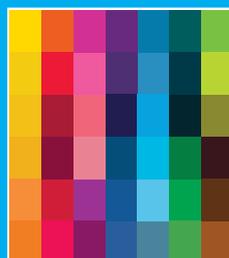
“The very young children in this preschool both meet and have to deal with abstract principles of interaction deriving from ideas about equal value and treatment. In turn-taking situations, the children respond to the equal value norm in different ways. In doing this they enact the right to equal value from rights-holding positions that:

- recognise their own equal value;
- recognise the equal value of others and
- privilege their own value.” (p. 15)



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**CONVENTION
ON THE
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